

THE PRINCESS AND THE ALIEN ABDUCTORS

by

Gregory Smith

My name is Sunni, and I'm a beagle. I'm especially beautiful. I'm small for a beagle, and where most have brown fur, mine is a dark red. I guess you could say I'm a redhead! All over my white fur I have cute black and brown spots called "ticks." I'm a knockout. Everyone tells me so.

I live in a house with two other beagles: Bailey and BJ. Bailey is BJ's daddy. He calls her his "little girl," but even at the time of this story, BJ was grown up and a lady in her own right.

Why did I say, "Even at the time of this story"? Because this took place some time ago. I'm still beautiful today, but Bailey is getting to be an old dog, and even BJ isn't as spry as she used to be. That's why this story needs to be told, before it's too late.

This is the story of how I came to be the Princess of All Beagles. And every word you're going to hear is true, I swear. I was there.

It started one evening when Bailey, BJ, and I were laying around the house with our people. We'd had a long day tracking scents in the back yard. Suddenly Mommy said, "Junior, why don't you take the dogs for a walk?" Junior is our child person.

"Aw, Mom!" he said, "why can't Dad walk the dogs?"

"Your father is tired. You can take the dogs for a walk."

"Mom! It's the middle of *F-Troop*!" (That was a TV show.)

"You've seen this one before." (It was in reruns.)

"But, Mom!"

"Junior!"

"Okay, okay, okay."

The real reason he didn't want to take us on a walk was that this was the episode of *F-Troop* that starred Zsa-Zsa Gabor. And the real reason Mommy was making him was that today had been Junior's report card day, and Mommy had to talk with Daddy. This always happened on report card day.

As soon as we saw our leashes, we became very excited. Three excited beagles is a sight next to which a tornado pales. A walk! Beagles love walks.

The moment we got out the door, we were pulling on our leashes as hard as we could. That's one of the first things dogs learn to do. And all in different directions. That's another first thing dogs learn to do. And the last first thing that dogs learn is that when one pulls ahead, another stops to sniff or pee. And when the peeing one is done, she runs ahead while the dog pulling ahead comes back to sniff at the pee. It drives people crazy!

It was a dark evening. Junior jerked our leashes, but nothing can dampen the spirits of a beagle on a walk. We sniffed our way down one street and then another. We were blocks from home. We had absolutely no warning. No sound, and certainly no smell. The only thing was that my fur seemed to prickle up, but I didn't know what that meant.

Suddenly a circle of purple light fell around us! And then we began to rise up in the air! We rose straight up, with the purple light beneath us like a floor. My fur stood on end. The fur on Junior's head was doing the same thing!

And then I saw, up above us, a Flying Saucer! GOSH! It was a dark disk, with lights running around the edge.

No one made a sound.

We rose through a black opening in the bottom of the saucer. The floor closed beneath us, the purple light disappeared, and there was a bright orange flash. Junior collapsed.

Bailey never loses his presence of mind. He's that kind of dog. Instantly he snapped, "Scoot!", and we scooted. We didn't even look around. "Scoot" has special meaning for dogs. It's what we do when we realize a bath is coming.

Dragging our leashes, we darted under a console of some kind that was just in front of us. It was a tight fit. We had to crawl on our bellies, like we do when we go under the bed. We turned around so we could watch what was happening.

We heard a raspy voice say, "Activate cloak." A different voice said, "Activated." Then we saw two... *creatures*... step from behind the console.

Their heads were shaped like footballs laying on their sides, only larger, and they had three eyes across the top and three mouths across the bottom. Their bodies were oval, but lumpy, like potatoes, only of course a lot bigger. Their feet were completely flat on the bottom, and their hands had a bunch of fat fingers -- maybe six or seven.

But the strangest things were their arms and legs. They were coiled, like fat springs, instead of straight. As they walked, they bounced up and down on their springy legs. But at the same time their arms seemed to bounce to match their legs, because while their heads and bodies bounced along, their hands stayed at the same level.

They were mostly colored blue. On top of their heads they each had a single silver-gray hair that grew straight up for a couple inches, then curled in a loop at the top.

“Aliens!” said BJ. “How cool is this!”

The two aliens stooped and lifted Junior. His body was limp.

“He’s alive,” sniffed BJ, “just unconscious.” We dogs can tell whether something is dead or alive by smell.

“Take him to the laboratory,” said the first raspy voice, from behind us, behind the console. So there were at least three aliens. The two with Junior carried him away to our right. As they walked, their bodies bounced up and down, but because their arms compensated, Junior didn’t bounce any at all.

