

Star Beagle Adventures Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

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Star Beagle Adventures Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

by [LordRobertBruceScott](#)

Notes

Throughout this episode, snippets of lyrics are quoted. These are from the second movement of the song, "Close to the Edge part II - Total Mass Retain" by Jon Anderson and Steve Howe. The song first appeared as track 1 on Close to the Edge, the fifth album by the progressive rock band, YES, 1972, Atlantic Records.

My eyes convinced, eclipsed with the younger moon attained with love...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 1: My ...Girl?

My eyes convinced, eclipsed with the younger moon attained with love...

13.1 My ...Girl?

“Time to contact?”

Captain Rhonda Carter was sitting up on the edge of her command chair. There was a familiar ferocious intensity to the blue-haired captain that her crew had not seen in quite some time. She was no longer a farm girl sitting in a chair too big for her. A predator was sitting in that chair now.

An apex predator.

“3 minutes, 48 seconds,” reported Ensign John Sevork from the “eyes” station.

“Let’s use them,” said Carter. “Overview of what’s coming our way. What’s different about this lepreshroom from the ones we got rid of back in that trinary system?”

“Aside from your boy riding on it,” Sevork started, “It appears the interior atmosphere generated by the fungus extends above the top and is maintained within the warp shell. Also, there appears to be a considerable amount of interior space. Even though it is easily 12 times the size of the largest specimen we observed in the, um, Landthorn system, there is the same amount of fungal matter, concentrated primarily just inside the rock.”

The young vulcan brought up images on the main screen as he was speaking that provided outlines, diagrams, cross-sections, and a lot of written information. Like most command-level Star Fleet officers, Rhonda Carter had trained herself to register and absorb such information at speed. And like Master Chief Bill Waller at the helm, Carter had long experience with this display schematic, making it easy for her to consume this information.

“No artificial gravity,” Carter observed. “The creature on top is held in place by its legs projecting through the rock and anchoring in the fungus. Feeding on it, possibly.”

“Space shrimp,” Waller offered.

“So you’re not giving me a name,” Carter said, rather incongruously. “I’m going to call you Steve. Steve the space shrimp...”

“Contact in 1 minute, 8 seconds,” reported Ensign Sevork.

“Your count is off, John,” Carter observed.

“Captain?” Sevork asked.

“Shields Captain?” Waller prompted.

“Standby weapons, but do not target,” Carter ordered.

“Shields?” Waller asked again.

“Useless,” Carter replied. “Steve can walk through our shields as if they weren’t even there. All power to weapons.”

“Contact now,” Sevork reported. “On screen.”

“No,” Carter said, a faraway look in her eyes.

“Captain?” Sevork asked again.

“Contact 1 minute, 19 seconds ago,” Carter whispered. Then: “No. Not Steve...”

Carter seemed to be looking into the middle distance, her voice distant, musing.

“...Stephanie...”



SBA Episode 13, Scene 2: Within My Hand

Chapter Summary

I crucified my hate and held the word within my hand...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 2: Within My Hand

I crucified my hate and held the word within my hand...

13.2

Within My Hand

“Your allies survive only because of your protection.”

The fires of hate flared up instantly in General Krank’s heart at the sight of a jem’hadar first, but the calmness of its voice and the odd incongruity of a flagon in its hand forestalled him from arming himself. He had dispatched dozens of these creatures in hand to hand combat. Very few warriors could make such a claim.

The jem’hadar’s voice was odd, calm, cultured. Almost as if the fearsome creature were animated and voiced by a vorta. He gestured with his flagon. “Come, sit and drink with me, General. Let us parley.”

It had been half a lifetime and more since Krank had seen the great meeting hall that straddled the Qam-Chee River on Qo’noS. The storied meeting hall was never vacant, except for this moment. Which was fortunate as any jem’hadar who set foot in this hallowed meeting place would be slaughtered out of hand.

The jem’hadar first sat down at a table, turning his back on the ancient general. Krank walked across the room, obtained a flagon of bloodwine, then walked up behind the bitterly hated enemy of his people, the very warriors who had slain his entire family. Representative of two of the species that murdered his family, as the jem’hadar had attacked on the orders of a vorta.

Krank walked around the table and sat down across from his enemy, who saluted the elderly klingon with his flagon. “You are worthy adversaries. It is fitting to salute you,” came the oddly cultured voice from the Dominion soldier.

General Krank observed the scaly warrior across from him, then, after a long pause for a long think: “The warrior is defined by the battles and enemies he chooses to fight. A warrior does not despise his enemy...” Krank saluted with his flagon of bloodwine. “He rejoices in his enemy.”

“This meeting hall was built by Qey’liS,” the first said. “Tell me about it.”

“The Qam-Chee river was a national boundary. Qey’liS was born in Qam. He conquered the east, expanding the eastern frontiers to the sea, then came to this river on the western border of Qam and laid the foundation stones on the eastern shore. He crossed the river and conquered the west and laid the foundations of this hall on the western shore. But he did not unite the nations.” Krank took a drink of bloodwine.

“This was a place for enemies to meet, not in peace, but in parley. They could drink together and negotiate peace or war. It became the place where our people united to throw off the Orion yoke and take their ships.”

“Without frontiers, the warrior spirit dies,” said the first.

“To be replaced by the spirit of the brigand, who preys, without honor, on his own people,” Krank responded. “What would the jem’hadar understand about honor?”

“We fight for our gods,” the first replied. “And you fight for the humans.”

“We fight alongside them,” Krank rejoined. “The enemy of my enemy is not, therefore, my friend. But an honorable enemy can become a valued ally.”

“We are rich with quoting the wisdom of Qey’liS,” said the first.

“An appropriate place to do so.”

“So when your human...” the first paused for emphasis, “...allies have turned every battlefield into farmland and beaten every sword into a plough, where will the klingon people turn? Will your warrior hearts sink into brigandry and turn against your own when every frontier has been conquered?”

“That is a long time off,” said Krank. “Every empire falls.”

The first pressed the issue relentlessly. “Where is your new frontier when the human empire encompasses your entire galaxy?”

The meeting hall had dissolved into open space and unfamiliar stars. But Krank was able to recognize a pattern, a constellation and a star system he had seen recently. “The Jar Galaxy. That is the purpose of this place?”

“The wormhole that brought us to you gave you a gift that your people desperately needed,” said the first. “Us.” He spread his arms and gestured broadly to the starry sky above their table. “This... this is not a galaxy. This is a bridge and a meeting hall.” The first had smoothly transitioned into the form of a very strange alien. One that a terrestrial vulcan had described as appearing like a cross between a stag and a giant tiger shrimp. “This place is a gift.”

