

## The Star Beagle Adventures Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

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## The Star Beagle Adventures Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

by [LordRobertBruceScott](#)

### Summary

The Beagle Task Force have to get the U.S.S. Escort to safety...

### Notes

Throughout this episode, snippets of lyrics are quoted. These are from the fourth movement of the song, "Close to the Edge part IV - Seasons of Man" 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.

# The Time Between

## Chapter Summary

The time between the notes relates the color to the scenes...



### The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 15: [Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man](#)

Scene 1: [The Time Between](#)

*The time between the notes relates the color to the scenes...*

15.1

### The Time Between

“U.S.S. Mako, this is the U.S.S. Escort, Rhonda Carter commanding. Please do not approach. Please maintain a peaceful stance toward the lifeforms that have been transported off our port and starboard stern.”

Captain Rhonda Carter was seated on the command throne of the U.S.S. Escort, wearing an EVA suit with her helmet on a tether. Two other persons could also be seen on the bridge, also wearing EVA suits with helmets attached by tether. The fact that the helmets were floating indicated that the artificial gravity was, at the moment, off.

Commodore Yui Song was clearly stunned at the evident deterioration of the toughest ship in the task force. “Rhonda, you are aware that you currently have at least 5 crew members drifting outside of your ship?”

“They have a job to do, so they won’t be drifting for long,” Carter rejoined. “As you can see, Escort is coming apart at the seams. Which is why the entire crew is wearing EVA suits. Even those in sections of the ship that weren’t torn up by our passenger. Are there any of those holy landers in the area?”

“One of them came out of the rift just before you,” Commodore Yui advised. “But they took off for the in door and long range telemetry indicates they are still headed that way at about warp 7, which seems to be their top speed.”

“That is good news for us,” Carter opined. “I assume Skip is watching, because he’s going to like this part, as a biologist...”

The commodore signaled to someone behind her and Captain Skip Howard was brought into the conversation via split-screens.

“Okay, that motley collection of creatures riding on those landthorns are, actually, the children of one of our now-deceased crew members, Ensign John Sevork. In addition to being part human and part vulcan, they are, apparently, part mushroom and part some other creature from some galaxy billions of light years away that we can no longer see the light from.”

“And they’re anchored in mushrooms that are encased in shells of rock,” Captain Howard observed.

“Those are the remnants of a much larger creature...” Carter started. “But that’s a long story for another time. For right now, those rockthorn mushroom things don’t get along well with the holy landers. And they’re capable of hurting them. They’re also capable of hurting us. We want to keep that from happening, we need to get these kids to somewhere they can hide. Some place with an asteroid field.”

“There’s a trinary system about 18 light years from here, but we would be going toward a swarm of holy landers,” Commodore Yui offered.

The image of the U.S.S. Beagle's bridge was replaced with star charts on the split-screens of the Escort and the Mako. "According to the star charts we got from the silicone life forms back about 8 months ago," came Howard's voice. Most of the star chart lit up with additional highlighting. "That appears to be the Jar Galaxy. We were wondering why the star charts the serrati gave us showed so many more stars than we could see. Two groups of them. One of them was the QLock we narrowly escaped a few months ago. The other one appears to be the Jar Galaxy..."

Carter pressed a few controls on the arm of her chair and a single system was highlighted. "How about this one? 31 light years, no holy landers in the area..."

"How are we going to get those strange mushroom children there?" Yui asked.

"They come warp capable," Skip Howard suggested. "Biologically generated warp fields?"

"The fastest we've observed creatures of their size is about warp 4," Carter confirmed. "The big one topped warp 6."

"Rhonda, we're going to have to tow you... can your ship even stand up to being towed?" Yui Song asked.

"Two backup structural integrity field generators say it can," Carter replied. "And we're in process of re-rigging the artificial gravity generator to temporarily serve as an additional structural integrity generator. Apparently they work on very similar principles. I could use some fresh engineers to help hold Escort together and my people need a safe place to sleep for a few dozen hours."



## SBA Episode 15, Scene 2: Vogue of Triumphs

### Chapter Summary

A constant vogue of triumphs dislocate man, so it seems...



#### The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 2: Vogue of Triumphs

*A constant vogue of triumphs dislocate man, so it seems...*

### 15.2

#### Vogue of Triumphs

"I haven't decided what to do about this mess. Suffice that you have both significantly damaged our operation out here. You have both really bungled critical first contact situations, in both cases involving life forms that have proven to be exceptionally adaptive, having adapted to life in multiple galaxies. Do I have to remind you that this is exactly why we are out here? To make sure that first contact with powerful alien cultures is not mishandled so we don't get into something like the Dominion War again."

Commodore Yui Song was coldly furious. Her tone was calm, but her icy glare would have withered even the emotionless former premiere of the Vulcan Science Academy, T'Eln. Captains Skip Howard and Rhonda Carter were withered. It felt as though the ambient temperature in the commodore's ready room were in free-fall.

"For now, I want complete, written reports. Captain Howard, that means a written report from everyone who was on that giant space station with you, from your shuttle pilot, from the transporter operator who beamed you off that space station..." Yui Song's expression managed to become even colder. "And I want a written report from every officer on the bridge at the time you ordered yourself and your party to be transported back to the U.S.S. Beagle in full view of a powerful, valuable, but technologically less advanced species... One that could have become a very valuable ally in this region of space."

Rhonda Carter stole a sideways glance at her fellow captain. She had known Skip Howard for more than a year now. She had grown fond of the odd young man who seemed genetically incapable of not smiling. He wasn't smiling now.

"Captain Carter," Commodore Yui continued in a voice that would make the near absolute zero of outer space seem warm by comparison. "You fled a situation that could potentially be threatening to the Federation without adequate investigation, endangered your crew and severely damaged your ship by inadequately investigating a potentially dangerous situation before barging in, you used the transporter as a weapon against a sentient life form, and following that, you apparently summoned a powerful telepathic entity and then fired on that entity before it had proven to be hostile. Killing one of your crew members in the process and leading to the deaths of six more. Ah!" Yui held up her hand as Carter opened her mouth to interrupt.

"You will have your chance later," Yui continued. "This is just an executive overview of what is going to happen over the course of this investigation."

Commodore Yui sat down behind her desk. Carter and Howard remained standing as they had not been invited to sit. "I am going to make some changes, effective immediately. These are long overdue administrative changes and are not, in themselves, intended as punishment for the current disciplinary situation. Although I do hope they will help forestall similar situations from developing in the near future."

"Captain Carter, your promotion to captain was a battlefield promotion. But you never completed the Star Fleet captain's course and testing. That was an acceptable situation for wartime, but we are no longer at war. Effective immediately, I am demoting you to the rank of commander until you pass your captain's exams. Commander Jason Bates will present the course work and I will administer the exam."

The commodore held out her left hand. Rhonda Carter set her jaw, her skin starting to turn a little pink, but otherwise tried to maintain a stoic

expression as she removed the fourth pip from her collar and dropped it into Yui's hand.

Yui Song turned her attention to Skip Howard. "Captain Howard, you aced your score on every promotional exam, achieving the highest average score for any captain currently serving in Star Fleet. You are a very smart man. And like so many smart men, you are unbelievably arrogant. You hide it well, but you only attended enough of the course work for your captain's exam to avoid getting kicked out."

The commodore rapped her knuckles on her desk. "You will audit Commander Bates' courses and the commander will set daily tests to assure you are paying attention. Jason knows how to make a test that does more than test your ability to take a test. Your attendance and scores will be perfect or I will have that fourth pip on your collar as well. Am I understood?"

Carter and Howard responded in unison: "Aye Commodore!"

"Captain Howard, I don't need reports from your crew to have noticed that something has been distracting you recently. I don't care what it is. Deal with it, get your head out of your ass and into the game. You need more than intellect and instinct to function as a captain, especially out here so far from the Federation. You need discipline. To that end, I am placing Commander Carter and the U.S.S. Escort under your general command. Commander Carter will retain command of the Escort, but it will be your responsibility to put that ship back together."

"Furthermore, I am temporarily moving Commander Holland to the Escort to serve as Commander Carter's first officer. Make sure that strange luchadore understands that any order from Commander Carter is an order from you. I am also reassigning General Krank to the Mako to facilitate his role as military advisor."

"While I have Commander Bates detailed to your mutual re-education, I will need someone to stand in as my executive officer. I am reassigning Lieutenant Commander Zizara Gross from the Escort to the Mako for that purpose. I am also reassigning Lieutenant Commander Senek from the Beagle to the Mako to serve as my science officer and 2nd officer. Lieutenant Commander Gregg Clark will transfer to the Beagle to serve as your first officer and science officer."

Yui Song thumped her desk again, fixing an icy glare on Captain Howard. "I don't know what your problem with Gregg is, Ronald, but you need to get over it. I do not like the tone you've taken when speaking to him and I am not the only person who has noticed."

"Finally, we have gotten a little too familiar and lax in our observance of the ranks. Effective immediately, we will be observing the ranks in all communication and during duty hours. I expect each of you to enforce this within your commands. Am I understood, Captain Howard? Commander Carter?"