As they approached the wall a door slid open, and they went through. Then we heard steps, and to our left we could see the feet of the third alien walking in

that direction. Again, as he approached that wall a door slid open, and then closed behind him.

“The first thing we need to do,” said Bailey, “is ditch these leashes.”

BJ was between Bailey and me. She quickly chewed through Bailey’s collar, and then mine. I chewed through BJ’s. My little teeth were very sharp.

Bailey crawled out and began sniffing the room, his tail wagging slowly back and forth. BJ ran around behind the console.

“Not much to tell from the scents,” said Bailey. “Just that there are only three aliens on board. And there have been total of eighteen... no, *nineteen* humans on board. How did I have confuse those two who smelled like goats? And some of the places they’ve visited are Nepal; Malaysia; the western Sahara; Suffolk, England; and Alaska.”

“Nepal?” I said. “Malaysia? Sahara? Suffolk! You don’t know what *any* of those places smell like.”

“Okay, maybe I’m guessing, but I smell places different from each other, and different from Florida.” (We lived in Florida.)

I was doing some sniffing of my own. “The ones who smelled like goats were the ones from Nepal,” I said.

We sniffed around behind the console. There we found two stools, for the operators to sit on. BJ was standing on one of the stools. Her front paws were up on the console.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I’m seeing what the controls look like. There are a lot of levers and buttons!” BJ was very smart. She read every book that was left on the floor of our house. That meant all of Junior’s books, including his schoolbooks, plus every volume of the encyclopedia that Mommy and Daddy had bought for Junior during an attack of optimism.

She also watched all the science shows on TV, like *Star Trek*. (Her favorite episode was *City on the Edge of Forever*.)

“We know from the aliens,” said Bailey, “that there’s a door in the wall to the right, and one in the wall to the left. What about this wall behind us?”

Bailey trotted toward the wall behind the console, and suddenly a door opened. He went on through.

“Come on!” I called to BJ, and we ran after him.

And this is what really happened, I swear:

* * *

The three dogs ran into a circular room. Metal consoles ran almost all the way around its metal walls. The consoles were covered with controls, and monitors hung from the ceiling. BJ skidded to a stop.

“Wow!” she said. “This is *too much!*”

The door slid shut behind them. Bailey was already sniffing. Every console had a stool. BJ jumped up on one.

“I don’t know what room this is,” said Bailey, “but the humans have never been brought here.”

BJ put her front paws on a console and looked over the controls.

“I wonder what this does.”

“BJ!” said Bailey, but it was too late. She had grabbed a lever in her mouth and pulled.

The lights dimmed and then went completely out.

“The light switch,” said BJ.

“Put it back!” snapped Bailey. They heard the swish of a door opening in the next room. “Hide, quick!”

BJ moved the lever, the lights came back on, and the three beagles dashed under a console on the other side of the room.

The door opened. Two aliens came in and went straight to the console where BJ had been.

“Everything seems to be in order,” said one, “and the lighting has returned to specification. What do you think happened?”

“I do not know,” said the other. “You know how they make these spaceships nowadays. Planned obsolescence. Something is probably getting ready to fail.”

The first alien touched some other controls. “Temperature is set correctly, and so is humidity, and atmospheric pressure.” He pushed a button, and the monitors lit up. Each one showed a different room in the ship. In one, Junior was strapped to a metal table, still unconscious.

“Everything appears to be in order.”

He switched off the monitors and they left.

“These aliens have three mouths,” said Bailey, stopping to scratch behind his ear. “That means they can eat, drink, and bark at the same time. What a concept!”

“That aside,” said BJ dryly, “this must be the ship’s environmental control room. The room outside is the tractor beam control room.”

“The what?” asked Sunni.

“A tractor beam is the technology they used to bring us aboard. There’s also a laboratory where Junior is being held for experiments.” BJ jumped on a stool and used her paw to press a button. The monitors lit back up. “That room there,” she pointed with her nose, “must be the master control room.”

The master control room had a swivel chair in the center. Two other chairs, at opposite sides of the room, faced consoles and monitors on the walls. There was an alien in the swivel chair, and as they watched a door slid open and the other two came in. They took the chairs facing the walls.

“The one in the swivel chair is the Captain,” said BJ.

“Why,” asked Bailey, “are they in the control room, instead of running experiments on Junior?” After a moment, he answered his own question: “Because they’re controlling the ship, which means we’re travelling. We’re going somewhere.”