Krank had little idea what tiger shrimp looked like, but he could think of features of a few animals from his homeworld that bore some resemblance to this creature.

His eyes widened with epiphany. His voice was hushed with awe:

“Endless frontiers...”

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note:

For this chapter I am increasingly relying on the lyrics as writing prompts.

SBA Episode 13, Scene 3: Reasons We Don't Understand

Chapter Summary

There's you, the time, the logic or the reasons we don't understand...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 3: Reasons We Don't Understand

There's you, the time, the logic or the reasons we don't understand...

13.3

Reasons We Don't Understand

Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison had been allowed to design his own dojo at Star Fleet Academy. He was a master of both Suus Mahna and Krav Maga, the epitome of vulcan and human martial arts, each voraciously mining every other art form to improve itself. 50 years ago, Harrison had added four new degrees to the krav maga black belt by adding techniques specifically designed to allow a human to defeat a cardassian master of Anbo, a klingon master of Mok'bara, a romulan master of Kormerek... and even a vulcan master of Suss Mahna.

And Captain Rhonda Carter, with no training at all and the worst form and stance he had ever seen, could defeat any one of them.

Harrison had become such a formidable and respected master that Star Fleet had recruited him and brought him in as a warrant officer to serve as a master trainer at Star Fleet Academy. He had trained two generations of trainers. He had travelled on the Odyssey in part to evaluate the dangers that the Gamma Quadrant might pose.

He was also there to study the legendary Rhonda Carter. Most people discounted the legends, but Harrison had seen some ship security recordings from the Cardassian war. What other people described as insane luck was, to his eye, clearly something more. At least one of the cardassian soldiers she had killed was clearly a master of Anbo, easily twice her size. His stance was perfect. His form flawless.

And Carter had ripped out his throat with a shard of an EPS conduit she had scooped up from the debris in the corridor only a second before.

Harrison had watched this recording over and over. There was no way it had happened by luck. It was so fast he almost couldn't see it. Flipping through frame by frame didn't help. It had taken weeks of review before he spotted it. Not even a split second of distraction on the cardassian weapons-master's part, but Carter had seen it and taken advantage of it. At mind-bending speed. It was all the opening she had needed.

When Carter had gone through basic training she had earned the nickname "Teacup Tiger" because of her combination of ferocity and small size. To Harrison's mind, her fighting style more closely resembled that of a wolverine.

Having seen her fight, hand to hand, with a phaser, at the helm of a starship, Harrison had become increasingly convinced that Rhonda Carter could see her opponent's moment of weakness before it occurred.

And after nearly six years serving with her, he still had no idea how she did it. It was as if she could see just a few seconds into the future and place herself just where she needed to be to take advantage of her opponent's moment of weakness.

This was the first time Seprek Harrison had returned to this dojo since meeting Carter in person.

She had steadfastly refused to spar with him. She never sparred with anyone. And had never told him why.

And here she was, in his dojo. In a fighting ghee, a costume that she would never don. She was not a trained fighter.

"Will you spar with me now?" the vulcan master asked.

"Never," Carter replied. "Not with you. Not with anyone."

“Why?”

“I will not train myself to pull my punches. You have seen what I do. I will not do that to you.”

“You think you could defeat me?”

“No. Only kill you.”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 4: Sad Courage



The Star Beagle Adventures

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Scene 4: Sad Courage

Sad courage claimed the victims, standing still for all to see...

13.4 Sad Courage

Eva Mendez's jaw ached. That was nothing new. Her jaw had ached ever since Medical Chief Kara Garrity had used a bone knitter to stitch the tiny bones of her shattered jaw together. Garrity had done as good a job as any field surgeon could do.

A trained surgeon in a fully equipped Star Fleet medical center could remove the shattered bones and replace her jaw with a prosthetic, but the U.S.S. Escort had neither. As a result, the ship's chief medical technician had been making subtle, ongoing adjustments, primarily to make sure Mendez's jaw didn't grow back wrong or become infected.

"It's time for your adjustment."

Mendez was horrified. She tried to protest, but her jaw was wired shut and all she could make was a horrified squeak.

It wasn't Kara Garrity's voice. Nor her broad, pale, Slavic face.

The face and voice were those of the elderly klingon general who had, less than two weeks ago, stepped off the transporter pad, reached over the transporter control console, and with a solid right hook, shattered her jaw.

"Now don't move," Krank said. It wasn't a Star Fleet issue bone knitter he was holding. It looked like some sort of klingon technology. It looked more like a torture device than any sort of medical tool... Although some part of her brain registered that there really wasn't that much difference between the two.

But she couldn't move. Only sit, horrified, frozen in terror as the warrior who had shattered her jaw gently ran a finger along her jaw, followed by the torture device. He made a series of "hmmm" noises as he studied the readings on the device. It was a nasty looking klingon sort of thing with prongs and spikes that didn't seem to have any purpose.

"Hmmmm," Krank said again. With feeling.

"Doctor Krank?" Mendez asked.

The room was dark, dank and the light reddish, the masonry on the walls rough. It looked far less like a surgery than some sort of torture chamber.

It didn't help that she was strapped onto some sort of cross that was not vertical, but at some sort of incline.

"Hmmmm?" Krank responded.

"What is it?"

"Not good," the elderly general mused. "Not good at all." Krank plugged the torture device, apparently some sort of exceptionally ugly medical scanner, into a rather ugly computer and a quite unappealing image of Eva's jaw was displayed in ugly colors on a quite repulsively designed monitor.

"This looks ugly," Krank stated.

The tiny, El Salvadoran transporter chief wasn't certain what the general was referring to. "What looks ugly?"

With a blindingly fast movement, the elderly klingon unsheathed the dk'tahg from his belt and, with the press of a catch under the hilt, deployed the side blades.

Mendez blinked and squeezed her eyes shut in fear.

“This,” said Krank.

Eva Mendez opened her eyes to see that Krank was using his dagger as a pointer.

“And these,” he continued, tapping a number of other points on the monitor. “The repair was only intended to be temporary until we could get you to a proper facility and prepare a prosthetic. These discolored spaces are an infection. One that can lead to hearing loss if it spreads to the small bones of your ear.”

“What can we do to stop it?” Mendez asked, the terror rising in her throat as Krank began laying out a variety of knives and axes on a table next to the cross she was strapped to.

“There is no way to treat an infection of this sort. Transporter technology won't work because the spores exist partly in subspace. I'm afraid there is only one solution.” He studied the bladed weapons and implements laid out before him.

“Doctor?” Mendez prompted.

Krank selected a large weapon that looked like the unholy child of some sort of axe and sword that should never have been mated, had not their parents forced them into it. Mendez recognized it as a mek'leth.