"Aye Commodore!"

"Dismissed."

It was only after Carter and Howard were alone in the turbo lift that Skip Howard broke the uncomfortable silence between them:

"Let's find somewhere where we can talk in private..."

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 3: Focus Shape Ascend



### The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 3: Focus Shape Ascend

*And space between the focus shape ascend knowledge of love...*

15.3

### Focus Shape Ascend

The U.S.S. Escort was being towed behind the U.S.S. Beagle. Or at least most of it was. The U.S.S. Arizona had been dispatched to pick up a few dozen pieces of ablative armor that had sloughed off and were drifting in open space.

Shadow, having been trained, among other things, as a nasqua, turned out to be quite useful in corralling these pieces into the small cargo ship's surprisingly spacious bay and, more importantly, arranging them so that nearly all of the debris was stored in an interlinked web within the Arizona's cargo bay.

"Okay, now I understand why there's a separate gravity generation system back here." Lieutenant Camille Salgado was the director of engineering for the U.S.S. Mako. She had asked Pel's advice about optimal loading for the U.S.S. Arizona in part because the small freighter, although leased to Star Fleet, was titularly Pel's property.

Pel had, in turn suggested consulting Shadow's least developed personality, Spun Verz Nasqua. The three of them were in Arizona's flight cabin along with U.S. Marine Lance Corporal Petra Spitze. Because the task force was restricted to warp 3.5, Arizona was traveling under its own power, as were the U.S.S. Bluebird and the U.S.S. Puppy.

"For very large loads, cargo loading is far safer and more efficient in a zero gravity environment," Shadow/Verz observed.

"But this is actually the first time you have loaded a zero-g cargo bay?" Lt. Salgado was a small, dark, round Columbian woman. She had entered Star Fleet through a reserve officer program at the Universidad de Chile while completing a masters degree in warp field theory in what was now considered one of the highest rated warp field programs in the Federation, second only to the Daystrom Institute itself.

"Deep personality mapping," Shadow responded. "Drugs, hypnosis, hours of direct memory stimulation fueled by memories collected directly from kidnapped and drugged subjects... It's a very painful and dangerous procedure for them. As it was for me. They created 17 of us. I was the only one who survived the entire development program. For me, when channeling Spun Verz, it felt like I had been webbing zero-g cargo all my life."

"I suppose we're quite fortunate that there was a EVA suit for your species in that escape pod," Pel observed.

"That was not a matter of luck," Shadow rejoined. "I brought it with me from the shuttle when the anointed commandeered our crew and supplies."

"Do you mind if I touch your fur?" Spike asked.

Shadow looked at the marine and thought for a few moments before responding. She got up and walked over toward Spike. "You may."

Spike moved very slowly and deliberately, paying attention to Shadow's reactions. She very gently ran her fingers through the fur on Shadow's arm. "It's heavier and more bristly than it looks," she observed. "Such a beautiful color. Very few living things on my homeworld produce a purple color like that."

Shadow relaxed slightly as Spike withdrew her hand. She had been very wary of a creature she recognized as a skilled and capable killer. Somehow, the physical contact made Spike seem less threatening.

"My people are very conscious of color," said Shadow. "I'm not even sure I should call them "my people." I was genetically engineered to have the perfect color and a lot of other unusual attributes. I was made and trained for a single purpose. To expose the anointed."

Jephan and Key were riding their landthorns just in front of the Arizona, Jephan just off the port bow and Key just off the starboard bow. With the exception of John, Jr., John Sevork's children shied away from the larger vessels and seemed more comfortable clustered around the Puppy, the Arizona and the Bluebird.

"They're so different from one another," Salgado mused.

Key was shaped like a long ribbon that tapered down to a single leg. She used her body to create the image of a human head by wrapping her ribbon-like body around as if it were wrapped around a head. This image rippled continuously, left gaps between each wind, giving the appearance of a spring in the shape of a female face. A female version of John Sevork.

Jephan was a bizarre mashup of his father and mother. His right side was vulcan in appearance and had one leg and one arm. His left side had three legs and the left side of his head was paddle-shaped and sported four snake-like, prehensile whiskers.

"Genetically engineered," Shadow observed.

"How do you figure?" Pel asked. "From what I was told their mother and father were killed shortly after he, um, contributed his part."

"The program wasn't complete," Shadow replied. "But they all survived. The diversity goes well beyond appearance. They're experiments. The variety is to give the coalition the best chance to survive in a new galaxy."

"And we're assisting this new life-form in invading and adapting to the Milky Way Galaxy," said Lt. Salgado.

"Because they are children of a colleague of yours," Shadow observed. "This was part of their mother's plan, to bind you to her children. I suspect she even engineered her death and the death of the father to create a stronger bond. So they have family in this galaxy that will look after them. I've heard people say Captain Carter is their godmother - I assume that means an adoptive parent.. The anointed do something similar with their songs. They create a dependence among native people to help them survive in a new galaxy."

"You should tell that to Commodore Yui," said Pel. "It might be very helpful for Captain Carter. There will be an investigation around why she fired on the parents of these, um... her godchildren."

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 4: Song and Chance

### Chapter Summary

As song and chance develop time...



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 4: Song and Chance

*As song and chance develop time...*

### 15.4 Song and Chance

Private First Class Guz Maxwell was duetting with Phillip Gorman, the planetologist from Sierra Leone. Both were so skilled on their instruments, Maxwell with the electric guitar and Gorman with a golden flute, that they were simply improvising, alternately leading each other in a very jazzy, laid back, mutual composition.

The U.S.S. Beagle included a lecture hall that doubled as performance space. This was part of the original vulcan design of the ship. A recognition of the importance of community in a society noted for valuing their privacy.

So it seemed odd to Commander Rhonda Carter that her newly appointed superior officer considered this room, with about 40 people of various races attending a very quiet public performance, to be an admirable place for a word in private. Captain Skip Howard accomplished this by leaning over and whispering into Carter's ear during the rare moments of applause.

"I want you to take the next three days completely off, out of uniform, out of sight, out of mind, completely hidden from everyone. Relax. Enjoy civilian life. That's an order..."

When Carter tried to respond, Howard held up a finger to his lips, then pointed to the stage, where Maxwell and Gorman were beginning another song. This time both Maxwell and Gorman were singing, in Arabic. Both had beautiful voices.

And were exquisitely beautiful young men. Guz Maxwell, although from Idaho, was of Mexican extraction with dark skin and a brush of coal black hair. Phillip Gorman was about a decade older, in his late 20's and was a striking blend of west African and Arabic heritage. Both were rakishly handsome, slim and muscular, in the peak of physical training.

By custom, all communicators were set to silent operation, so there was no simultaneous translation of the lyrics. But Carter knew one Arabic word: "Habibi." "My Love." It was clearly a love song. She had started the song impatiently awaiting her chance to argue her case with Captain Howard. This was a critical time for the U.S.S. Escort. Her ship was being held together with baling wire and prayer beads.

But Carter found herself caught up in the song. It was clearly a love song. The two gorgeous men were singing it to each other. And they clearly meant every word of it. Rhonda Carter was unaccustomed to finding men erotic in any way, but the passion these two exceptionally fit, handsome and talented young men were expressing for each other had her unusually aroused.

She joined in the applause at the end of the song, wishing it had not ended. And Captain Howard took this moment to whisper in her ear. "I won't hear any argument on this, Rhonda. Both you and Escort are my responsibility and I need to get both of you fixed as soon as possible. You've just been through a month of hell, not to mention a first class dressing down by our commodore. It's time for you to let go of the wheel and let someone else drive for a little while."

He silenced her again with a finger to his lips as Maxwell and Gorman were introducing their final song. Only a few minutes into the song, Howard started in his seat as his communicator vibrated. He squeezed Carter's shoulder and mouthed, "Sorry, got to go," to her before getting up and leaving.

Carter seethed for only a minute before the soaring sound of Phillip Gorman's flute drew her out of herself. At the end of the concert, as the



other audience members were mingling in the hall, each waiting their turn to congratulate the arousing musicians, Carter slipped out of the lecture hall, intent on tracking down Captain Howard.

She didn't make it 10 meters.

A door opened and the most beautiful creature Commander Carter had ever seen stepped into the hall, causing her to stop in her tracks, uncomfortably close to the tall, unbelievably slinky trill who had stepped into her path. Yellow and brown leopard spotting stood out against her milk-white skin. An arrogant expression made her face only more alluring, framed by long, silky black hair that seemed to have a blue shine to it. Black leather skirt, leather bodice and thigh-high leather boots...

And by far the most captivating, eyes a color of hazel that she had never seen before.

Carter thought she was having a heart attack. It took a moment for her to realize she had simply forgotten to breathe. It only then struck her that she was looking at an ancient personality wrapped in a beautiful young body. This was a joined trill.

Akri Dexe slowly and elegantly extended her arm and twined Rhonda Carter's collar in her elegant, perfectly manicured fingers, gripping it firmly. She drew Carter closer to her with a jolt. Her voice was deep, strong, powerful: "Just where do you think you're going?"