“Where?” asked Sunni, a little panicked. “How will we get back?”

“A beagle,” said Bailey, “can do anything he sets his heart to. Or she. But in the meantime, I wish we could find something to eat around here.”

"I'm going to do a little exploring," he said to BJ. "You stay here, and if anyone comes be sure to hide."

"That monitor shows the tractor beam room," said BJ. "I'll be able to see if anyone comes."

Bailey and Sunni left through the door to the tractor beam room. Noses to the floor, their snouts swept back and forth. Their paths took them left and right, and sometimes completely around, but their wandering was purposeful, guided by their noses.

After the door was closed behind them, Bailey said, "BJ, can you still hear me?"

"Yes, loud and clear."

"How about the aliens? Are they hearing me?"

"They're showing no sign."

"They're like humans," said Bailey.

To understand, you must know that dogs have two ways of talking. Their usual way is one that humans can't hear. It has something to do with frequency. Or maybe brain waves. No one knows. Since almost no humans know about it, it's never been studied.

Although it is strange that humans don't suspect a method of dog communication that they can't hear. How often does a human try to slip a treat or a piece of cheese to just one dog, only to find herself quickly surrounded by all the other dogs in the household, silently expectant? It's because they spread the

word. And it doesn't matter how many rooms away the other dogs were. This method of talking carries a long way.

Barking is the way dogs talk when they want humans to hear. Barking can also carry a long way, as you may know if you have a neighbor with a dog who lives a block away. Or three blocks. Or five.

Bailey and Sunni went through the door where the aliens had taken Junior. They found that they were in the laboratory. Junior was strapped to a table. The walls were lined with cabinets with metal doors. There were a few instruments with dials that glowed a gentle red.

Bailey and Sunni sniffed quickly around, converging on a metal column that stood next to the table in the middle of the room. The column went from the floor to the ceiling. Four arms, coiled and flexible like the aliens' arms, branched out at different heights. One arm ended in what looked like a tray, and another in a light that glowed red. The other two arms ended in clusters of what might have been tools or instruments.

Bailey and Sunni stood on their hind legs, sniffing higher and higher up the column. They sniffed as high as they could reach. The fur on the backs of their necks stood on end.

They dropped to their forepaws and left the room walking backwards, watching the strange column. Their tails pointed up, and the white tips twitched.

The door slid shut on the laboratory. Bailey and Sunni looked around. "I'll bet this is the galley," they heard BJ say, from the environmental control room, "the ship's kitchen."

"I never understood this 'kitchen' thing," said Bailey, "this human idea of keeping food in only one room. If I had a house, there'd be a kitchen in every room."

There was no table in the galley, but in the center of the room a dozen or so steel cables hung from the ceiling halfway to the floor. And one of the walls sloped up from the floor and around to the ceiling in a big half circle. There were notches cut in the slope.

Bailey and Sunni sniffed up the slope as high as they could reach.

"The aliens walk up this," said Bailey.

They sat on their haunches and looked up at the ceiling. There were notches there, too.

"They eat," said Sunni, "while hanging upside down from the ceiling?"

"How do know this is the galley?" said Bailey.

"Look at those appliances on the opposite wall," said BJ.

Sitting on a counter along the wall were several box-shaped gadgets with round glass doors, like washing machines. And one with a square door and a panel of buttons.

"The one with the square door will make food if you push the buttons," said BJ. "It's just like on *Star Trek*."

Bailey leapt to the countertop, his tail wagging.

"I'm hungry," he said.

He studied the buttons. He raised his right paw and pushed in the middle of the panel. Several buttons beeped. The square door glowed and pulsed. The

box hummed. Then the glow disappeared, the door popped open, and a tray slid out.

There were three piles of mush on the tray. Each had what looked like a cylinder of wood sticking up out of the middle. Bailey sniffed, then recoiled.

"This smells awful!"

He sniffed again, and recoiled again. He tried to force his nose to sniff again.

"Yikes!" he said suddenly. "It's moving!"

Sure enough, the piles of food were crawling off the tray onto the counter.

Bailey jumped quickly to the floor.

"That never happened on *Star Trek*," said BJ.

Bailey and Sunni went through the door to the next room. Here there were shelves stacked with piles of what looked like folded metallic cloth. There was also another half-circle ramp that went from the floor to the ceiling.

Bailey sniffed at the ramp.

"Do you think this is the bunkroom?" asked BJ.

