

To Boldly Go:

## The *Starquest* Adventures

### Return of the Lost

by Cleve Johnson

#### ***Captain's Log: Stardate 53912.8***

*We continue to survey and map the Beta Quadrant. At the same time, we have been searching for more survivors of the U.S.S. Kennedy or their descendants. So far, we have not had any success in finding any sign of those who were lost over sixty years ago. We are approaching the nearest star system, containing two class-M worlds, within range of the Starfleet shuttlecraft of that era. I am in high hopes that some evidence will be found that might lead us to finding survivors.*



Commander Melanie Leeson sat confidently in the center seat of the bridge. She appreciated that Captain Stuart allowed her to spend more time as the officer of the deck than many captains might. But Stuart was always one to encourage his people and not micromanage them. It was part of his style to bring out the best qualities in others, and he did not feel that his authority as the ship's captain was threatened by allowing his first officer to spend more time in the command chair than him. "Take us out of warp, Blake. Full Impulse."

"Aye," Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams replied. "Shall I lay in a course for the fourth planet?"

"Make it so," Leeson stated.

"Commander," the junior security officer at the tactical station interrupted. "Sensors detect an alien ship."

"Heading?" inquired the first officer.

"It appears to be moving to intercept us, sir," the ensign stated.

"Call the captain to the bridge, Ensign," Leeson ordered.



Captain Rob Stuart sat across the table from Janice Edwards, the ship's chief medical officer. He smiled as he lowered the teacup from his mouth. "And what have you planned for today?"

Edwards set her cup down and smiled back at Stuart. "I'm running diagnostics on all the medical tricorders today," she said. "I think that I can recalibrate them to give a more accurate sub-molecular scanning range."

"And what about after you get off duty?" Stuart asked, a playful smirk on his face.

The doctor smiled. "I usually have dinner with someone special," she said casually. "But I haven't been asked if I would be interested in doing anything else yet."

Taking the hint, Stuart leaned back in his chair and returned Edwards' smile. "What would you like to do? A game of chess, maybe?"

"How about a romantic holodeck program?" Edwards prodded him. The couple liked to spend time together on the holodeck, and it had been a few days since they had done that. "A midnight walk along the beaches of the Mediterranean? or maybe Hawaii?"

Rob Stuart rose from his seat and took the doctor's hand, gently lifting her to a standing position as well. He put his arms around her and kissed her passionately. Jan, of course, returned his affection. But then, the intercom beeped.

"This better be important," the captain muttered, not letting go of the doctor. "This is Stuart,"

*"Sorry to bother you, Captain,"* the voice of the young security officer said, *"but Commander Leeson needs you on the bridge. An alien ship is heading in our direction."*

"On my way," Stuart stated as he closed the com signal. "Are you sure that you want to share me with the duties that go with being a starship captain?"

Edwards smiled as she held Stuart's hand. "I love you enough to put up with just about anything."

Stuart kissed her again and exited the ready room.



"They still don't respond to our hails, Commander," Lieutenant Mary Goodman, the senior OPS manager said as she continued to send standard greetings.

"T'Les, what do the scans show?" Leeson inquired of the science officer.

"The race that built this ship must be technologically inferior to the Federation, Commander." The Vulcan spoke, as usual, without emotion. "The vessel has minimal warp capabilities and nothing that resembles standard impulse drive. Sub-light engines are similar to the chemical rockets used by Earth during the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries."

"What about weapons and defense?" Stuart asked as he walked out of the turbolift.

"Forward and aft laser cannons, a laser turret on the underside, and forward missile launchers," T'Les said. "Sensors have detected twenty missiles with nuclear warheads in the forward section of the ship."

Stuart moved toward the center of the bridge, Leeson vacating the command chair and moving to the chair on Stuart's right. Stuart sat down and focused on the spot on the viewer where the alien ship appeared. "Magnification factor four. Any contact with the aliens, Exec?"

"No sir," Leeson replied. "No response to standard hailing frequencies and universal greetings."

“Commander T’Les, what kind of life signs do you read?”

“I detect twenty-seven individuals. The species appears to be unknown compared to any previous lifeform on record, Captain; however, the readings indicate some similarity to various non-sentient aquatic species found on many worlds. I would like to examine them in person to get more precise readings.”