"Into your quarters?"

Dexe fixed an aggressive glare onto her prey and backed into her quarters, her fingers still entwined in Carter's collar, drawing the small, blue-haired woman in with her.

"Apparently I owe you a serious and heart-felt apology..."

Captain Skip Howard had returned to his office, located ahead of the U.S.S. Beagle's bridge. Lieutenant Commander Gregg Clark was relaxing on one of two lounge chairs in front of Howard's desk. Instead of sitting behind the desk, Howard had thrown himself into the other chair.

"Honestly, Gregg, I didn't realize I was behaving badly toward you. Although in retrospect, I was clearly being more than a little..."

"Dismissive?" Clark suggested. "Snarky? Passive-aggressive?"

"All of the above," Howard admitted. "I reviewed the recording from the bridge when you took command of the Puppy. Guilty as charged."

"Just for the record, I never complained to anyone about it," said Clark.

"You should have," Howard rejoined. "And you didn't need to. Apparently the commodore regularly reviews fleet communications. I really don't know where it was coming from and I am sorry."

"Well, I wasn't very nice when I first boarded this ship more than a year ago. You might have heard about a few snide remarks I made about you at the time. I think I was a little, um, envious."

"Envious of me?" Howard asked.

"Who wouldn't be, Captain?" Clark asked.

"In this room you can call me Skip," Howard replied. "And what do you mean?"

In response, Gregg Clark reached over and tapped one of Skip Howard's glossy, black fingernails. "You are so much your own man. You don't give a flip about what anyone thinks about you. I turned down being promoted because I didn't want to be a soldier. I wanted to be what you are, an explorer. And while we both like bears, I'm 51 and alone, while you've managed to find the prettiest bear in the woods..."

Howard laughed. "You are a very smart man, Gregg. Smarter than most people think you are, and most people think you're smart. Salutatorian of your class at academy. I'm lucky to have you as a first officer, and, hopefully, as a friend." Without getting up, Howard extended a hand.

Gregg Clark shook his new captain's hand. "Your secret is safe with me, sir. But I do want to know something..."

"You already know the big secret," Howard observed. "I suppose I could let go of one of the smaller ones..."

"What have you done with Captain Cart... I mean Commander Carter?"

Skip Howard laughed again. "I fed her to one of the most ravenous carnivores in my little menagerie. Rhonda's been in command far too long. She's going to rediscover the joy that comes with submission. She's about to be rode hard and put up wet..."

It was Gregg Clark's turn to laugh. "Oh, that's a mental image I really didn't need..."



## SBA Episode 15, Scene 5: Temperance Rules

### Chapter Summary

...Lost social temperance rules above...



### The Star Beagle Adventures

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Scene 5: Temperance Rules

...Lost social temperance rules above...

### 15.5 Temperance Rules

“What is that?”

It had been nearly a year since Commodore Yui Song had donned an EVA suit. Considering how long she had been an astronaut, wearing a space suit should have been second nature. But she had only put it on often enough and long enough to keep her Extra Vehicular Activity certificate valid. Which was a requirement for her to serve in any role on a Star Fleet vessel or any spacebound installation.

Yui had joined Captain Skip Howard on the bridge of the U.S.S. Escort. She had at first been inclined to ask why Rhonda Carter was absent, but a cat-sized alien that looked like a cross between a stag and a tiger shrimp had captured her attention.

The small creature was standing on the helm station, managing to be at the same time, utterly alien and unbearably cute.

“That is The Runt, the most aptly named of Ensign John Sevork’s children,” Captain Ronald Howard, XIV replied. “She could not be transplanted and could not survive in open space, unlike her siblings. So it appears that the U.S.S. Escort is her home.”

“How do you figure that, Captain Howard?” Yui asked.

“She was born here,” Howard responded. “In her father’s home. It’s her birthright.”

“Then by that logic, all of John’s children have a claim to Escort,” Yui objected.

“The rest of them are free,” Howard countered. “They’ve moved out. Gotten their degrees. Landed the corner office. Taken out mortgages. But The Runt can’t leave. This is the only home she can survive in. And only if she’s cared for.”

Master Chief Bill Waller, sitting at the helm station, spoke up. “I’m taking care of her until my captain gets back.”

“You mean Commander Carter, Master Chief,” Yui corrected.

“She may be a commander now, but she’ll always be my captain,” Waller replied. “And I’m not the only one on this boat who thinks so... Sir.”

“Perhaps the only one to express that opinion so bluntly to a flag officer, though,” Howard chided.

“Where is Commander Carter, Captain Howard?” Commodore Yui asked.

“Out of uniform and under orders to avoid Star Fleet personnel for three days,” Howard replied.

Yui Song was shocked. “You’re isolating her? Do you think that’s appropriate?”

“You defrocked her, sir. I’m having her defenestrated.”

“In plain English, Captain...”

“I have a ship full of civilians,” Captain Howard observed. “Yesterday, today and tomorrow, Rhonda Carter is a civilian. She has been a soldier since she was 17. 35 years. Star Fleet has used her, celebrated her, relied on her, and for several years, ignored her and tried to pretend she never existed. Until they needed her to fight their wars for them again. They’ve been proud of her, afraid of her, embarrassed by her. As long as she is under my command, I’m going to care for her as if she were one of my own.”

Yui Song made an amused noise. Then: “Okay Captain, I didn’t put on this bulky space suit to stand on a non-functional bridge. Show me the damage.”

“Yes sir,” Howard agreed. “Let’s start with the attaching pylon for the port nacelle. Easily the worst damage on this ship. That structure is being held together with spot-welded crossbars and structural integrity generators.”

At the port bridge exit, Howard turned toward Bill Waller. “Please join us, Master Chief, and bring The Runt with you. It’s time to show part of her value to the commodore. Call someone to take your station and join us once you’re relieved.”

“Aye Captain,” Waller responded. He activated the communicator in his EVA suit. “Flight Specialist DeCoucy, please report to the helm.” He turned to see Flight Engineer Abra Kahen looking at him from the bridge engineering station.

“So what do you think of our new captain?” Kahen asked.

“I want to hate him,” Waller replied. “Rhonda Carter is the only captain of the Escort. Well, there was Kirk Freeman, who captained this boat for a little over a week before he was killed in battle. Rhonda’s been our captain ever since. But you heard the man.”

“He is a Howard, sir,” Kahen responded. “You know what they say... Star Fleet is the Howard family business. Four admirals and I don’t know how many captains over the centuries. All of them with a reputation for inspiring fierce loyalty.”

Bill Waller nodded. “Rhonda’s in trouble. She would never admit it, but I’ve never seen her doubting herself so much. She needs help. Help that I can’t give her.”

“Maybe a temporary demotion and some time in the care of a Howard will be just what she needs,” Kahen mused as a gangly, dark-skinned young Frenchman strolled onto the bridge.

The young man strode up to the helm station and stood at attention. “Master Chief,” he said.

Bill Waller stood up. “Take the helm, Gabriel. I need to join the commodore and our new captain on a damage survey.”

“Aye, Master Chief,” the young man replied, then settled at the helm and looked curiously at the cat-sized alien who was standing on the console.

Waller scooped the creature up and cradled her in his arms. “Come along, Runt. Got some nice, yummy mushroom bugs for you.”

The Runt vibrated her oddly paddle-shaped head, emitting a soft rumble not entirely unlike a cat’s purr.

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 6: His Outstretched Arm

### Chapter Summary

Then according to the man who showed his outstretched arm to space...



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 6: His Outstretched Arm

*Then according to the man who showed his outstretched arm to space...*

### 15.6

#### His Outstretched Arm

John, Jr. was pointing, his long, spindly arm outstretched toward the aft and slightly starboard. He had been traveling off the U.S.S. Mako's port stern, riding his own warp field at warp 3.5.

"What is he pointing at?" asked Lieutenant Commander Zizira Gross. The bolian was temporarily serving as first officer for the U.S.S. Mako. While Commander Jason Bates, whom she had officially relieved so that he could tend to the re-education and certification training for Commander Rhonda Carter and Captain Ronald Howard, XIV, seemed at first to be simply happy to take a vacation from his role as Commodore Yui Song's first officer, in actuality he was watching her very closely. And, no doubt, reporting his observations to the commodore.

Lieutenant Commander Senek, recently reassigned as the Mako's 2nd officer and science officer was also on the bridge, currently standing at the communications station. He looked mildly annoyed. "By your leave, Lieutenant Commander Gross?"

"By all means, Mr. Senek," Gross replied.

"Hailing frequency open, communication established," Senek reported.

Gross looked back at the vulcan 2nd officer in surprise, then turned her attention to the screen, which was now dominated by the large and oddly misshapen head of John, Jr., purple mohawk and all. The formula felt odd to her in this circumstance, but it made more sense than anything else she could think of to say. "John Jr., this is the U.S.S. Mako, Zizira Gross commanding."

"Go ahead, Mako," John Jr. responded, his rich west Texas accent filling the bridge with the sound of a region of a planet the strange alien had never been within a thousand lightyears of.