Doctor Krank hefted it appreciatively.

“There is no other option. I must amputate...”

Eva Mendez screamed.

SBA Episode 13, Scene 5: Sea People

Chapter Summary

As armored movers took, approached to overlook the sea...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 5: Sea People

As armored movers took, approached to overlook the sea...

13.5 Sea People

The U.S.S. Escort, and its growing cadre of sister ships, were much safer and easier to land than most deep space vessels. Given their compact size and heavy construction, these ships were capable of in-atmosphere combat - a very rare capability for any deep space vessel.

Chief Flight Engineer Roman Hess clambered out the back of the starboard nacelle, having completed the repairs to it and glad that the ship had landed. This had made the repair work so much more pleasant.

With the Bussard collector swung out on its hinges and the rear exhaust port open, the ocean air could blow through. The air used to compress these compartments for repairs while in space tended to be heavily recycled and simply unsatisfying for breathing. It didn't handle moisture well, making working inside the nacelles while in space, very sweaty, dank, and uncomfortable work.

Despite his given name, Roman did not look Italian in any way. He was of average size, about 5'8", with a short brush of light blonde hair and eyes that sometimes looked blue or green.

"Eyes of the ocean." That's what his mother had called them.

Chief Hess walked down to the sea shore and joined his boss, the tiny and usually reticent roylan, Lt. Ki Kresid. She had replicated a recliner for him and had beamed it here. She needed no such luxury for herself: she relaxed squatted down to her haunches. She could rest like that for hours on end. If Roman tried it for more than a few minutes, his legs would start to cramp.

Kresid was holding a small, square glass with her favorite drink, tika tika nectar. She kept a tika tika root growing in the quarters she shared with Roman and ten other crew members.

The Escort had originally been designed with very tiny individual quarters for the officers, and small double rooms for the ensigns and the rest of the crew. Kresid was the reason those rooms had been sacrificed so that, other than the captain and first and second officers, the crew rotated through a small number of berths that slept four to a shift.

There had been some complaining at first, but the complaining had subsided after the first battle. The space that had been, in Kresid's opinion, wasted on quarters, had now been repurposed to support two industrial replicators, additional damage control resources such as emergency shielding and structural integrity field generators, a large number of powerful batteries to power these items during battle, and an innovation that Hess himself had suggested, atmospheric planes: short, stubby wings that could be extended below the nacelles and were programmed to enhance and stabilize the ship during in-atmosphere maneuvers.

These four wings had proven essential in enabling the Escort to first evade, and then hunt and destroy three jem'hadar scarab-destroyers after diving into the atmosphere of a gas giant. The industrial replicators, along with their dedicated batteries, had helped Escort accomplish repairs to armor, weapons, and the engines in the heat of battle.

Kresid had thoughtfully provided a tall glass of ale for her strong right arm. Hess drank the ale slowly, appreciatively. It was slightly warm. Just the right temperature for ale. Kresid sat next to him, her long, thin tongue flicking down into the tiny glass of the purple fluid that was her preferred beverage.

They sat in comfortable silence. As they had many times before. Engineers tended not to be the talkative sort. At least, not the really good ones. Thoughtful and observant, that's what made a good engineer.

"Your people are sea people," Kresid said. "So are mine."

Only the first part of that statement made sense. Hess was descended from the Saxons who had lived along the southwestern coast of Denmark and had sailed back and forth first to raid, then to colonize the east coast of Great Britain.

But the roylans were forest creatures, a primitive society, still largely arboreal. The majority of roylans currently alive had been bred in captivity by the Orion Syndicate as slaves. And the orions had discovered that the tiny roylans made superior engineers. Tiny, quick, agile, and surprisingly clever and strong.

"Sea people, Ki?" Hess asked. He turned to look at the giant, oddly shrimp-like alien next to him. It was several times his size.

"My ancestors patrolled the shallow waters of our homeworld. A planet billions of light years from here. As your homeworld is also more than a billion lightyears away. Except for the doorway."

"Why?" Hess asked. "Why do you want to come to us?"

"You are a marvel. So tiny. So frail. So short-lived. And yet you have accomplished so much," the giant stag/tiger shrimp responded. "We will join you. To study. To learn."

"To conquer?" Hess asked. "That's what my ancestors did. The Saxons."

"They came and established farms. They joined the native people and became the native people. And then fought off new waves of invaders. And more invaders came and joined them, and they became the native people. I'm not coming for your homeworld, Roman. I come bearing gifts that will take your people generations to understand.

"Just as it took the Britons generations to understand the great gifts the Saxons brought them."

SBA Episode 13, Scene 6: Understanding

Chapter Summary

There since the cord, the license or reasons we understood will be...



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Scene 6: Understanding

There since the cord, the license or reasons we understood will be...

13.6

Understanding

Princess L'Ruut ran her hand over the purple mohawk and smiled her studied, carefully crafted, sultry, sexy smile. She was a logical oddity and, at the same time, a logical necessity among terrestrial vulcans. A tradition brought over from the home planet.

L'Ruut was a sex worker. Her role was to couple with vulcans who had either lost or never had a betrothed. During Pon Farr. It was an honorable calling that, for various reasons, because it violated so many ancient vulcan and human taboos, caused those called to this work to live somewhat apart, not quite accepted in either human or vulcan communities. Especially because, like L'Ruut, the majority of "substitutes," as they had come to be called, were vulcan/human hybrids.

"It suits you," L'Ruut said. Even her voice was voluptuous. The overt sexiness wasn't really needed, nor even wanted. L'Ruut's choice to lean into it was a sort of rebellion on her part against the unspoken and understated discrimination she and others of her profession faced, even though it was necessary and (officially) honorable.

The few women and even fewer men who found themselves providing this service were almost always those who had themselves been bereft of betrothal for any number of reasons. Their small number and the increasing need for their services, especially with the privations of two recent wars, meant that they were constantly busy, which only enhanced the stigma associated with their calling.

Ensign John Sevork didn't mind. He had made a deep connection with L'Ruut during his Pon Farr. He had chosen her services instead of betrothal because he was in Star Fleet and did not want to leave a family behind. There would be time for family later. He was only in his 20's, quite young for a vulcan. Even for a hybrid.

"My captain suggested I update my hairstyle. She has recently changed her hair color to blue, so I looked up human hairstyles in that idiom and this one appealed to me."

L'Ruut stroked his purple goatee. "I'm sure your parents will not approve."

"They are fairly open minded. They approved of my choice to spend time with you instead of starting a family." Sevork settled onto a couch, patted the seat next to him.