Sunni sat down and looked at the ceiling. "They sleep upside down, too?"

"Maybe," said BJ, "they evolved on a world where their ancestors hung upside down from trees. Or rocks."

"Well, there's nothing more here," said Bailey, and he trotted toward the door to the next room.

"Wait!" said BJ, and he stopped. "The way I figure it, the rooms in this ship are arranged like a wheel."

"Wheels are what allow people to take us on rides," said Bailey, wagging his tail.

"The room I'm in," continued BJ sternly, "is in the middle -- the hub. You're going in a circle around the outside of the ship. The next room you'll come to is the control room, where the aliens are."

"Oh," said Bailey. "Then what do we do next?"

"I have more news," said BJ. "I have an outside view monitor, and we've landed."

"Landed! Where?"

"There's reddish sand and rocks, but the colors don't look as bright as they should. I'd guess we're on Mars."

"Mars!" said Sunni. "How will we get home?"

"Don't worry," said Bailey. "A beagle never runs out of ideas. BJ, let us know what happens."

A few minutes later, BJ said, "The aliens are in the tractor beam room. They've lowered a ramp to the surface, and they're going outside." Then, a little later, "They're out of my sight."

A short time passed, then BJ said, "They're coming back, and they're carrying stuff." Then, "They're going into the laboratory, where they've got Junior. I think they'll be in there a while. The coast is clear."

"Come on," said Bailey, "let's see what Mars is like."

He and Sunni ran through the master control room, hardly giving it a glance, and into the tractor beam room. They found a ramp leading down to a desert of pale red sand. BJ was waiting, and they ran down the ramp, Bailey in the lead.

They wove back and forth across the Martian surface, looking for scents. "Not much to smell," said Bailey. "There's more gravity and color, and the light's not so bright, but except for that it's pretty much like the Moon." (Bailey had visited the Moon once, but that's another story.¹) "You seen one extraterrestrial world, you've seen 'em all."

Sunni took a look at the alien spaceship. It was the usual flying saucer shape, but it was mint green on the bottom, and brown on top, with a sky blue band around the edge.

"These aliens," she said, "have no taste whatsoever."

BJ was furiously digging a hole. Red sand shot out between her back legs.

Bailey ran over and stuck his nose in the hole.

"What have you found?" he cried. "A mole?"

"I'm looking for water," said BJ. "I've heard a theory that there's water just under the Martian surface."

"Water," sniffed Bailey, "should be served in bowls."

"Here's the aliens' scent!" cried Sunni. "This is where they went when they left the ship!"

In a flash, Bailey's nose was beside hers. Behind them, BJ continued to dig.

¹The First Dog on the Moon, by Gregory Smith

The two beagles followed the scent on a twisting path through a field of boulders. It started to descend into a ravine. Suddenly they stopped, their tails straight up.

"There are more aliens ahead," said Bailey.

They backed up slowly, then turned and ran to the ship.

BJ was still digging. About half her body was in the hole. Her rump stuck up in the air.

"No water yet!" she called.

"Come on," said Bailey, "let's get out of here."

The beagles ran up the ramp, shaking the Martian dust from their fur. The tractor beam room was deserted.

"Let's find out where the aliens are," said Bailey. They ran into the environmental control room. BJ jumped on a stool and activated the monitors.

"Uh oh," she said. "It looks like they may be starting experiments on Junior."

"It's time to act," said Bailey. "Follow me."

The three ran through the tractor beam room and into the master control room. BJ jumped into the swivel chair in the middle.

"Wow! The Captain's chair, just like on *Star Trek*. Warp factor ten, Mister Sulu!"

"Be serious," said Bailey. "BJ, you need to fly this ship back to Earth."

"What? Didn't you just say 'be serious'? I don't know how to fly this ship!"

"You watch *Star Trek*. Figure it out."

BJ into one of the other chairs. She pored over the controls. A long minute passed.

"I think this is the communications station," she finally said. "This is where Uhuru would have sat."

She ran around to the other console. She studied those controls for two very long minutes. Then, tentatively, she extended a paw and touched a button.

"I think this is the Rewind button," she said, and then she pushed it.

Immediately they heard and felt a hum and vibration.

"The ship's taking off," said BJ.

"The aliens are going to know!" cried Sunni.

"They'll be coming through that door," said Bailey. "Quick! Out the other one!"

BJ and Sunni were at the door in a flash. They skidded to a halt as they waited for it to open. Bailey had his head cocked, listening. The door started to open.

"They're coming!" said Bailey.