It took a moment for Gross to process that John Jr. had somehow learned both the response formula, the accent, and the language itself from the father he had never met. "John Jr., what are you pointing at?"

"The anointed. They have turned around and are now in pursuit of us," John Jr. drawled.

"The U.S.S. Beagle has a probe in the area and is sharing telemetry now," Lt. Cmdr. Senek reported. "I can confirm John Jr.'s observation."

"How did you know?" Gross asked

"I can hear their song in my mind. Or, to be more precise, I can hear their song through my legs," the mushroom-riding space shrimp replied.

It was about 20 minutes later that the conference was held in the U.S.S. Mako's conference center, which was significantly larger than the more familiar setting of the U.S.S. Beagle's conference room, if nowhere near as lavish. The large conference table was simple and largely made of high quality plastic, as opposed to the antique hardwood table in the Beagle's conference room.

The chairs, on the other hand, while nowhere near as ornate, were far more comfortable. Instead of the vulcan-made chairs on the Beagle (which were designed exclusively for vulcans), the bolian-made chairs in Mako's conference center were light, tough, easily anchored to the floor and designed to be easily adjusted to provide a comfortable, well-designed seat for more than 200 different species. Which was why these chairs had become standard-issue for Star Fleet vessels and installations. Which was, in turn, why the bolians had expanded their manufacturing to include a new factory in Bugrino on Kolguyev Island in the far north of Russia.

"Assuming we continue to travel at warp 3.5, and that they can maintain warp 7.2, the closest of the holy landers should catch up to us in just under 19 days." Lieutenant Commander Senek was providing the analysis. Which was exceptionally distracting to the Mako's female crew members.

"There is no way we can protect the godchildren at this rate," Commodore Yui Song grouched. "And we just received confirmation that the holy landers have destroyed our beacon at the in-door to the Jar Galaxy."

"We have been in emergency response mode since Escort returned from the Jar Galaxy. We have really been in need of a better plan," opined Captain Skip Howard. "So I asked my new science officer to come up with one... Lieutenant Commander Clark?"

Greg Clark took a deep breath. "We cannot tow Rhonda's godchildren. But we could create a scow for them and tow that. But we need material to build one from. And there is nothing close. Theoretically, with just a small reduction in mass, the Beagle, with the Puppy onboard, could tow Escort at warp 7.5, which would allow Beagle to reach the Al Salemais star system in just under 26 days."

"Even with enhanced structural integrity from the repurposed artificial gravity generators, Escort would fall apart under that kind of stress," Commander Rhonda Carter objected.

"Yes," Skip Howard agreed. "Trying to keep Escort in one piece seriously limits our speed..."

"So let's stop trying," Greg Clark concluded. "We need something to build a sled out of for John's children and the nacelles are about to fall off Escort. So let's take the nacelles off, repurpose them to serve as a sled. Beagle can then tow the remainder of Escort to Al Salemais, taking 26 days. Given the much smaller mass, once the godchildren are firmly embedded in the nacelles and taking their physiology into account, the Mako, with both the Arizona and the Bluebird docked in its shuttlebay, could tow them at warp 8.6, which would have Mako arriving at Al Salemais in just over 17 days."

"Assuming the holy landers are determined to interact with us, and that they can maintain warp 7.2, they would not arrive at Al Salemais for at least 47 days," Skip Howard observed.

"There is no way that Escort could be made space worthy in," Lieutenant Ki Kresid, Escort's director of engineering paused for a math break. "Um, 21 days. Much less battle ready."

"So instead of trying to put Escort back together, we continue to take her apart," said Greg Clark. "And use the pieces, along with native materials, to construct fortress Escort."

"With General Krank riding with Mako, he could survey the system to identify the best defensive position for both John's children and for fortress Escort," Skip Howard continued.

During this discussion, Rhonda Carter turned bright pink. "I will not have my ship taken apart and turned into a..."

"It's my ship, Commander Carter," Captain Howard interrupted quietly.

Carter turned toward him in almost a blind fury, but something about the look in his eyes got through to her. She took a deep breath, then: "I apologize, Captain. It's just..."

"I understand, Commander," Howard said. "Believe me, I would feel very much the same way in your place. I don't like the idea of disassembling a starship and turning it into, not even a space station but a defensive installation. I am under orders to make Escort fly again, but after reviewing all of the damage, I think once we do, we should rename it the U.S.S. Grandfather's Axe."

Carter was far from the only person confused by Howard.

"Your riddles aren't always party favorites, Captain Howard," Yui Song warned. "Please explain yourself."

In response, Captain Skip Howard hefted an imaginary axe. "This is my grandfather's axe. It has two pieces, the blade and the handle. After grandpa passed, dad replaced the handle. And I just replaced the blade."

Commander Dutch Holland spoke up, his unique luchadore uniform causing Commodore Yui to reflect again on what a strange menagerie Captain Howard maintained on his ship. "To put it in plain English," Holland started, the phrase sounding a little strange in his thick Mexican accent. "By the time we get finished rebuilding Escort, pretty much every part of that ship will have been recycled and rebuilt using the industrial replicators. Until the only part left will be those replicators. And those replicators were not original on that ship. There will be nothing left of the original Escort. Only the idea of Escort will remain. It will essentially be a new ship."

"Can we actually accomplish that out here?" Carter asked.

“Not really,” Commodore Yui replied. “But I may have some very interesting and good news on that front. In a few days. I won’t announce it until I have confirmation.”

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 7: All the Human Race

### Chapter Summary

He turned around and pointed, revealing all the human race...



#### The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 7: All the Human Race

*He turned around and pointed, revealing all the human race...*

15.7

#### All the Human Race

Commodore Yui Song concluded the meeting with: “Enact step one immediately. Captain Howard, get those nacelles off the Escort and build your sled. Commander Carter, you’re very probably the best person to explain the plan to your godchildren, obtain their input and let everyone know about any potential issues. The rest of you are excused. General, Captain, Commander Carter, please remain.”

It took a few minutes for about 20 other people, most of them civilian experts who were resident on the U.S.S. Beagle, to exit the U.S.S. Mako’s conference center. As large as the conference table was, it was rather lost in the middle of a very large room that took up a large part of deck 3.

“Rhonda, I know you feel an obligation toward your godchildren. And according to PeI, that might very well be by their mother’s design.” Commodore Yui settled at the table and gestured to Carter, Howard and Krank to have a seat. “But once we get them to the AI Salemais system, do you not feel that your obligation will have been fulfilled? Ronald’s plan seems to really involve hunkering the task force into that system for the long term.” She gestured toward all three of them. “Convince me that this is the best option.”

“You’re talking to the wrong recently demoted captain, sir,” Rhonda Carter replied. “I hate every part of this plan.” She raised her hands in a frustrated gesture. “Okay, taking the nacelles off and using them as sleds is brilliant. It’s the only way to keep both John’s children and Escort’s technology out of the hands of the holy landers. But bedding down in that system... And we would be bedding hard. Once Escort is sufficiently dismantled to make for any workable defensive installation, we are stuck until help arrives. And we don’t know when that will be.”

Carter looked at Captain Skip Howard. “By all means, speak your mind, Rhonda,” Howard said.

“It’s always better to maintain mobility. An aggressive stance gives you the option to run away. But if Escort is in pieces, we can’t run away. The last thing we want is for the holy landers to get their hands on Federation technology. They have been aboard Escort. They know its value.”

“She has a point, Ronald,” Yui observed.

“I would like to hear General Krank’s assessment,” said Howard.

Yui Song gestured toward the elderly klingon general.

“Tactically, Commander Carter is correct,” Krank opined. “She is a fighter after my own heart. The klingon way is to take an aggressive stance and to attack first when conflict appears imminent. Captain Howard appears to be thinking more strategically. I believe he is hoping that a strong enough strategic position, coupled with the holy landers’ evident respect for the capabilities of the, as Rhonda named the species, leprethrooms, could be sufficient to convince these holy landers to attempt to negotiate. A very Federation strategy.”



“And the flaw in that strategy?” Yui asked.

“We do not know enough about the holy landers or the depth of their enmity with the leprethrooms,” Krank continued. “While the holy landers are a formidable force, we have never seen them engaged in serious hostilities. With the exception of the odd battle we observed in the, um, as Rhonda named it, the Valentine system.”

General Krank paused to clear his throat and take a drink of something dark and strong smelling. “We saw them fire warning shots from their ships at pursuing leprethrooms, but the only pitched battle we observed did not involve any guns, knives or hand-to-hand combat.”

Rhonda Carter nodded. “They were singing at... some big dark thing in the sky.”

“We could not tell whether it was in earnest, or if it was some sort of ritual,” Krank opined.

“I reviewed the reports in detail,” said Skip Howard. “And also interviewed our resident experts on all things holy lander, the various personalities of the purple known variously as Shadow, Sheeux Vosq Nala, and Ben Urri Urri. Their ships are bristling with weapons, but no one in her culture has ever observed them using any weapons. Only singing.”

“You think they specialize in ritual combat?” Yui song asked. “What does that mean?”