L'Ruut settled next to him. She looked vulcan, but her human ancestry had given an unusual reddish tint to her hair. It was long and voluminous. She wasn't particularly beautiful, but very fit - somewhat more athletic than was the norm for vulcans. She leaned against John, then snuggled in tightly, comfortably.

"I love visiting with my clients. It's really the only time I feel comfortable and accepted among my own kind."

"We know you," Sevork responded. "You share much more than your body. You share your whole being."

"Week in and week out," L'Ruut said softly, distantly. "Sometimes as many as two clients in a week. I barely get to recover from being melded intimately with one mind and another is reaching out to me in need. I almost never get to visit."

"I love you," Sevork said, simply.

“All my clients say that,” L’Ruut replied.

“And every one of us is speaking the truth,” Sevork responded. “It does not mean we will never love another. But you cannot touch that kind of compassion and not be moved.”

“I get lost sometimes. So many minds intruding on mine. In such desperate need. There are days, sometimes weeks, when I am just trying to figure out who I am.”

“You need a vacation,” said Sevork.

“I need to retire,” L’Ruut replied. “I’m nearly 100 years old. I have shared mind and body with more than a thousand. I carry the seed of hundreds of men stored inside me. Yours among them. Some day I want to have your child.”

John Sevork cuddled comfortably against the giant alien that he had described as a cross between a stag and a tiger shrimp.

“As long as I get to meet him. Her. Them.”

“Oh, have no doubt, John. You will. You absolutely will.”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 7: The Lift

Chapter Summary

Down at the end, close by a river...



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Scene 7: The Lift

Down at the end, close by a river...

13.7 The Lift

There was something hypnotic about the Pattiseema Lift, linking the Godavari and Krishna rivers, just a few kilometers west of where each emptied into the Bay of Bengal. Flight specialist Maya Davi had rowed up and down this canal many times with her mother when she was a girl, checking for erosion along the banks, charting the flow of the muddy brown waters.

The boat was one that the Davi family had built and rebuilt using the same tools and techniques that their ancestors had used for thousands of years. It was a point of pride that this knowledge had been passed down for so many generations. The art of boat making, the materials used, everything had changed over and over. Not just updates of old techniques... technological revolutions.

But old ways or new, old boat or new didn't make much difference to the work that the Davi family had been doing for generations: The Davi family minded the Lift. The water needed to be sampled, the banks needed constant attention, the wildlife needed to be catalogued, the irrigation canals that sprang off the Lift required regular measurement.

Slowly rowing up and down the Lift was the best way to catalogue all of these items and more. For Maya it had been a long, wonderful dream, at least in retrospect. As the youngest child, her job was to transcribe her mother's notes. Her older brother and two older sisters rowed. Her father steered the boat. Her mother used a variety of sensors to measure the banks.

Those long, straight banks made it clear that this was no naturally occurring river. Most of the Lift was so straight that it was like a road, stretching from horizon to horizon without a single bend.

A road of brown, muddy water. Carrying natural nutrients, making vast stretches of what was once barren lands into fertile farmland.

"Labeo fimriatus... Maya! Write it down!" Maya's mother often had to rouse Maya from her daydreams. The Lift was so hypnotic to look upon.

Maya scribbled the Linnaean taxonomy into the wildlife notebook, followed by: "Fringed-lipped carp." And prepared for the inevitable lecture:

"It's a big one, 122 centimeters! So good to see such a big specimen. You know that these fish, along with a few endangered varieties of turtles moved into the Lift shortly after it was dredged. The Lift was only meant to be a temporary solution before other canals were made. But the endangered species made it their home and did so well here, with some management, that they were taken off the endangered list. And so was the Lift. They quite literally saved each other." Maya's mother loved telling this story.

"Honey, I know you don't want to be a river biologist. Or canal engineer. Just try to focus on the here and now."

Maya looked up in surprise. This was something her mother had never said. Eventually her two eldest brothers had both married scientists and the legacy of the Davi family was secured. But not before she had enlisted in Star Fleet, at age 17, just to get as far away from the Lift as

possible. And now she was back here.

“This is the lesson the Lift has to teach you, Maya,” her mother shrimp said. Maya had no idea how such a huge creature could possibly fit into the Davi family boat. It would have looked far more harmonious simply enjoying the water of the Lift. She also had no idea how this creature could possibly be her mother.

“This canal, linking two vital rivers, has new tributaries added all the time. New irrigation lines. It takes constant upkeep. And the people taking care of the Lift are not the same people who built it.”

Maya’s mother shrimp reached out with a whisker and gently stroked Maya’s hair. Maya had always loved it when her mother stroked her hair. “You ran away and joined Star Fleet to leave the Lift behind. And here, billions of light years from your home, you have come back to the Lift. You have to learn to appreciate your life and appreciate your destiny. The Lift must be cared for. And if cared for properly, it will provide new homes and new opportunities for endangered species...”

“Including yours.”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 8: Life On The Edge

Chapter Summary

Close to the edge, round by the corner...



The Star Beagle Adventures

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Scene 8: Life On The Edge

Close to the edge, round by the corner...

13.8 Life On The Edge

“Of course the most invasive species that we are intimately familiar with is... anybody?”

The biology class was one of many pre-med track classes at Upper South Trantor Preparatory, a school located near the top of one of the tallest, most massive skyscrapers in the City of Trantor on Cun Ling, the artificial planet that was only now beginning to realize a significant portion of its population potential. The school was far from exclusive; it was a tributary for the University of Upper South Trantor, itself not an “Ivy League” (whatever that meant) school. Like all universities that included the words “of” and “Trantor,” UUST was a public university, open to everyone.

One of the many andorian students said, brightly, “Homo sapiens!”

“Correct!” Professor Joza inhaled deeply, savoring the steam that exuded from the cup attached to her chest. Few people realized that the Benzites did not require this steam to survive in standard atmospheres. The steam recycled directly from their lungs helped these extraordinarily intelligent blue people maintain a stable internal temperature and humidity, which, in turn, excited neurotransmitters that enhanced their already considerable native intelligence.

Kara Garrity was, predictably, annoyed. As one of only 27 human students in this school largely populated with andorian teachers and students, she felt oddly out of place within a city that sported the highest concentration of humans anywhere in the galaxy. She was at this school because her grades did not qualify her for any other school anywhere near her home. Most of those had large populations of andorians as well. Upper South Trantor had a very large andorian population. Minuscule compared to their human neighbors, but still the largest concentration of andorians anywhere outside of their home moon.

“What about the Borg?” Kara asked.

“Would anyone like to answer?” Professor Joza asked.

“They’re not a species,” one of the more annoying andorian students answered.