“Maybe you will have the chance if they would be amicable to it,” Stuart replied. “Blake, how long until we intercept?”

“One hour, twenty-six minutes at present speed.”

Stuart thought for a moment. “Exec?”

“Yes, Captain?”

“Have all senior staff report to the main conference room in ten minutes.”

“Aye Captain.”



Stuart entered the conference room and sat in his designated chair. He noticed that all the senior officers had arrived ahead of him, and he appreciated their promptness. “We have an opportunity to make first contact with a new race. From what we can tell, they are technologically inferior as far as space travel is concerned.” Stuart looked around at each of his officers. “They either cannot or have chosen not to communicate with us so far.”

“Can we assume that they will be friendly, sir?” Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara, the security chief, asked.

“I don’t think that we can make any assumptions one way or the other until we have more information,” Leeson interjected.

“Quite right.” Stuart showed his support for the two officers’ position. “We will continue to try to communicate through established methods and assure them of our peaceful intent. We also want to find out if they have any knowledge of possible *Kennedy* survivors that may have come to this system.”

“May I suggest that we take a defensive posture, sir?” The first officer had her training as a security officer, and that training still directed her thinking.

Stuart noticed most of the senior staff nodding in agreement, especially Lieutenant Nakamara. “That would be prudent as always. We will approach with shields up, but there’s no need to use too much power to the shields since they use nothing stronger than lasers.”

“What about the Prime Directive, Captain?” Lieutenant Mary Goodman inquired.

“It might not apply since this is a warp-capable species,” Stuart replied. “*However*, we will follow all policies and procedures concerning first-contact situations.”

Adams shifted in his chair, trying to decide whether to verbalize his opinion. After brief consideration, he decided that he would. “Why not just go in cloaked as a stray comet or one of their ships?”

“That would not be wise since they have already detected us,” T’Les said.

“How do we know that we’ve been detected?” asked Blake.

“It is only logical to conclude that they have since the alien ship made a course change in our direction shortly after we entered the system.”

“I agree with our science officer,” Stuart stated. “I prefer the straight approach anyway. Blake. I don’t want to appear too aggressive, so I want to cut speed to one-half impulse right after this briefing.”

“Aye, Skipper.”

Stuart looked around the room. “Any questions or comments?”

No response came, so Stuart said, “Dismissed,” and the meeting was officially over. He rose from his chair and placed his hands on the table as the officers began to file out of the conference room.

Stuart called the ship’s counselor’s name to get the other man’s attention. “James, could I have a moment?”

Goodman moved toward the captain, who waited for the room to clear. Janice Edwards acted as though she wanted to stay behind, but Stuart indicated with his eyes that he would see her later.

“James,” Stuart began, “I know that you are part Betazoid. How strong are your empathic abilities?”

“I can read basic emotions in others if I’m close enough, Captain.” The counselor figured that Stuart was looking for an advantage to help alleviate the unknown factors involved with making first contact.

“How close would you need to be?”

“Usually within sixty or seventy meters.”

“Any chance of enhancing the distance to a few kilometers?”

Goodman shook his head. “If I were fully Betazoid or even half it would be possible, but I don’t have the full set of genes or the mental training.”

“I was hoping we could get some sort of emotional makeup on these aliens, but we will do our best to figure them out the old-fashioned way.” Stuart paused. “Thank you, Counselor. I would still like you on the bridge.”

“Of course, Captain. I’ll do my best to advise you based on observing the aliens if they let us see them.” Goodman sensed that his captain had something else to talk about. “Excuse me for being forward, sir, but I think that you want to talk about something other than just first contact.”

Stuart said nothing.

“Something of a more personal nature?” Goodman persisted.

Stuart slowly moved closer to the conference table and sat casually on the edge of it while Goodman only followed with his eyes. Robert P. Stuart, a starship captain,

thought a moment before revealing what his emotions had already spoken to the part-Betazoid counselor. “I was wondering about you and Mary,” he finally said. “About how you seem to be able to keep your personal lives separate from fulfilling your duties while serving on the same ship.”