“They have an immensely complex and ritualistic culture, and they greatly value demonstrations of strength,” Captain Howard observed. “And they have demonstrated a preference for non-violent forms of combat. I have a team of cultural experts going over every detail and continuing to interview Shadow and combing through the vast catalogue of the writings of Ben Urri Urri...”

Commodore Yui was barely holding her impatience in check. “Sum this up for us, Ronald.”

Captain Ronald Howard, XIV smiled. “A show of strength and a ritual welcome, combined with protection against their singing and we might be able to do better than avoid battle. We might be able to negotiate, if not an alliance, possibly a peace treaty?”

“And that is the Federation way of doing things,” General Krank concluded.

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 8: Smiled Whisper

### Chapter Summary

I shook my head and smiled a whisper, knowing all about the place...



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 8: Smiled Whisper

*I shook my head and smiled a whisper, knowing all about the place...*

15.8

#### Smiled Whisper

John Jr. was the oldest (by a few seconds), and the largest (both in mass and height) of Ensign John Sevork's children by Stephanie, the space shrimp, and Rocky, the rock-encrusted, spacefaring mushroom. His siblings looked to him for leadership.

Once the nacelles had been removed from the U.S.S. Escort, John Jr. arranged his siblings, spacing them out along the two nacelles to distribute and balance their mass - 5 of them on one nacelle, 6 on the other.

Each of the siblings was embedded in its own rock-thorn, with as few as one or as many as 6 legs projecting through the rocky table-top, down into a portion of the mushroom that had been Rocky, whose living tissue had been divided to provide housing and nutrients for each of the siblings.

They had been traveling under their own power at warp 3.5, but could not move much faster than that. And it was doubtful they could have travelled even at that speed all the way to the Al Salemais system.

The bottom tip of each rock-encrusted mushroom was the transition point between its expression in relative spacetime and subspace. Exactly how a mushroom was capable of producing a warp field was still a mystery, even though all of the scientists of the task force had been carefully studying every reading that they could take of these odd creatures.

It did not work on the same principle as warp engine to nacelles. Instead, the mushroom appeared to exist in relative space and subspace simultaneously. The warp field was generated by the subspace expression of these creatures that Rhonda Carter had dubbed lepreshrooms (by eliding the words "leprechaun" and "mushroom.")

No one had come up with a name for whatever John Sevork's children were. Their mother had been referred to as a "space shrimp." Their father was a hybrid of vulcan and human. And they also carried DNA from the lepreshroom in which they had been born. Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison had referred to them as "vulcan-human-mushroom-shrimp babies." They were most commonly referred to now as "Rhonda's godchildren" or simply "the godchildren."

In appearance they were so radically different from one another that they hardly seemed to admit of being characterized as a species. Some of them looked disturbingly humanoid. Others had ribbon-like bodies, or appeared to be rock formations.

No two were alike, and yet their presence sitting atop their individual land-thorns with only a bubble of atmosphere between them and the cold of interstellar space marked their similarity. A bubble of atmosphere generated and projected by the mushroom living inside the thorn-shaped rock that each of John Sevork's children were riding atop.

Commodore Yui Song, Captain Skip Howard, Commanders Rhonda Carter and Jason Bates, and Lieutenant Commanders Gregg Clark and Zizira Gross were watching from the U.S.S. Mako's caudal lounge, the rear-most room in the Mako's secondary engineering hull. The caudal lounge's windows were the rearward surface of the ship, further back than even the aft end of the nacelles.

Pel and Shadow were also present, watching as each of the strange, mushroom riding orphans intersected the point of their individual land-thorns with one of the U.S.S. Escort's liberated nacelles. As the point of each thorn intersected the surface of a nacelle, the rock and mushroom partly phased into subspace, allowing them to become first mingled with, then firmly anchored into the nacelle.

This was a difficult process for Rhonda Carter to watch, so Commodore Yui felt rum would be in order. She had initially planned to use baijiu, until some research found that the powerful Chinese drink would be poison for the bolian, ferengi and probably the purple as well. Most uninitiated humans would also consider the drink probably poisonous given how close its pungent aroma was to that of pure rocket fuel.

Rhonda Carter was, understandably, nearly in tears given the tremendous damage the nacelles were taking. This damage alone guaranteed that the rebuild of Escort would be a process of several months as the nacelles would have to be largely rebuilt from scratch.

“Here, get this down you,” Skip Howard said, handing a glass of rum to Carter.

Carter knocked back the rum with a single swallow and handed the glass back to him.

Captain Howard and Commodore Yui exchanged glances. Yui shook her head. “Keep them coming, Captain.”

In response, Pel handed one of the bottles of rum to Captain Howard. He looked at the glass, then looked at the bottle. Howard raised his eyebrows, set the glass aside, uncorked the bottle and handed it to Rhonda Carter, who drank from it without hesitation.

“Considering we are about to divide the task force, I was thinking about sending Commander Bates with you, along with Commander Carter,” Yui said.

“With respect, I think we have overriding priorities, Commodore,” Howard opined. “I would recommend Commander Carter work with General Krank to identify the best defensive installation. Krank is as qualified as any military adviser, but fortresses are not his forte and Rhonda has a talent for identifying vulnerabilities. You’re going to need her to keep shooting down every Krank plan until you can identify the best defensive option.”

Yui Song sighed heavily. “I suppose there will be plenty of time to complete your joint re-education once we’re bedded down in the Al Salemais system.”

“Either that or no time,” Howard replied. “I also want to swap out Lieutenant Commander Clark for Lieutenant Commander Gross.”

Commodore Yui’s reaction to this suggestion was strong enough to elicit additional response from Gregg Clark, who had been hovering at the edge of this conversation.

“We talked this move over and Captain Howard is right,” Clark said. “He needs Gross to help his science teams develop a defense against the song of the holy lander. And I have been working with Lieutenant Ki Kresid on ways to weaponize as many of Escort’s normal operational systems as possible, since they won’t be required to support normal ship functions. General Krank and Commander Carter need that information for their planning.”

“Why not send Lieutenant Kresid?” Yui Song asked.

“She will be busy holding Escort together until it gets to Al Salemais and at the same time, preparing it to be dismantled and repurposed once the Beagle gets it there,” Clark replied.

“Meanwhile, Zizira Gross was the only member of Escort’s crew who could actually hear the words of the holy lander whose song had that crew enthralled,” Howard added. “She has agreed to allow the more talented among the vulcans on my ship to engage in extended mind melds with her and pick her memory clean. It appears those ultra low-frequency songs have lyrics and while we can’t hear them, the universal translator can. And, apparently, at its default setting, the UT was translating those lyrics and reproducing the translation at the same, sub-sonic frequency. Which, apparently only a bolian could hear...”

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 9: Silence of the Valley

### Chapter Summary

On the hill we viewed the silence of the valley...



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 9: Silence of the Valley

*On the hill we viewed the silence of the valley...*

15.9

#### Silence of the Valley

“While you were talking with the frost giants aboard their space station and Commodore Yui and her first contact team were getting a tour of the purple station, Captain Carter and her team were aboard the blue space station getting their brains warped by a holy lander who was on that station.”

Lieutenant Commander Zizira Gross was holding forth in the U.S.S. Beagle’s conference room, explaining to a large team of scientists just how the holy landers had taken control of the U.S.S. Escort nearly a month ago, kicking off a chain of events that led to the Escort’s misadventures in the Jar Galaxy, which had, in turn, resulted in the death of Ensign John Sevork and the birth of his 12 children by a creature from another galaxy. A creature currently referred to as a “giant space shrimp.”

The interdisciplinary team included the Tellerite Biological Survey, the United Federation of Planets Expeditionary Diplomatic Corps, archeologists Fish Head and Arizona Kind, the trill oceanographer Akri Dextt, and the signals unit from the 1st of the 1st of the 54th, an elite reconnaissance and signals detail from the United States Marine Corps, known as the Space Hounds, their brown and grey camouflage uniforms featuring a beagle shoulder patch. Also joining this group were the U.S.S. Beagle’s Dean of Ship, Sakura Nakamura Holland, the task force’s new executive consultant, Pel and the purple known as Shadow.

It was Shadow who spoke up in surprise. “The blue worship the holy landers? What about the purple?”

“We were just as surprised as you are,” Lt. Cmdr. Gross replied. “We had been reading the screeds of Ben Urri Urri, um, your writings...” Gross paused in mild confusion, then pressed on. “So we were expecting to find the purple worshipping the holy landers and the blue to be extremely skeptical of them. What we found was the reverse.”

“According to our research, your people are divided, purple and blue, at every system you have colonized. Separate, but not equal,” opined Erok Gruex, the assistant director of the UFP Expeditionary Diplomatic Delegation. “The holy landers take advantage of the first population to fall prey to their song and, perhaps just out of spite, the other color is immediately skeptical. And thanks to your work,” the vrish diplomat angled the feathers along his arm toward the small purple at the table, “they quickly discover their suspicions are well justified.”

Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland picked up the thread. “So, apparently, this strange separation of your species into two populations has given both of your populations something they can rely on for resilience and resistance against holy lander domination: Each other.”