“Correct,” Joza replied. “The Borg are not a species. Like the Federation, the Borg are a culture composed of several subject species. Even more subject species than are in the Federation.”

“Member species in the Federation are not subjugated!” Kara exclaimed.

“This is a biology class, not a civics class,” Joza responded, “But, for the sake of clarity, every student in this room, and me as well, we are all part of the population of Cun Ling, a full member planet in the Federation. Are we not all, famously, equally subject to Federation law? Full membership requires that planetary law be subject and subsumed under the Federation Tribunal.”

Kara Garrity had no response to this. She sat in her seat and stewed. Indeed it was the next day after this conversation that she had left home, taken a tram to the local Star Fleet base in Central Trantor and enlisted.

“So you see,” Professor Shrimp continued, “You, too, have been subjugated. Just because you were born into subjugation and raised to admire the system to which you are subject, even to believe that, because it was founded in large part by your ancestors, that it is your birthright, you have, nonetheless, been subjugated.”

Kara continued to stew, hoping against hope that her gigantic crustacean professor would not continue to elaborate.

“There have been many master species such as the humans,” Professor Shrimp elaborated. “But humanity is very interesting. Your dominance is carefully disguised. You consider yourselves as first among equals. It is both amusing and quite clever. And, quite possibly, supremely successful. The various subjects of your human empire can look at what subjugation to other empires would look like and find their current yoke far more acceptable.”

“I am equal...” Kara started, then her voice trailed off in confusion and some embarrassment.

“Equal to a vulcan?” Professor Shrimp asked. “They are stronger and smarter than you and live nearly twice as long. An andorian? They’re much faster than you and far more sensitive to light, sound, and, especially, balance. And yet, largely thanks to your much, much larger populations, you humans dominate your Federation.”

The giant professor reached out with an antenna and tapped Chief Medical Technician Kara Garrity’s arm. “If you are too comfortable in your illusions, you will miss the dangers around you. Such as the fungus growing in Eva Mendez’s jaw...”

Kara’s eyes opened wide. “What?”

“It is the same species that invaded this ship a few weeks ago,” the giant shrimp explained. “The spores exist partly in subspace. They have gotten into a lot of things, but by far the most dangerous is their colonization of Eva’s weakened jaw. They are a very invasive species...”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 9: The Startled Memory

Chapter Summary

Sudden call shouldn't take away the startled memory...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 9: The Startled Memory

Sudden call shouldn't take away the startled memory...

13.9

The Startled Memory

Lieutenant Commander Zizira Gross was horrified. She had always been somewhat afraid of Captain Rhonda Carter, but now the witch had finally come into her own. Bolians were a practical people. Not believers in magic or spells or witchcraft. Those were just stories to excite young children.

And stories children told younger children to frighten them.

After contact with the humans, and their scary campfire stories, the stories of witches in particular had really spiced up bolian storytelling. But the stories didn't hold a candle to the living reality.

Gross wasn't certain why there was now a bubbling cauldron where the command chair should be, or how all the bridge monitors had been altered to display spells and various arcane symbols. All glowing and none of them actually on the screens, but hovering, like holograms, just in front of the screens. Except there were no holographic projectors on the bridge of the U.S.S. Escort.

Carter's back was to Gross, which she considered very satisfactory. Well, it would have been far more satisfactory if Carter had simply not been here on the bridge.

Scratch that, Gross thought. It would be much more satisfactory if she was, herself, pretty much anywhere else.

Carter's electric blue hair was floating about as if she were in zero G. No - there was more of a pattern to the movement of her hair. As if her hair was somehow prehensile and was making arcane signals of its own.

Gross wanted to flee, but Carter was chanting. It sounded like the chanting of the Holy Warrior who had held everyone on Escort in thrall, particularly Gross. But unlike the Warrior's song, the lyrics to this song were in some ancient, arcane, unholy Earth language that the universal translator was unable or unwilling to provide translation for.

The song kept Gross rooted where she stood, terrified. A bolian, Gross had always wondered about the human aphorism, "My hair was standing on end..." Gross didn't have any hair. But she suddenly understood the idiom. If she had any hair, it would have been standing on end. Her skin prickled, as if she were electrified. She was wrenching about, trying to fight against her frozen muscles.

Gross was hoping that she had not actually been noticed. Hoping against hope that Carter would not turn around. Particularly since, in addition to stirring whatever unholy potion was bubbling in the gigantic black cauldron in the middle of the bridge and occasionally tending the roaring fire underneath it, the wild, blue-haired witch had taken to levitating just a few inches above the deck plates on the bridge.

Of course, simply thinking about how terrifying it would be if Rhonda Carter were to turn around, how much she really did not want to be seen by her, nothing was more likely to make the witch turn. Like a freezer door opening. Causing a deep chill to run up Gross's spine.

Of course the arcane symbols on her face were now glowing. Far worse were the eyes - brightly glowing orbs of solid, bright blue... And she was still singing, the song holding Zizira Gross frozen in place...

Gross struggled against the spell. She still couldn't move, but she finally found her voice. "Wh... Why are you doing this? Why are you doing

this to me?”

“To stop you,” Carter said, simply.

That was the creepiest of all. Carter didn't stop singing, nor did she work the spoken words into her song. There weren't two of her and she didn't have two mouths. Zizira Gross could simply see her captan speaking and singing at the same time. Not two images superimposed over each other. Just one unified impossibility.

Gross swallowed. Hard. Then: curious... “Stop me from what?”

“From stopping me,” said the singing shrimp-witch.

The Escort's first officer took a sudden breath, looking into the glowing eyes of a giant shrimp that could not have possibly fit on the bridge, but, somehow, did.

Gross managed to raise her hand. Pointed a trembling finger at the sorcerous crustacean:

“...It's YOU!! I KNOW you!!...”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 10: All The Way



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 10: All the Way

All in all, the journey takes you all the way...

13.10 All the Way

Abra Kahen rested on her elbows. And on the extremely fit and handsome young man underneath her.

He claimed to be a prince. Prince Dahar. He was certainly handsome enough for it. They were both dancers, exceptionally fit, extremely flexible, and, at this moment, finally sated, if quite exhausted.

Prince Dahar (he insisted on being called “Prince,” but he didn’t like honorifics such as “Your Highness” or “Sire”) traced his young lover’s face with a finger. Abra was exceptionally pretty and quite skilled with makeup. And barely 18.

“I’ve waited so long for this,” he said, softly. “So lovely...”

Abra sat up and took his hands in hers. Gently kissed and suckled his fingertips. One at a time.