BJ and Sunni squeezed through. Bailey started to run after them.

"What's going to stop them," said BJ over her shoulder, "from undoing what we just did?"

Bailey stopped in his tracks.

"Come on!" cried Sunni.

"We need a diversion," said Bailey quietly, and the door slid shut, cutting him off from BJ and Sunni.

Behind him, the other door opened. Bailey turned to face the aliens.

They rushed in, all three, looking around wildly. But they missed Bailey, near the floor.

By each of the two entrances to the master control room there was a flat, empty console, like a desk. Bailey jumped onto the one next to where he was standing. "Gentlemen!" he barked, with his head held high, his ears alert, and his white-tipped tail pointed up.

Gentlemen! he *barked* -- that form of dog speech that humans (and aliens) can hear.

"Gentlemen!" he barked again. "May I ask who you are, and what you're doing here?"

Nine red eyes fixed Bailey with a dumbfounded stares.

"Gentlemen!" Bailey barked yet again. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I," said one of the aliens, "am Captain Ankylosing Spondylitis, and I command this ship. And I have more right to ask you who you are, since you are on my ship. But you ask who we are, and I will answer: We are the Alien Abductors. We abduct aliens such as yourself."

"But I'm not the alien," said Bailey. "You are."

"No," said Captain Spondylitis, "*you* are."

Bailey saw how this could be a point-of-view thing.

"Now," said the Captain, "who are you, and what are you doing on my ship?"

Bailey switched to the other dog way of talking, that the aliens couldn't hear:

"BJ, I need you in the environmental control room."

"Already here," said BJ.

"Sunni, stand by in the tractor beam room."

"Will do," said Sunni. *"what's up?"*

"I have a plan," said Bailey.

"My name is Bailey," said Bailey, resuming barking, "and I'm here for exactly the reason that I said: To find out who you are, and what you're doing."

"Just a moment," said the Captain. "You are a dog!"

"More specifically," said Bailey, "I'm a beagle."

"But dogs are just humans' pets!"

"Oh, you are so wrong," barked Bailey. "Dogs are actually far superior to humans."

"It was my impression that humans created dogs."

"It's true that humans created dogs."

"Then it is impossible for dogs to be superior. Scrofula's Theorem clearly demonstrates that no species can create a superior species."

"That's ridiculous," said BJ, using the speech that the aliens couldn't hear.

"Ask them why."

"Why?" barked Bailey.

"Because no species can comprehend a design more complex than its own brain, and so cannot design the brain for a superior race."

BJ said, *"Repeat what I say."*

"You weren't listening to me. I said humans created us. I didn't say they designed us. They aren't smart enough for that."

"You weren't listening to me," said Bailey. "I said humans crated us. In crates? No, that's not right. They designed us. No, they didn't. They aren't smart enough for that!"

The aliens waggled their heads in what might have been bewilderment.

"Hoo boy," said BJ.

"Hoo boy," said Bailey.

"I didn't mean for you to repeat that!"

"I didn't mean for you to repeat that!"

"Who to repeat what?" said Captain Spondylitis. "We do not understand."

What the humans created," said BJ slowly.

"What the humans created," repeated Bailey...

"...was a mechanism by which successive iterations of a species were slightly and randomly different from their predecessors. Among these random variations, some would be superior to their predecessors. The process selected these out and then repeated itself.

"This allowed for the development of a new species that was superior to the species that first set the process in motion.

"Humans designed this process and set it in motion. We are the result. We are dogs."

"Whew!" said Bailey, *"what did I say?"*

"I think you described the practice of selective breeding," said Sunni.

But the aliens seemed both impressed and uncomfortable. At least, that's what Bailey thought as they rotated their eyes to look at each other. Bailey noticed they could rotate their right and left eyes independently of the center one, so they could look in three directions at the same time.

"Prove that you are superior to humans," said Captain Spondylitis.

"I already have," said Bailey.

"How?"

"I'm here. I boarded this ship, without your knowledge. I boarded it on Mars, a planet no human has visited. And (by the way) I'm piloting your ship back to Earth."

The aliens sprang to navigation console, one taking the seat while the other two crowded over his shoulder. The seated one worked the controls. The three looked at the panel for a moment. Then they looked at Bailey. Their nine eyes seemed unfocused. Bailey took this to mean they were stunned.

The Captain and the other alien moved to their seats, a little unsteady on their spongy legs. The Captain took the seat in the middle.

After a pause, the Captain said, "Well. What are we to do with you?"