Goodman approached and pulled out a chair to sit. He instinctively knew that Stuart had dropped the ranks and that the two of them were talking, not as superior and subordinate, nor counselor and counselee, but as two men sharing experiences. And Goodman felt honored to have Stuart, whom he had great respect for, ask him to share his personal experience as a man who had married not only a fellow Starfleet officer but one that he served with daily. “It’s not too difficult since our different positions don’t usually cause us to work together. Other than in staff meetings, of course.”

Stuart listened and nodded in agreement. “I see. Do you think that in *my* position as ship’s captain, I could have that same detachment?”

Goodman’s lips turned upward ever so slightly. The counselor knew that the captain and CMO had become ‘an item,’ and although it was not publicly advertised information, it was not a secret. His empathic abilities had told James Goodman that both Stuart and Edwards felt strongly about each other. He also sensed Stuart’s hesitation, understanding that a starship CO needed to keep his personal and professional lives separate. But he also knew that there were no regulations stating that a commanding officer could not have a relationship with one of his officers. “I think that you could manage it, Captain,” he said. “It might not be easy, but you could survive it.”

“You think so?”

Goodman nodded. “And so can the doctor.”

Both men stood up. They shook hands firmly and the captain suddenly felt a bond with the one man on the ship who could relate to him at this moment. “Thanks, James.”

“Any time, Captain.”



The alien ship continued to approach the U.S.S. *Starquest*. It was a dinosaur in comparison. A fossil. Yet, the crew of the primitive spacecraft would not be known as cowards. At least that is what those on the bridge thought.

Stuart and the senior bridge officers watched the viewscreen intently, each wondering what new life forms might be aboard.

Silence permeated the bridge. A silence that could almost be deafening. But the silence was interrupted.

“They’re trying to communicate, Captain,” Lieutenant Mary Goodman said. “Universal translator is trying to decipher.”

“Let’s hear it, Lieutenant,” Stuart said.

“...*Chee Tranak. Chu ya no wanted. Chu violate Tranak space. You will be destroyed if you no leave chee space.*”

The captain motioned to the OPS officer to open the channel. “This is Captain

Rob Stuart of the space vessel *Starquest*. We are on a peaceful mission and mean you no harm.”

*“Chu togla. Chu want to take what belongs to chee. You same as the Rihansa.”*

Stuart glanced at Leeson sitting next to him. “Is something wrong with the translator, Exec?”

The first officer ran her fingers over the control panel attached to her chair. “No sir,” she said. “I can only guess that some of the words are not translatable, at least not yet.”

Stuart nodded to Mary Goodman to reopen the transmission. “We are searching for some of our people who may have come here long ago. Can you give us any information?”

*“You are like Rihansa. You talk false.”*

Stuart, like the rest of the bridge crew, was becoming frustrated with the miscommunication. How could he get through to these people? And who or what was Rihansa?

*“You leave now or suffer our weapons.”*

Of course, the Tranak posed no threat to the technologically advanced Federation starship, but Stuart knew that the Prime Directive had to be followed. And it appeared that any survivors that may have come to this system probably were driven away as well. “Blake, all stop,” Stuart said. “Any suggestions on how to convince the Tranak that we just want to find out what happened to the *Kennedy* crew?”

No one spoke as Stuart looked at each of his officers in turn. Blake shrugged his shoulders in resignation.

“Sorry Captain,” Leeson finally said, interrupting the quiet.

“Well then,” Stuart began. “We don’t have much of a choice except to check out the next closest system.” He paused as he felt defeated. “Set course and engage at warp three, Blake.”

“Aye Skipper,” Stuart’s best friend replied.



The Tranak ship’s commander watched through the viewport as the alien spacecraft disappeared in a flash of light. He remembered how the Rihansa had invaded and plundered the sacred place and remembered how his father had died defending against the giant bird that came to steal the rocks of the gods. And he was relieved that this new invader decided to show wisdom in leaving. Or was the retreat merely a deception? The aliens could be allied with the Rihansa—those pointed-eared devils—and they might come back in force.

“Crolek,” the commander said to his second-in-command. “Inform our superiors about the aliens and request instructions.”

“I obey, Yurek,” the officer replied.