She laced her fingers with his, came down to her elbows again and studied his face. He was so incredibly fit. But fine lines on his face betrayed his age. He wasn’t a boy. Or even a young man. That didn’t matter so much, really. He was the star dancer of the Tiruppur Agni Yuvraj Nritya Atithi, a dance company that had, according to legend, been founded by the local royal family more than 800 years ago.

While the company was charged with keeping traditional dance forms alive, the family who had founded the company were, as the name of the company implied, fascinated with fire dancing. And Prince Dahar was the best. And Abra had been his student for 6 years. And had been hopelessly in love with him that entire time.

Today was the end of a dream come true.

Abra knew she was only the most recent in the long line of beautiful young dancers who had graced the prince’s bed. Four months was the average length of these torrid affairs, but it was really driven by the birthdate of the next young dancer he had his nets out for. For Abra, that next date was about two months away. Many of his former lovers stayed with the dance company and even occasionally shared his bed again. Others would join other dance troupes, often traveling troupes. These women also occasionally returned. And not for bad reason. The prince was really, really good in bed.

But Abra was not going to be another of his has-beens. She had used him to learn her own arts of pleasuring.

She kissed Prince Dahar’s nose, then sat up again. “Will you see me off tomorrow?”

“Off to where?” the prince asked in confusion. “Are you going to visit relatives?”

She leaned down and kissed him again. “No, silly. Off to war.”

“War? What are you talking about?”

“The klingons have attacked one of our colonies, my dear prince. We are at war. I have enlisted in Star Fleet. Aren’t you going?”

Prince Dahar was stunned. He fumbled about for words. He finally settled for: “But what about us?”

Kahen laughed. “Us? There is no us. There never was. Only you and your desires... And me and mine.”

Dahar started to say one thing. Then started another. His confusion was almost comical.

“Oh, you are a wonderful lover. And when I was 14 years old I used to tear myself apart fantasizing about you. But I see you. I know you. I’ve known you for some time. I was happy for our time together. You taught me more than you realize. You taught me to dance. You taught me how to handle fire. You taught me how to make love. And you taught me how to see through other people’s lies. To see people for who they really are, not just what they want you to believe.”

Abra Kahen leapt lithely out of bed, happily displaying her beautiful, young, naked body before donning some diaphanous robes that covered without concealing, somehow making her even more alluring.

She smiled at the enormous royal shrimp that was far too big for the bed it was reclining in.

“I made love to my prince one more time. I was rewarding him for teaching me such a valuable lesson. But you are not my prince. I see you, Stephanie. I see you for who and what you really are.”

“Once you have been used the way that I was used, you either willingly blind yourself, or you promise yourself to never be fooled again.”

Princess Stephanie had nothing to say. She could only observe the humble Star Fleet NCO with some confusion and only a dawning appreciation that these people might not be so simple as at first they had appeared.

SBA Episode 13, Scene 11: Apart From Any Reality

Chapter Summary

As apart from any reality that you've ever seen and known...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 11: Apart From Any Reality

As apart from any reality that you've ever seen and known...

13.11

Apart From Any Reality

“Not buying it. We’re not in Rhonda’s grotto...”

Captain Rhonda Carter slapped the stalactite, then flicked General Shrip/Krank’s nose.

“Come on, Stephanie, you can do better than that...”

Captain Carter looked around an unfamiliar sea shore as unfamiliar, slightly purple waves flowed in from an unfamiliar sea. Several giant tiger stag shrimp were sunning themselves just off shore, in the shallows.

“Let me guess,” Carter said. “This is your species’ home planet. It’s not even in this galaxy, is it? It’s a billion light years away in some other galaxy that has an opening into this one...”

“Just as you are a billion light years from your home planet,” Stephanie the Space Shrimp replied.

“And these are either your ancestors or your cousins,” Carter continued. “Either way, these animals are not your species. They look similar, but they’re not as intelligent, nor capable of space flight.”

“They’re reasonably intelligent. A social species,” the giant shrimp mused. “I think you would find them comparable with...”

“I don’t give a fuck,” Rhonda Carter said, calmly. She got up out of the command chair. “Yeah, I know this isn’t my real chair. I’m sitting in the real chair. And I can’t give an order to Maya to fire the phasers at your little land thorn...”

“You knew?”

“You’ve been so much smarter than us pathetic, tiny, limited, short-lived creatures. So much smarter and stronger than me. You want to know how I knew? Ask John Sevork. Oh wait... You have that strong young man wrapped around your... um... leg, I guess? Of course you’re doing this all at once, but you can only manage those experiences serially. so for us it’s simultaneous. But for you it’s sequential. Meaning the order is really important. You had to take the strong minds first...”

“I suppose you’re going to explain?” Stephanie the Space Shrimp was amused.

“Sure, why not?” Carter was equally amused. “You know my crew through me. And where I would place them, you also knew that through me. So you started with the crew who I thought were the toughest and went down from there. You were easily able to play General Krank’s philosophy against him. You had to take him down first because I have him at the transporter. And my most disciplined officer, Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison at weapons. I gave you an answer that he desperately wanted to know.”

Carter tapped her command chair with the little finger of her left hand. “I’m not sure why you chose Eva Mendez next. Of course she would be at the transporter, but I think you may have needed a fix. You definitely tortured her. Let’s see... Chief Roman Hess, the strong, silent type,

trying to fix the nacelles so this ship could go to warp. Ensign John Sevork, our only telepath..."

She continued tapping the command chair. "Maya Davi, my star pilot, who would have the weapons just under her fingertips, Kara Garrity because there is also a transporter in sick bay. Then the ones you thought would be weaker. Like Zizira Gross. I was so disappointed with her because she was so completely taken over by those singing holy warriors. That was your first surprise. Zizira is bolian. More susceptible to low frequency sound than humans, but, what you didn't know, far more resistant to telepathy than we are..."

"And then my lovely little Abra Kahen. Everyone underestimates beautiful women. Pretty face, nothing happening behind it. It was so easy to have you fall for that. Who would have thought that she would be the person with a core of steel? Someone you could never hope to fool? She is a fire spinner, after all... You don't play with fire like that unless you're really mentally tough. By the way, she is not my lover."

The alien crustacean registered surprise. Something that Carter noticed.

"No, you were only seeing my lurid fantasies about her. I'm her captain. I don't screw my crew."

"You do love to hear yourself talk..." the space shrimp observed.

"You underestimated me, Stephanie. You thought I was the brawn of this operation and relied on other people to be the brains." Carter caressed her collar. "They don't hand this fourth pip out to just anyone..."

"Yes," Stephanie replied. "You are a Star Fleet captain. Commissioned to seek out new life and new civilizations. I am both..."