"You're not going to do anything with me," said Bailey. "It's out of your hands (if you call them hands).

"Allow me to demonstrate.

"Be ready, BJ.

"I can make it warmer...."

It began to get warm in the room. Very warm. Bailey's tongue hung out and he started to pant. The aliens changed color, becoming more yellow the warmer it got.

"...and I can make it colder," he said, "(I apologize for the drool)."

The room quickly turned cold. Very cold. Bailey could see his breath, and the aliens began turning green.

"Good thing I brought my fur coat," said Bailey. "I can also make it brighter or darker."

The temperature returned to normal, and the lights brightened and dimmed.

"I can..." Bailey started.

"I wonder what this one does," said BJ.

"BJ, no!" cried both Bailey and Sunni.

But it was too late. Suddenly they were weightless, floating in the air.

"I guess it's the artificial gravity control."

"...shut off the artificial gravity," barked Bailey, to the aliens.

"I'm going to barf," cried Sunni.

Then they "fell" to the "ceiling," which had suddenly become "down."

"Cool," said BJ, *"I've reversed the gravity."*

"I can even reverse the gravity," barked Bailey, lying on his back on the "floor," all four feet in the air. The aliens were sprawled and struggling to get up.

"Going the other way," said BJ.

"Wait!" said Bailey, but the original floor became "down" again, and they all fell, again.

Bailey landed on his four paws. The aliens fell in piles of tangled, coiled arms and legs.

"See?" said Bailey casually, "I even landed on my feet. How did you do?"

The aliens untangled themselves and climbed into their chairs.

"Daddy," said BJ (meaning Bailey), "*we've arrived back on Earth.*"

"Thanks," said Bailey.

"And now," said Bailey to the aliens, "I would like to know what your intentions are with respect to Junior, and the human race."

"Naturally, we are going to destroy them," said Captain Spondylitis. "We are going to use Earth to raise herds of gargons. We considered enslaving humans to serve as herdsman, but they are too ornery."

"Gargons?" asked Bailey.

"Gargons are our livestock animals. Can you picture it?" Spondylitis waxed, his three eyes rolling upwards. "Millions of gargons, all over the planet, engaged in beautiful displays of synchronized grazing." The pointed tips of his football-shaped head began to glow orange. "And fresh mashed gargon! We will have fresh mashed gargon even in this desolate corner of the galaxy. There is nothing to compare with fresh mashed gargon kidney. I will have to treat you, after we have eliminated the humans."

Bailey remembered the crawling piles of food in the galley, and his stomach gave a heave.

"Thanks for the offer," he said, "but I've found out what I came to find, and now I have to report."

"So you will be leaving us?" said Spondylitis hopefully.

"No," said Bailey, "I think rather that someone will be joining us.

"BJ!" said Bailey. *"Get to the tractor beam console pronto! And Sunni stand by. It's almost your cue.*

"I perceive," he barked, "that we have returned to Earth. I'm going to borrow your tractor beam for a moment.

"BJ, tractor something up."

"Tractor something up!" said BJ. *"I don't know how to run this thing."*

"Well figure it out quick!" To the aliens, Bailey barked, "I'll control your tractor beam from here."

Suddenly there was a THUD and the ship jumped, as though hitting a bump.

"BJ!"

"Wrong button, I guess."

"You guess?" To the aliens: "It takes a little practice to get the hang of these controls."

Then the alien at communications said, "The hatch is opening, and tractor beam has been activated!"

The alien and the Captain jumped up and headed for the door.

"Sit down!" barked Bailey.

They dropped back into their seats.

"Hey, cool!" said BJ, *"I tractored up a Chevy pickup with chrome hubcaps! Can I keep it?"*

"*Sunni*," said Bailey, "*make your entrance!*"

As the door slid open, Bailey barked, "All stand!"

The bewildered aliens leaped to their feet. Bailey stood at attention. As Sunni entered, Bailey let out an earsplitting howl of fanfare:

"AaaaaaaROOOOOOOOOO!"

"Announcing Princess Sunni Rainbow, Ruler of All Beagles!"

"AaaaaaaROOOOOOOOOO!"

Sunni leaped to the desk-like console near her door. She arranged her feet and sat down with dignity. She turned her head demurely, so as to avoid looking at them.

"You may be seated," said Bailey, doing so himself. The aliens sat down with thuds.

"You are....," said Captain Spondylitis.

"Princess Sunni Rainbow, Ruler of All Beagles," said Sunni, looking at him now. "Do you have trouble hearing?"