“How long can this division continue until genetic drift takes over and the purple and the blue speciate?” asked Lt. Cmdr. Gross.

“For two distinct populations, there is a lot of mingling according to the genetic signatures we’ve been able to access,” Drisk javWalrish advised. The enormous tellerite gestured toward Shadow. “Some of you furry beasts have been coloring outside the lines...”

“There are always a small number of purples born among the blues,” said Shadow. “Blues born among the purples. And a fair number of people in between who aren’t really purple or blue. They find their place. Black markets. Smuggling. Negotiating peace treaties. Other even less reputable activities.”

“I think we’ve lost the thread,” came the dry, but sultry voice of the trill oceanographer, Akri Dexe. “Our purpose is to come up with a defense against the song of the holy warriors. So please, how did they take control of Escort?”

“Right,” said Lt. Cmdr. Gross. “From the top…” The bolian officer took a deep breath. “When Captain Howard was on the frost giant space station and Commodore Yui was on the purple space station, Captain Carter, Lieutenant Singletery, Warrant Officer Harrison and a few others were on the blue space station, where they encountered a number of holy warriors. They weren’t even aware that they were singing and experimenting with the frequencies they needed to control humans. Once they had humanity dialed in, one of them boarded Escort with Captain Carter and ordered us to land Escort near their compound, where we picked up another.”

“One of them was a warrior. The other was an engineering specialist. Apparently the frequencies that worked on the humans and the vulcan/human hybrids worked even better on me.” The bolian officer paused to squeeze the back of her neck, a sign of agitation among bolians. “Their song was painful for our engineering director, Lieutenant Kresid, and completely incapacitating for Lieutenant Commander zh’Kathar. Some of our crew members recall that the holy warriors helped Kresid and zh’Kathar into the escape pod. It seems they didn’t want to hurt them, just get them off the ship. Their entire purpose was to use us to help them get safely to the surface of a planet in the Jar Galaxy so they could, as Rhonda put it, sing at some big scary dark thing in the sky…”

“I have examined the frequencies of the songs of the holy warriors from Escort’s security recordings,” said Akri Dexe. “Their song is not entirely unrelated to whale song. It can be propagated through any fluid medium, whether liquid, gaseous, or even solids such as deck plating or soil. And there is evidence the holy warriors adjust their singing based not only on the species they want to control, but also on the available media for promulgation. They sing differently on land than they do on a ship.”

“I was wondering what an oceanographer would have to contribute to this discussion,” Major Janet Carter mused.

“On Trillus Prime there is a carnivore you might call a sirefish. Divers who do not take adequate precautions quickly become prey. They live in salt-water marshes and can adjust their song either for deep ocean prey or to draw animals from the shoreline into the water. Trill fishers learned how to turn these predators into prey by using water drums to counter their frequencies. The drums could be used to drive the sirens off, attract them for easy harvesting or simply incapacitate them based on the type of drum and the way it is played.”

“So are you suggesting we start up a drum circle?” asked Sergeant Tommy Richards.

“Our communicator pins should be able to produce the frequencies needed and store a number of different programs that can render the holy warrior’s songs ineffective, confuse them, and, at need, possibly even incapacitate them,” Dexe replied. A rather predatory smile crept across her features. “I think we might be able to give them a taste of their own medicine…”

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 10: Cycles of the Past

### Chapter Summary

Called to witness cycles only of the past...



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 10: Cycles of the Past

*Called to witness cycles only of the past...*

15.10

#### Cycles of the Past

“John, Jr., Steve, Steph, Jr., Sevrock, Rohn, Key, Jephah, K’Lon, Rock, Ork, and Rider...”

Commodore Yui Song was in the caudal lounge with her current first and second officers, Lieutenant Commander Gregg Clark and Lieutenant Commander Senek. Clark was stealing side-long glances at the gorgeous vulcan, who appeared somewhat more mournful and annoyed than usual, if that was possible.

While she could understand it, the vulcan’s beauty and sex-appeal seemed quite impactful among not only her human and vulcan crew members, but also with bolians, who were generally not attracted to anyone who wasn’t blue. And they weren’t particularly impressed with hair. Or faces that didn’t have bifurcating ridges.

She hated to admit it, but Yui Song was increasingly of the opinion that moving this walking aphrodisiac to her ship was probably a bad idea. The spike in pheromone production and the increased sexual activity among her crew were annoying enough. But it was all the giggling that was driving her crazy. It was in this moment Yui suddenly understood the annoyed vulcan.

The unbearable weight of all that attention would be enough to drive most people mad.

“And Commander Rhonda Carter,” Senek observed.

Yui Song was shaken out of her reverie. She looked out the back windows again at John Sevork’s odd, mushroom-shrimp children. riding embedded in the U.S.S. Escort’s detached nacelles, themselves enveloped in a tractor beam. And, using an EVA suit equipped with gravity boots, Rhonda Carter was walking among them, taking time to talk to each one.

“I’m reasonably certain no one has ever tractor surfed a pair of nacelle skis,” Gregg Clark quipped.

“No one ever accused Rhonda Carter of cowardice,” Senek observed. He turned toward Commodore Yui. “Captain Howard knows why you demoted her. You did it to protect her.”

“Is that what he told you?” Yui asked.

“He didn’t need to. I figured it out. I have known him long enough to know if I deduce something, he has already done so. Particularly when it comes to Star Fleet politics.”

“Star Fleet politics is the Howard family business,” Gregg Clark observed. “But do you care to share with the class? I hadn’t figured this one as a protective move for Carter.”

Senek turned his large, deep green, mournful eyes on his first officer. “I read the order. The commodore buried the important information in

the middle of several paragraphs of blistering criticisms and harsh rebukes. You have to read carefully as the different words are scattered across various paragraphs throughout the memorandum: It is a brevet reduction in rank for administrative purposes.”

“Ah...” Clark prevaricated.

“You should know this one, Gregg,” Yui chided. “Meaning that if I determine her rank is to be restored, because her reduction in rank is brevet and for administrative purposes, it will not require Commandant Star Fleet to approve my decision as it would not be a promotion. Her promotion to captain has already been approved.”

“Wouldn’t restoring her rank increase the chances of a court martial?” Clark asked.

“There will be no court martial,” Senek opined.

“It would re-open her first court martial,” Yui agreed. “Political dynamite. All of those nasty secrets that the V’Shar, the vulcan intelligence agency, was so desperate to bury... All those skeletons would be out of the closet and dancing in the sunlight. My inquest will be sufficient and my ruling on this matter will stand. Star Fleet needs a Captain Rhonda Carter. But I need her to be a real Star Fleet captain. Not just a glorified gunboat commander.”

“So how do we get her there?” asked Clark.

“We cannot,” Senek responded. “She has to get there on her own. Because she wants to.”

Commodore Yui gestured to the space-suited Carter, confidently hopping from one towed nacelle to the other, as if these weren’t being towed at greater than warp 8. Just to make sure she spent at least a half hour with each of the strange children of John Sevorok.

“She wants it,” Yui observed. “That is an entirely new Rhonda Carter out there. She just turned 51 and she is completely reinventing herself. She has been spending more time out there on those nacelles than inside this ship. Getting to know her new godchildren. At the end of the day, that’s what being a Star Fleet captain is all about. Caring. For all of life. In all of its bizarre diversity.”

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 11: The Said Remark

### Chapter Summary

And we reach all this with movements

In between the said remark...



### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 11: The Said Remark

*And we reach all this with movements*

*In between the said remark...*

15.11

### The Said Remark

Commander Rhonda Carter stood up very slowly, then walked over to Rohn. She had been talking to Steph, Jr. There was a simple caste system among the dozen children of John Sevork. John, Jr. was oldest by a few seconds and the most massive by a few kilograms. Steph, Jr. was next, then Jephah, then Rohn. Age, size, and rank corresponded for each of these odd creatures.

She had bonded first to John, Jr. and The Runt. John, Jr. because, for all his strangeness, he had oddly humanoid features and his use of the English language mirrored his father's. The Runt because she was simply devastatingly cute.

Rhonda had quickly learned that she needed to follow the caste system if she wanted to be accepted in this odd society. Her adoption of The Runt was not problematic for a few reasons: The Runt held a special place in the hearts of her siblings. And she wasn't here right now. She was several lightyears away aboard the remainder of the U.S.S. Escort, currently being towed by the U.S.S. Beagle.

So every day, Carter would don her Extra Vehicular Activity suit, step out of the rear airlock, re-establish a cable link that was anchored on one end to the rear of the U.S.S. Mako and on the other to what was left of the port nacelle of the U.S.S. Escort, currently being towed via a tractor beam, and she would connect her EVA suit to the cable and zip-line over to the severely damaged, severed nacelles. First to talk to John, Jr., who was anchored in the anchor position on the port nacelle, then Steph, Jr., who was similarly anchored on the starboard nacelle.

And every day, Rhonda Carter made a point of speaking to each of her godchildren, but made additional time to get to know one of them. Today that one was Rohn.