"I'm not that kind of Star Fleet captain." Carter's grin was disturbingly wolf-like. "Perhaps if I were Captain Skip Howard, I might care. He's the one who's good at first contact. But he isn't here... Oh, you are a sadistic bitch, aren't you? I didn't have to see what you did to Eva to know that... Making me piss my own bed. Twice. Playing with my blood pressure... You were having so much fun with me that I was able to hide someone from you. The strongest, smartest, most capable person on this ship. And I've managed to hold your attention just long enough..."

"You know that I am pregnant..."

If it was possible, Carter's smile seemed to become even more predatory. "Oh yes. I know. You told me only a few minutes ago..." She pounded the left arm on her command throne:

"Now!!!"

SBA Episode 13, Scene 12: Deception

Chapter Summary

Guessing problems only to deceive the mention...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 12: Deception

Guessing problems only to deceive the mention...

13.12

Deception

The tide was sweeping out on the western shore of Numinor. The white spires of the central city rose halfway to the sky behind, gleaming in the setting sun. And on the beach, the body of a young woman had just washed up onto the white sands and was now still, no longer rocking in the receding waves.

“Six.”

Master Chief Bill Waller was sitting incongruously nearby at the helm of the U.S.S. Escort, a control panel under his fingers. The index finger of his right hand was flexing, ever so slightly.

“An interesting opening gambit. My beautiful young wife. We never found the murderer. It was a serial killer who struck only once in every city on Cun Ling... 47 victims across 47 cities. All beautiful young brides. The first was in Eden. The last was in Ba Sing Se. Then the murders just... stopped. I suspected this would be the first place you would bring me.” Waller looked up at the giant stag/tiger shrimp thing polluting the crystal clear waters of his home city of Numinor.

“That is one of your strategies, isn’t it? Going to the moment that us non-coms enlisted in Star Fleet? And this was when I decided to join. To get away from this. Hundreds of light years away. But that was 32 years ago and I don’t live here anymore. Try again...”

Flames were subsiding from what remained of the battle bridge of the U.S.S. Valley Forge, an antique Excelsior class ship that should have been retired decades ago. It was just a training vessel these days, but the weapons and shields had been upgraded, along with nearly every other system and when the borg came, Excelsior was one of the first ships to answer the call.

A control stick from the panel had been blown outward and had punched a hole through the skull of a young vulcan officer.

“Five,” said Master Chief Waller. “Ensign Salok. It was shortly after I was promoted to Master Chief. Chief of the Boat. Valley Forge was to be my retirement assignment. Salok would have become a great officer and I wasn’t going to allow a bunch of rowdy enlistees to bully him. Training boat - green officers, veteran non-comms. It was a sad day, but you already kind of blew this trope with my dead bride. And wasted an opportunity to convince me not to kill you.”

“You?” Stephanie the Space Shrimp was incredulous. “What makes you think you can kill me?”

“Because I’m still sitting at the helm of the U.S.S. Escort with my finger hovering over the trigger for the phase cannons,” Waller replied. “I haven’t targeted them, but at this distance, I hardly need to. I have been ordered to kill you, but I am giving you four more chances to convince me not to. I suggest you not waste those chances trying to control me. Believe me, you can’t.”

“My mind to your mind. Your thoughts to my thoughts,” said Ensign John Sevork, his fingers framing Bill Waller’s face.

“You can take you whiskers, or whatever those are, off my face, Stephanie,” said Waller. “We’re already in a mind meld. You’ve melded with the entire crew. It’s all happening simultaneously, but you can only experience it sequentially. But this is a very good move.”

“Four,” said Stephanie. “Okay, I don’t know how, but I can tell you aren’t lying. How? How are you able to have so much control?”

“There are 45 of us. And you’re having to really tightly control what you’re doing or you could kill every one of us,” Waller replied. “Yes, John realized when he melded with the captain that the way you communicate is very similar to a mind meld. And he taught us how to push back and take control. Only a few of us have the strength of will and mental balance to try. John evaluated all of us and selected a few of us to train. How to walk back into the mind meld to see what you see. How to stay grounded. Apparently, I’m a natural.”

“Now that you have learned what you need to know, you have three more chances,” Waller concluded.

“Master Chief Bill Waller, is it?” Captain Skip Howard was about the same height as the U.S.S. Escort’s minuscule chief of the boat, if much slighter of build. Somehow, the captain of the U.S.S. Beagle managed to be intimidating anyway. Green eyeshadow, black fingernail polish. “I am told you are the man I really need to get to know. Please do me the honor of joining me for dinner in my private mess aboard the Beagle.”

“Will my captain be there?” Waller asked.

“She is aware of the invitation. You’re welcome to discuss it with her,” Howard replied.

“You want to know everything about everyone on my boat, don’t you?” asked Waller.

“Ah, I see Rhonda has already prepared you for this meeting...”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 13: Into the Void

Chapter Summary

Passing paths that climb halfway into the void...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 13: Into the Void

Passing paths that climb halfway into the void...

13.13

Into the Void

“Captain Skip Howard, a very good choice,” opined Master Chief Bill Waller. And I have no idea how you’re managing the turquoise eye-shadow and fingernail polish when you don’t have eyes or fingers...

The giant space stag/tiger shrimp across the table from Waller seemed entirely unfazed by the fact that it was a lobster dinner in front of Waller... And a shrimp cocktail on her side of the table. Or that the captain’s mess on the U.S.S. Beagle was far smaller than she was.

“You were very impressed with Skip Howard. Both you and Captain Carter think our encounter would have evolved very differently if he were here. I believe you, Bill Waller, that you can kill me. And I also think you believe Skip Howard would’t want you to do so. Perhaps we can both figure out why.”

“Perhaps,” Waller replied. “But it would have to be a damn good reason. Skip Howard isn’t my captain. Rhonda Carter is. And she has ordered me to kill you.”

“Then why haven’t you?”

“Because it’s not time yet. And while we have these few moments together, it’s only sensible that I give you the chance to convince me not to. I am very uncomfortable with that order. To use deadly force when you haven’t used it against us.”

“You don’t trust your own captain’s instincts?” Stephanie asked.

“I know Rhonda. She’s the best fighter there is,” Waller said. “She knows just the moment to deliver the killing blow. But sometimes she doesn’t know when to not fight. We’ve had to talk her out of it before. We don’t have that luxury this time. Either I obey her order, or I choose for the first time to disobey her. And if she is right about you, that would be a terrible decision on my part. I will give you two more chances to convince me to do that.”

Master Chief Waller sat in the witness chair. His crustaceon captain sat at the defense table, alone. There was a panel of judges (Star Fleet captains and admirals) and a prosecutor (also a captain.) Instead of four pips, Stephanie had only one full pip and one hollow pip, the rank insignia for a 2nd Lieutenant, even though she did not have a collar to support them.