"We understand," said the Captain, "that Bailey would like to report to you."

"He already has."

The aliens glanced at each other.

"When?"

"I consulted with Minister Bailey before I arrived."

"Minister Bailey?"

"Bailey is my Minister for Alien Relations."

"You have a Minister for Alien Relations?"

"Of course. You wouldn't expect a princess to relate to aliens herself, would you? And by the way, let me assure you that in this case you are the aliens."

The aliens turned to look at Bailey, who tried to look as ministerial as possible.

"Now," continued Sunni, "I must instruct you to desist your plan to take over the Earth, and in fact to never visit it again, ever."

"What?" yelled the Captain.

"Must you be told everything twice?" asked Sunni.

"And if we refuse to obey your 'instruction?'" asked the Captain contemptuously. "What will you do then?"

"I'm a Princess. I won't do anything, other than refer the matter to my Minister of Alien Relations."

"Alien Relations," spat the Captain. "You would do better to refer it to your Minister of War, because that is what it will be: War!"

"Oh, I don't have a Minister of War," said Sunni. "Beagles don't fight wars. Horrid things!"

"Then we will attack, and you will die."

"No. You will attack, and be a minor annoyance that Minister Bailey will deal with in short order."

"How will you 'deal with' us?" said the Captain. "You are dogs! You have no weapons, no tools, not even clothes. We have spaceships. We have the all-powerful Focusing Disintegrator Ray. And we have cool-looking uniforms."

Bailey said, "We have no need for such things. We've left them behind."

Everyone turned to him.

"Then please explain how will you 'deal with' us?"

"I will destroy you with your own weapons."

"Rubbish!"

"Was it rubbish when I used your ship to bring us home from Mars? Was it rubbish when I used your tractor beam to bring Princess Sunni on board?"

Suddenly the aliens were silent.

"I can use your weapons against you, on your own ships."

The aliens shifted and looked at one another.

"That would be one way," said Bailey, in an offhand bark. "Another would be to direct your ships to fly into the Sun, just as I directed this one fly to Earth. Another would be to shut down your life support systems while you were in space."

"You cannot!" exclaimed the Captain.

Bailey looked at him.

"Maybe he can," said the alien at the navigation console.

"We have ships much bigger and more powerful than this one," said the Captain.

"So," said Bailey, "you're saying you'll put more firepower at my disposal?"

Another silence. Finally, the navigator said, "This may be what the humans call a... a 'Catch-22.'"

"Okay," said Sunni suddenly, "I've got places to be and beagles to see. You've been given your warning: Lay off the humans or else. You've seen a small demonstration of dog superiority.

"Now I want you to retrieve Junior, the human you have in captivity, and bring him to the tractor beam room. Arrange for him to wake up when he's released."

The Captain looked at the communications officer. The communications officer looked at the Captain. The Captain looked at the navigator. The navigator looked at the Captain. The navigator and the communications officer looked at each other. Then all three aliens swivelled their three eyes so they all looked at each other at the same time.

"Do as she says," said the Captain. The other two sprang to their feet.

"BJ!" said Bailey suddenly, *"the pickup truck! They're coming through the tractor beam room! Send the pickup truck down fast!"*

"I haven't figured out all these controls."

"Fast!" snapped Bailey.

The aliens approached the door.

"Oops," said BJ.

The door slid open.

"BJ!" cried Bailey.

"It's down," said BJ, and the aliens disappeared through the door.

"What happened?" asked Bailey.

"The hatch opened before I activated the tractor beam."

"What does that mean?"

"Let's just say the truck is down. Oh, and I don't want to keep it anymore.

I'm back in the environmental control room now."

A moment later BJ said, *"The aliens are getting out weapons!"*

"Reverse gravity!" ordered Bailey.

Suddenly the ceiling became "down." Sunni and Bailey turned in midair and landed on their feet.

"Humph," said Bailey. *"They make a big deal because cats land on their feet. It's not like it's hard to do."*

Captain Spondylitis didn't land as gracefully. In fact, he barely had time to get his arms up to avoid crashing on his head. Bailey padded over to where he lay.

"When I switch the gravity back, you will be so good as to instruct your men to abandon their weapons, and just bring Junior as instructed."

"How do you do that?" moaned the Captain.

"You wouldn't understand," said Bailey, and he returned to his place.

"Gravity back," he said.

The floor became "down" again. Sunni and Bailey turned and landed on their feet. The Captain crawled to his chair and pushed a button on the arm.