The commander returned his attention to the viewport and the stars outside, wondering if he would see the alien ship again. Wondering if he would die in battle against the aliens. Wondering if he would kill *them*.



Rob Stuart and Janice Edwards walked together along the waterfront. Jan sensed the disappointment that Rob felt concerning the aliens' response. She wanted to help him through it, but he had not chosen to share his feelings about the situation, so she decided to concentrate on the moment and wait for him to open up. "It's a beautiful night for a stroll on the beach."

Stuart said nothing but squeezed the doctor's hand gently.

"Hard day?" Jan already knew the answer.

Rob kicked some sand with his bare feet. "I should have been able to get through to them," he muttered. "I just feel like I failed."

Jan stopped and faced Rob, holding both of his hands, staring into his deep blue eyes. "I've felt that way, too," she said. "Every time I lose a patient or can't find a cure for some newly discovered disease."

Stuart just wrapped his arms around Edwards. "Thanks."

"For what?"

"For knowing the right thing to say," Rob said. "And for loving me." Rob kissed her, and they continued their stroll on the beach.



The starship arrived at the next star system and entered orbit around the sixth planet. It wasn't necessarily a paradise, but the planet could sustain human life. Stuart was hopeful that this may be the place that the U.S.S. *Kennedy* crew had migrated to.

"Sensors indicate the remains of several structures near the planet's equator, Captain. The structures appear to have been constructed from several Federation shuttles." T'Les looked up from her console to look toward the bridge's center. "I estimate that they were destroyed approximately twelve years ago."

"Any life signs, Commander T'Les?" Melanie Leeson asked.

"Multiple readings on plant and animal life. Possible humanoid life located four point seven two kilometers from the damaged structures."

Stuart's heart jumped. He had little doubt that the *Kennedy* survivors had been found. At least some of them had been. "How many, T'Les?"

"Unknown, sir. The lifeforms seem to be inside a large cave that our sensors cannot fully penetrate due to lithite deposits within the rock."

Stuart glanced toward his first officer. "I think an away team would be in order, Exec."

"Aye Captain." Leeson agreed and quickly stood up. "Blake, Yoshi."

Adams and Nakamara rose from their duty stations and moved toward the turbolift. Holographic crewmen appeared at the CONN and tactical stations after the officers vacated their positions.

Stuart did a double-take when he saw the holograms that had appeared. One wore the uniform style from more than a hundred years past—black pants and boots, gold shirt. The ‘man’ at CONN had old-style lieutenant stripes on his sleeve. Stuart immediately recognized him. “Lieutenant Sulu, please maintain orbit.”

“Aye, aye, Captain,” the hologram replied.

Stuart also recognized the ‘man’ at tactical, and his uniform was from an older era than the artificial Sulu. “Mister Reed, it’s good to see you.”

“The pleasure is all mine, sir.”

Stuart smiled and shook his head. He had forgotten that Blake had programmed some of the holograms to look and act like some of the famous people from Starfleet’s past. He pushed a button on his chair arm console. “Jan, please report to Transporter Room One for an away mission.”

*“On my way, Captain.”*



Leeson, Adams, Nakamara, Edwards, and two security crewmen materialized on the planet’s surface. The temperature felt cool. Leeson thought that it was too cool for being an equatorial region of an M-class world. “We’re not expected, so let’s try not to startle anyone.”

The away team saw the cave opening and started walking toward it. They did not notice the four pairs of eyes behind a group of trees following their movements. The eyes watched as the five Starfleet officers entered the entrance to the cave, their home for the past fifteen summers.

“Who are they?” the young woman asked her companion.

“Don’t know,” the young man replied. “But they look like us.”

“We should tell grandmother.” The girl looked worried.

The boy pulled out a palm-size device and flipped it open. “Jeffrey Miller to Hannah Stark.”

*“This is Hannah.”* It was an elderly-sounding voice. *“Is anything wrong?”*

“Strangers just entered the cave entrance,” Jeffrey said excitedly. “And they look human.”

The boy’s announcement was met with silence. “Hannah?”

*“Are they wearing uniforms of some kind?”*

“Yes, and I think I saw an emblem on their uniforms that looked similar to the necklace that you wear.”