Rohn was shaped more than a little like a terrestrial stag. He stood on four legs, but, unlike his older sister, had no arms. His paddle-shaped head was somewhat smaller than Steph, Jr.'s, but unlike hers, had no prehensile feelers. While he was capable of audible speech, Rhonda had no idea how he produced that sound.

"You can breathe my atmosphere," Rohn said in a deep, rich voice. "Take off your suit and climb onto my back."

Carter didn't hesitate to remove her helmet. She took a deep breath of the atmosphere maintained above the tabletop. It was identical to the composition of atmosphere that was standard in all Star Fleet vessels. She tethered her helmet to the suit and stepped out of her gravity boots, which were firmly attached to the rock atop which Rohn rode. As she stepped out of the suit, she fastened it to the boots, then put her hand on Rohn's back.

"I have ridden horses, large animals on my homeworld," Carter said.

"You needn't worry about me carrying you. We are weightless," Rohn responded.



In response, Carter very gently touched off and angled herself into a sitting position, pulling herself down onto the odd creature's back.

"I could throw you out of this warp field," Rohn observed, calmly.

"You could," Carter agreed.

"You knew that, but you didn't hesitate to shed your space suit and jump on my back?"

"I don't really do hesitation. Either I do something, or I don't."

"Is that how you felt when you killed my mother and father?" asked Rohn.

"Yes," Carter replied. "In that moment I was convinced that killing her was absolutely necessary to protect my crew."

The strange animal flexed beneath her. Rohn was somewhere between the size of a large dog and a small donkey. "And you never doubted your decision?"

"When Rocky took control of my ship and then intersected and became part of it, I felt I had underestimated how dangerous that wounded mushroom might be on its own. I had not decided to destroy it too," Carter mused. "But if I had, I would have killed all of you. And we might never have found our way back to the Milky Way." Carter sighed heavily. "I had no way of knowing any of that. I just saw no reason to kill a wounded creature that did not present a threat to me and mine, even though our nacelles were offline and we couldn't leave. That lapse in judgement cost six lives."

"So letting us live to be born was a mistake?"

"Probably," Carter answered. "A very lucky mistake."

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 12: Over and Done

### Chapter Summary

Now that it's all over and done...



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 12: Over and Done

*Now that it's all over and done...*

### 15.12 Over and Done

“Somone has been really busy. A whole lot of someones.”

Captain Phillip Phlox stood at the railing overlooking a shuttered promenade. The doors were welded over with a secondary wall. Everything was walled off. Even with all the work that had been done over the past five months, it was still clear that this antique cardassian monstrosity was in terrible shape.

Holes had been melted through the flooring and broken struts had been strapped into place. The work would continue during the several months ahead as this station was transported thousands of light years to its new destination.

His station.

At 212 years old, Phlox was the oldest captain in Star Fleet. Even though he was half human, he seemed to have inherited the longevity from his father's species. He had been in and out of Star Fleet, traveled all over the Alpha Quadrant, served as an ambassador and a few terms on the Federation Council. He had taught at Star Fleet Academy and as a visiting professor at most of the prestigious universities on Earth, Denobula and at the Vulcan Science Academy. He had been recruited back into Star Fleet specifically for this assignment.

Vice Admiral Ho Lan Thao was standing next to, and entirely dwarfed by the half-denobulan captain. The small, Vietnamese woman would be dwarfed by most people, but with her perfect figure and age-defying beauty, she was visibly a presence to be reckoned with.

“It will take well over a year to move all of this to Priority Alpha Defense 13,” Vice Admiral Ho observed.

Phlox smiled just a little too broadly. “Some of my human ancestors considered 13 to be an unlucky number. As much time as it will take to move the pieces of this station into location, it will take equally long to repair all this damage and bring each section online. This is a massive effort. Where is the labor force going to come from?”

“That's right,” Ho replied. “You've been buried in reactivation orientation and training.”

“There is a lot of catch up and relearning for me to do,” Phlox agreed. “The last time I wore a Star Fleet uniform was more than 100 years ago. Some of the protocols have changed since then. The uniform has changed dozens of times... I haven't had a chance to review the logistics for this project.”

“The new uniform suits you,” Ho said with a smile. “The last time I saw you, your fashion choices seemed more than a little dated...” She took a breath, then: “We're starting with cardassian and bajoran contractors who will, during the first leg of the journey conduct repairs to each section. Primarily big, structural items and major mechanical. Bajorans will handle most of the structure while the cardassians will be focused on the power plant. Under supervision of Star Fleet and the Avradaga Satellite Defense Research Institute.”

Ho gestured to a number of bajorans below who were already working on patching some of the gaping holes in the deck plating. “We're not keeping the bajorans and cardassians apart, but their interaction is fairly carefully structured. Those crews will be phased out over the next

month as the station sections pass into Andorian space. We will pick up andorian and bolian crews to take over the next phase of the project. The bolians will stay on as a permanent crew, but ASDRI's role will be phased out in favor of the Daystrom Institute and Nakamura Enterprises as the station moves past the far reaches of UEG territory.”

“And for the final leg of the journey?” Phlox asked.

“We're going to rely fairly heavily on the bolian workforce, but we hope to supplement it with locals recruited by our advance team,” Ho replied. “And by advance team, apparently, our hopes are pinned on a single renegade ferengi female who has become associated with the Beagle Task Force to recruit from a variety of people they have had contact with, first from a confederation known as the Oulhedrey, then from people known as, variously, the purple, the blue, and the frost giants.” Ho smiled.

Captain Phlox raised his eyebrows. His cheeks puffed out oddly as he expelled a long, slow breath. “This is a massive project to pin on a single renegade female ferengi.”

“This entire project hinges on ferengi contractors.” Vice Admiral Ho stretched, then shook her head slowly “The whole project was sold to your friend by a Damon Trock. He bought the salvage rights to all this stuff from, variously, the cardassians and the romulans, designed the entire project and sold it to a consortium of private citizens within the Federation. Who have donated it to the defense of the Alpha Quadrant.”

Ho put her hand on Phlox's arm. “But before you can take command of this station, I have a priority resupply mission for you. You're going to get to meet Pel, that ferengi we're pinning our hopes on. And believe me, you're going to find that however strange you think this mission is, it is so very much stranger.”

Phlox made an amused noise. “Okay, I will take your word for it, Admiral. Who is going to look after this project while I'm running this resupply mission?”

“I will plant my flag here for the next three months,” Ho replied. “You will take my flagship, the USS Citadel, to resupply the Beagle Task Force. I wish I could send some destroyers with you, but the only ship I have available is an old Miranda class ship, the U.S.S. Ulysses. They will rendezvous with you near the Al El system in about 4 months.”

“There will be three different captains in charge of this operation over the next 9 months, the last of them being Captain Jim Vanzant,” Vice Admiral Ho Lan Thao continued. “You will rendezvous with him after you have resupplied the task force and send Citadel back to me under his command. The Ulysses and its crew will be permanently assigned to you, and your command will fall under the general command of Commodore Yui Song. But you're largely going to be on your own. She will remain on exploration duty in the general region, which means she may be, at any time, months away from you at best speed...”

Captain Phillip Phlox took a deep breath. “Thirteen months just to get into position. Another at least two months to finish setting up the station, assuming we can access local supplies and labor...”

Vice Admiral Ho smiled up at Phlox and gently squeezed his arm. “And then the real work begins...”

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 13: Called to the Seed

### Chapter Summary

Called to the seed, right to the sun...



#### The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 13: Called to the Seed

*Called to the seed, right to the sun...*

15.13

#### Called to the Seed

Although the U.S.S. Mako, which was towing the nacelles of the U.S.S. Escort and carrying the U.S.S. Arizona and the U.S.S. Bluebird within its primary shuttlebay, was separated by a growing gulf of lightyears from the following U.S.S. Beagle, which was towing the bulk of the U.S.S. Escort and carrying the U.S.S. Puppy in its shuttlebay, the personnel aboard were able to confer in more or less real time via subspace radio. The delay of less than a second went almost unnoticed.

Both ships were still some distance from the Al Salemais star system, but probes from both ships were coursing through the trinary system, cataloguing the planets orbiting each star. Two G-type yellow stars orbited each other at a great distance, completing a single orbit in just under 829 Earth years. A red dwarf, designated as Al Salemais C (ASC for short) orbited one of these larger stars (ASB) at roughly the same distance that Saturn orbits Sol.

Two planets orbited the red dwarf, with a dense asteroid ring orbiting slightly further out. Four other planets orbited ASB within the orbit of the red dwarf and a dense asteroid ring separated ASC from ASB and its planets. ASA had 7 planets, with 2 gas giants outside of a less dense asteroid ring and 5 rocky planets inside, including 3 M-class planets in the "Goldilocks Zone."

The conference was taking place in the U.S.S. Beagle's conference room and the U.S.S. Mako's holodeck. Using a newly developed function of the Beagle's unique holotransporter, an extension of the Beagle's conference table was projected, at which projections of the conference participants from the Mako were seated. This effect was mirrored in the Mako's holodeck, so that, apparently, all of the participants were in a shared space with Captain Howard and Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland at one end of the doubled conference table and Commodore Yui Song at the other.