“You gave testimony against your own captain at her court marshal. In fact, she trusts you more than anyone else on her crew because of how damning your testimony was.”

“We had to hold her back. She was vicious, especially when her blood was up. She started as an enlistee and got promoted through the ranks and eventually a battlefield promotion to ensign. Near the end of the first Cardassian War, our team had rescued a group of cardassian defectors and three of them died in our care the first night, murdered by someone in that group. Rhonda ordered a young vulcan in our group to forcefully mind-meld with her suspect and both men died in the process. I had argued against it. It was against every regulation and against

vulcan morality in general.”

“But she was acquitted?” the giant space shrimp asked.

“Only because it turned out the cardassian in question was a member of their Obsidian Order and the vulcan was no humble ensign,” Waller replied. “He was actually an agent for the vulcan secret agency, the V’Shar. The entire affair was hushed up and Carter spent the next 12 years as an un-promotable 2nd lieutenant. Until another war got started and Star Fleet needed fighters again.”

“And you have served with her that entire time. Trying to restrain her temper. Trying to keep her from being more violent than necessary. A dozen years and more after testifying against her. Why?”

“Because she asked me to,” said Waller. “She pretty much begged me to. And she is nowhere near as vicious as she once was. You have one more chance to convince me.”

General Krank used his dk’tahg to point to the readout displaying Eva Mendez’s jaw. Bill Waller could understand the readout well enough to see that there was, apparently, no damage of any sort.

“I have intimate control over the tiny creatures that your captain refers to as “mushroom bugs.” While I was in Eva’s mind, I was distracting her from the intense pain of her jaw being rebuilt from the inside. You will find that her jaw is completely healed.”

Shrimp Krank pointed to another readout, this one displaying a cross section of Rhonda Carter’s skull. “As I used them to conduct the far more complicated rebuild of your captain’s eardrums. When you next encounter her, she will be able to hear you. What she saw as torture was in part me learning how to not kill her with my telepathy and in part me driving her metabolism to be able to accept the new tissue: fungal tissue transformed to take the place of her ruptured eardrum...”

Master Chief Bill Waller sighed heavily. “If it were up to me, I would not attack you. But I have to trust my captain’s instincts. I am sorry. If what you have told me is true, then I am making a terrible mistake...”

“Wait!” said Stephanie. “I have a hostage...”

SBA Episode 13, Scene 14: Total Mass Retain

Chapter Summary

As we cross from side to side, we hear the total mass retain...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Scene 14: Total Mass Retain

As we cross from side to side, we hear the total mass retain...

13.14

Total Mass Retain

“I said NOW, Bill!”

Captain Rhonda Carter was bright pink and shaking with rage. Master Chief Bill Waller was the most reliable member of her crew. Tough, smart, honest, and loyal to a fault. He was the only one who had what it took to stand up to the telepathic pressure of the giant space crustacean who had invaded the minds of each of her crew.

Waller had to wait until Carter, Abra Kahen and Zizira Gross had time to break free from the telepathic domination and try to free the rest of the crew. And he had waited just a few seconds after Carter had given him the order. When it got to five seconds, Carter had to assume he was trapped.

Which made opening fire on this alien all the more paramount.

With a few quick commands, she transferred firing command to the arms of her chair. Buttons on the left arm typically assigned to communications became a rough targeting control system. Fire control was on the right.

Waller was slowly shaking his head, apparently trying to free himself. Carter could help with that...

Master Chief Waller suddenly realized fire control had been removed from his panel. Instantly horrified, he turned in his chair:

“No Rhonda, don’t!! She has...”

Even as he was speaking her name, he knew it was too late. The thunder of the phaser pulse cannon erupting into fire filled the ship. The reflection of the weapons fire from the viewscreen lit up the bridge. And the alien’s death scream could be heard in all their minds, causing everyone throughout the U.S.S. Escort to howl in pain. Several crew members crumpled to their knees or collapsed to the floor.

Rhonda Carter was bright pink and it was clear to anyone that knew her well that her blood pressure was spiking. She quickly reprogrammed the controls on the arm of her command chair, then selected a switch: “Shipwide, this is Captain Carter. Report in by the numbers, casualty report.”

Reports came in section by section, indicating that 6 crew members, including Eva Mendez, had lost consciousness. As the reports were coming in, Carter got out of her chair, stepped forward and looked around the bridge, then: “Bill, where’s John?”

Master Chief Waller turned to look at her, shaking his head slowly.

“Computer, locate Ensign John Sevork.”

The familiar female voice that had been the ship’s voice for nearly every Star Fleet vessel for well over 100 years responded: “Ensign Sevork is not currently aboard the U.S.S. Escort. His communicator pin is not detectable.”

“Captain,” said Waller. He directed her attention to the main viewer. He played back the last few seconds of the space stag/tiger shrimp’s life. A purple mohawk could be seen moving rhythmically near the back of the alien crustacean.

“Is he... Was he... Can you enhance and rotate the view based on sensor readings?” Carter asked.

“Do you really want me to?” Waller asked.

“We have to know,” Carter responded.

Waller dutifully changed the view.

“Oh... I really didn’t want to know,” Carter said. “Preserve but take that off screen. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to unsee that...”

Waller changed the view back to the current view of the land thorn with its top shredded.

Carter was shaking her head. “Do you think he knew what he was... Um... I mean, I thought I was okay with interspecies mating...”

“He was so young,” Waller observed. “At that age he could have gotten an erection thinking about trees. Or baseball.”

“That was why you disobeyed my order? You knew he was, um...”

“I didn’t know what he was doing,” Waller replied. “I just knew she had him. At least he died with a smile...”

“That’s just so wrong on so many different levels...” Carter started. Then: “Bill? I can actually hear you!”

“I know,” Waller responded. “She also healed Eva’s jaw before we killed her.”

“Before I killed her... Woah!!” Carter lost her footing as the Escort suddenly lurched, the view screen registering the ship tilting down at the bow, showing lower parts of the broken land thorn.

“Bill??” Carter almost leapt back into her command chair.

“Escort is not responding to the helm!” said Waller. “And the lepreshroom is moving. Registering a 60 degree downward angle at the bow and the lepreshroom is rotating to match... Make that 90 degrees. The bottom tip of the creature is headed directly for the bridge! 30 seconds to contact.”

“Evasive?”

“Helm controls are dead, Captain!”

Carter hit a switch on the arm of her command chair:

“All hands, brace for impact!”

Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

Chapter End Notes

This is the final scene for Episode 13.

The adventure continues in Episode 14: Close to the Edge Part III - I Get Up, I Get Down

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