*“Stay where you are until someone contacts you,”* Hannah said. *“And don’t*



worry. *I think they are here to rescue us.*”



The *Starquest* away team descended further into the depths of the planet, searching for signs of life. Blake’s tricorder indicated that a group of people, mostly humans, were in a large cavern just beyond the next tunnel. “We’re getting close, Mel.”

“Stay alert and try not to scare them,” Leeson said.

But as the away team passed through the tunnel’s exit, Leeson was surprised to see a group of thirty to forty people facing them, apparently waiting for the Starfleet crew to emerge from the tunnel.

“Welcome to New Earth,” an elderly woman said.

Leeson approached the woman, surprised that their arrival had been detected. “I’m Commander Melanie Leeson from the Federation starship *Starquest*.”

“And I am Hannah Stark, former helmsman of the U.S.S. *Kennedy*,” the elderly woman said. “I gave up hope of ever seeing anyone else from home.”

“Does anyone need medical attention or other aid?” Edwards chimed in.

“This is Doctor Edwards, our CMO,” Leeson said.

“Thank you, Doctor,” Hannah replied. “We could use your assistance with one of our people who is about to give birth. Tom, could you take the doctor to Melissa?”

A man stepped away from the joyful crowd and motioned to Edwards. “This way, Doctor.” Both walked toward another tunnel.

“We found the remains of a village a few kilometers away,” Leeson said. “Was that your settlement?”

Hannah nodded. “It was,” she said, a tear forming in her left eye.

“You were attacked?” Leeson asked although she knew the answer from what the buildings looked like and from the tricorder readings.

Hannah nodded, wiping her eyes. “Beams of energy came from the sky and destroyed the village. Many people died, including my husband and two sons.”

Leeson placed a comforting hand on the old woman’s shoulder.

“That was fifteen summers ago,” Hannah said. “My granddaughter is the only family I have left.”

Melanie Leeson wanted to know the details of the attack that happened long ago. She was curious about who or what would attack helpless people without warning. She wanted to know if they would be back. But that information could wait until the survivors’ immediate needs were dealt with. “We’ll help you and your people. I need to contact my captain and make arrangements to transport your people back to the Federation.”

“Thank you,” Hannah said as she grasped Leeson’s hand.



Stuart, Edwards, Leeson, and Adams sat around a table in the officer's lounge. The doctor had just finished briefing the others on the medical conditions of those who had been found on the planet below. She was especially pleased about the new life that she had helped bring into the world.

Adams slurped his milkshake as the captain and doctor tried to ignore the noise that he made. But Leeson could not block out the obnoxious sound. "Can you be quiet?" Leeson demanded, rather than asked.

"Sorry Mel," Blake said. "I just love milkshakes so much that I want to get every drop," he added with a sly grin on his face.

Stuart and Edwards smiled, finding their friends' little conflict amusing. "Can we continue, Exec?"

"Of course, Captain. Starfleet has dispatched a ship to pick up our visitors. It should arrive in about three and a half weeks."

"Good," Stuart said. "You seem to have things under control. Since we will be here for a few weeks, I'd like you to plan some away team missions to study New Earth. Maybe a little shore leave for those who haven't been off the ship in a while."

"I'm not sure that is a good idea, Captain," the first officer stated. "Whoever attacked the settlement may be coming back."

"It's been fifteen years since the attack. They would have been back before now, wouldn't you think?"

Leeson shrugged. "I suppose they would have."

"I leave the details in your capable hands, then."

"I'll handle it, sir," Leeson replied as she heard Blake slurp the last remains of his shake.

Stuart unsuccessfully tried to suppress a laugh as he noticed his first officer cringing at the sound. Rob took Janice Edwards' hand and gently lifted her to a standing position. As the two officers walked toward the exit, they noticed a teenage couple from the group of survivors holding hands as they looked out the viewports. The expression on their faces showed the amazement of seeing the planet, their home, from space for the first time. It seemed to Stuart and Edwards that these young adults were experiencing a perfect moment in time.

The double doors slid open, and the captain and doctor strode through them. Stuart, noticing no one else in the corridor, stopped and faced Edwards. Their eyes locked. This was their perfect moment. One of many that would come.

***The End***