The entire program had been designed by Pel, demonstrating that, to someone immersed in the vagaries of the ferengi economic system, the relatively arcane mathematics of holography were child's play. Holographic systems required sufficient extensive use of imaginary numbers to cause most electrical systems engineers to quail, but even this aspect of holomath was dramatically outmatched by the basics of ferengi accounting, which had elevated the use of imaginary numbers to an art form surpassing the miraculous.

"You might think that the climates of ASA 2, 3, & 4, based on their distance from the ASA star, would be hothouse, temperate, and icebox in that order. But that isn't the way planetary climates work." The denobulan planetologist, Cetris Rye, was holding forth. "ASA 2, the closest of the three habitable worlds to the ASA star, is currently undergoing an ice age, while both ASA 3 and ASA 4 are supporting what we would consider temperate climates with ASA 4, the furthest planet from their star, being slightly warmer. All three planets have significant biospheres, including large oceans, forests, and highly developed flora and fauna."

"All of these variations are in response to conditions local to each planet," continued Phillip Gorman, the planetologist from Sierra Leone. "Conditions such as location of the tectonic plates and the continental bodies that ride on them, their impact on ocean currents, air currents, particulate matter from volcanos, all have a tremendous climate impact."

"There is significant panspermia in this system," added the enormous director of the Tellerite Biological Survey, Drisk javWalirsh. "Oddly, it appears that while life arose independently on each of the planets, that life was modified significantly by contact with single-cell life carried from one of the moons of ASB 4, carried by a number of asteroids that also brought water to those planets."

javWalirsh brought up close visuals of the close orbit level of each planet. “Also, based on orbital debris, we have significant evidence that intelligent life, apparently arising on ASA 2, visited and colonized ASA 3 and 4, beginning almost 900 thousand years ago and continuing for nearly 60 thousand years, causing traffic in several species among all three planets. After nearly 800 thousand years, we can assume that the vast majority of those lines will have either speciated or become extinct, but the collective impact has been to homogenize the biospheres of all three worlds.”

“Unfortunately, due to the effect of Coulomb’s Law, any electromagnetic signals sent by these intelligent creatures would have faded into the e.m. background long ago,” opined Major Janet Carter, the commanding officer of the U.S. Marines’ elite reconnaissance unit, known by their nickname, the Space Hounds. “The only effective way to attempt to collect any residual signal would require sending a probe more than 800 thousand light years away. That would be eight times the diameter of the Milky Way Galaxy. And even in the darkest, quietest corner of intergalactic space, we would not be able to gather much.”

Commodore Yui Song, along with the other leaders of the expedition, had been digesting this information. “Is there any possibility that descendants of the race that created all that orbital debris persist in this system?”

“That is a question that we have almost no precedent to answer,” Captain Ronald Howard, XIV replied. “I can hazard a conjecture...”

“Please indulge us, Captain Howard.” Yui Song managed to keep the exasperation out of her voice. It took an effort.

“We don’t see any evidence of subsequent orbital hygiene, such as humans and most other warp-capable species engaged in to clean up the orbital mess around their planet to clear the way for interstellar journeys,” Skip Howard replied. “So it seems reasonable to assume that if any of those populations developed interstellar travel, it was not along the lines of warp drive or any other form of travel that would require them to clean up all that orbital junk. Further analysis will probably reveal several periods of near space activity, separated by hundreds or thousands, possibly tens of thousands of years of inactivity, indicating the rise and fall of civilizations capable of local space travel.”

“The last of these went silent more than 800 thousand years ago. Assuming they did not develop another method of interplanetary travel, it is highly probable that their descendants are either extinct, or have evolved into species no longer capable of developing interplanetary travel.”

Shadow surprised everyone by speaking up. “Assume, for the moment, that either they, or some other capable, intelligent species, persists on one of those planets. If that is the case, the anointed, the people you refer to as the holy landers, will attempt to enslave them. And we will have led the holy landers right to them.”

## SBA Episode 15, Scene 14: Now That You're Whole

### Chapter Summary

Now that you find, now that you're whole...

### Chapter Notes

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



#### **The Star Beagle Adventures**

Episode 15: Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

Scene 14: Now That You're Whole

*Now that you find, now that you're whole...*

15.14

#### Now That You're Whole

“Someone has been busy,” observed Lance Corporal Petra Spitze. “A whole lot of someones...”

“Creme de Rattleroot,” Glaffe javClirv responded. “Tastes better than it smells. And it does wonders for your body aroma...”

The tellarite herbologist was serving up a dish of foods that had been grown over the past two days in the soil of Al Salemais A4.

United States Marine Corps Lance Corporal Petra Spitze turned her head, took a deep breath, then quickly popped a spoonful of the exceptionally foul-smelling gruel into her mouth, and tried not to retch. A surprised look of pleasure crossed her features until she exhaled, the breathed in again without taking the precaution of turning her head away from the food.

“See what I mean?” javClirv asked. “Smells awful. Tastes wonderful. After a few days, you won’t notice the smell. Because you’ll have absorbed enough of it into your system that you’ll smell just like it.”

Spike breathed hard, swallowed hard, then tried again not to gag.

“Which, in your case, will be a significant improvement, Stinky,” javClirv concluded.

Spike had grown accustomed to the jabs and jibes of the tellarites. Most of the time she had a ready insult to throw back at them, which had endeared her to the entire biological survey team. But at the moment she was too filled with curiosity to engage in the normal banter.

“So this meal is only from the one plant?” Spike gestured toward a freshly planted and freshly reaped field. “And you only planted it yesterday?”

“Day before yesterday, local time,” javClirv said. She pointed to the sun, which could be seen visibly moving through the sky. “This planet’s day-cycle is just over 21 of your hours. It actually makes the rattleroot grow faster. We developed it from a klingon plant and engineered it to grow faster, provide more nutrients, and re-seed itself to increase the crop in a very confined area. That small field will feed all 40 of us colonists for the next four months, providing us all the nutrients we need while we are sourcing local foods and growing other crops to supplement our diet.”

“We planted a crop. We harvested a crop. We’re living on that crop,” Spike observed.

“Making this planet a Federation colony under Federation law as long as no one has a prior claim to it,” javClirv said. “Like the intelligent species that have spread to all the continents and most of the islands on this planet.”

“We’ll just have to hope the holy landers aren’t familiar with that part of Federation Law,” Spike rejoined.

The new Federation colony of ASA 4 had been constructed in the caldera of a dormant volcano, which was part of an island chain in the middle of the larger of the planet's two oceans.

Four large quonset huts provided sleeping quarters and a larger, mostly open building provided a kitchen, a dining area and general daytime shelter.

The entire Tellarite Biological Survey, a contingent of United States Marines, the planetologist Phillip Gorman, the trill oceanographer Akri Dexe and the elderly premiere emeritus of the Vulcan Science Academy, T'Eln, had crowded into the U.S.S. Puppy and raced forward at high warp from the U.S.S. Beagle and met up with the U.S.S. Bluebird, which had flown back toward them from the U.S.S. Mako's position. The tellarites and the marines joined Commander Rhonda Carter, General Krank, Pel and Shadow in the U.S.S. Bluebird, which had then travelled at high warp to establish this colony on ASA 4. The U.S.S. Puppy, carrying the remainder of the colonists had arrived a day later.

It had taken another 3 days for the U.S.S. Mako to arrive in orbit, relieving the colony of the U.S.S. Bluebird, the U.S.S. Puppy, Commander Rhonda Carter and General Krank, to be replaced by the U.S.S. Arizona. The U.S.S. Beagle was still en-route, but Carter and Krank were already preparing planetary orbital defense.

"Do you really think this ploy about setting up a colony on a remote island on this world will be enough to keep the holy landers from trying to enslave the people of this planet?" Spike directed this question to the very elderly T'Eln, who had just sat down next to her with a full plate of creme de rattleroot. Other people would have been too intimidated by the former premiere of the Vulcan Science Academy to ask such an impertinent question. But impertinence was a Spitze family trait.

And as intimidating as the newly appointed planetary governor of ASA 4 was, T'Eln was a paragon of vulcan equanimity and egalitarianism. Her icy, emotionless demeanor made everyone around her feel equally beneath her.

"I have substantial doubts," said T'Eln. "It is a rather impressive gambit and thoroughly human."

"You don't approve?" Spike asked.

"The Federation wasn't built by vulcan pragmatism alone," Planetary Governor T'Eln replied. "The principle ingredient has always been an almost miraculous reserve of human optimism. Commodore Yui made a tough call, but in impressive one. She could not protect the intelligent populations of two planets, so she chose the more defensible position in hopes of reducing the negative impact of our retreat to this system. An impressive blend of pragmatism and optimism."

"It almost sounds as though you like her," Spike suggested.

"You humans do indulge in a dangerous habit of anthropomorphizing everything and everyone around you."

#### Close to the Edge Part IV - Seasons of Man

#### Chapter End Notes

This is the final scene for Episode 15.

The adventure will continue in Episode 16 - And You And I Part I - Cord of Life

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