"Leave all weapons in the armory," he said. "Just bring the experimental subject to the tractor beam room."

A few minutes later the aliens returned.

"Junior is still unconcious," said BJ.

"I perceive that Junior is still unconscious," said Sunni. The aliens stared, again amazed. "When will he revive?"

"As soon as he exits the ship."

"Then I think it's time we made our departure. Minister Bailey?"

"You will remain in this room while we depart," said Bailey. "You will make no attempt to follow or hinder us."

And without so much as another look he jumped down and trotted around the room. He stopped by the console where Sunni was perched, stood at attention, and barked, "All rise." Hearing the aliens stand, he lifted his snout into the air:

"AaaaaaaROOOOOOOOOO!"

Sunni sprang to the floor. She left the room, the very picture of grace, with Bailey high-stepping behind her.

As soon as they entered the Tractor Beam room, they heard a shrieking alarm:

EeeerrrrWWWrrriitTT EeeerrrrWWWrrriitTT!

...and the lights were flashing. BJ was at the console, a look of panic on her face.

"What's going on?" asked Bailey.

"How should I know?" said BJ. *"How do you expect me to run this thing? I don't know what all these buttons do!"*

"Exactly what happened?"

"I pushed a green button. I thought, what harm can a green button do? Green means 'go.' Then another green button over here started flashing, so I pushed that."

"At what point," asked Bailey, "did it occur to you that, to these aliens, green might mean something other than 'go'?"

"When the alarm went off. I may have done something bad."

Bailey thought. *"We said we could.... Hmmm. And now we are. This may work out for the best."*

"BJ, can you tractor us down?"

"I think so."

"Then let's get out of here!"

Bailey and Sunni stood next to Junior, where he lay on the floor. BJ pushed some more buttons.

"Hey!" she said, "listen to this."

They heard Captain Spondylitis over the loudspeaker. He seemed to be on the radio to his home base:

"Stay away from Earth! It is not the humans! Earth is really ruled by a race with a technology so superior to ours you cannot even comprehend it! Stay away! Stay away! You will be destroyed if you do not! Classify this as a category three world -- too dangerous to approach. For Morpheus's sake, stay away!"

"Time to go," said Bailey. BJ pushed a button, and they were standing in the purple cone of light. Bailey's and Sunni's fur stood on end, and then they and Junior began to rise up off the floor.

"Oops," said BJ, *"that's up. This must be down."*

The floor slid open beneath them. They hovered in the purple beam. BJ bounded over the console and into the beam. They began to descend.

They lowered onto the bed of a smashed pickup truck. The purple light disappeared. It was still night. BJ looked up and saw only stars.

"The ship is cloaked," she said. "I don't know if that will muffle the explosion."

Bailey was sniffing. *"Based on the scents," he said, "we could be in Nepal. Or Malaysia. Or the western Sahara; or Suffolk, England; or Alaska."*

Sunni sniffed the air. *"Bailey, you nincompoop! We're only a few blocks from home."*

"Good job navigating, BJ!" said Bailey, jumping out of the truck. *"Now we need to run!"*

Junior stood up and rubbed his eyes. "Where am I?"

"How are we going to get Junior to run?" asked Sunni. *"He's so lazy he won't even change the channel on the TV."* (This was before TVs had remotes.)

Bailey looked around. *"By pretending to run across a street full of cars! Look! Headlights! There's a street over there."* Then he barked, "Run for it!"

The three beagles tore off in the direction of the street.

"Hey! Stop!" yelled Junior. "Stop! Come back!" He climbed out of the truck. "Mom will kill me if you get hit by a car!" He began to run, in the manner of someone who isn't used to running.

"It's working," said BJ, looking back. Then, "What's happened to Sunni?"

Bailey swerved and circled back. He found Sunni sniffing the entrance to a hole. "This is a rabbit hole!" she said. "I've never been able to chase a rabbit."

Bailey sniffed quickly. "It's a gopher tortoise's hole. You'd make a good turtle hunter, Sunni. NOW RUN!"

They ran. Suddenly there was a brilliant flash.

"Okay," said Bailey, "we've run enough."

All three beagles stopped and put their sniffers to the ground.

It turned out they'd been gone several hours. Their Mommy and Daddy were "worried sick," as they said over and over again. ("Don't they think we heard them already?" asked Sunni.) The police had been called. Everyone wanted to know where Junior had been. He had no idea. They didn't believe him.

The beagles kept a low profile. No one noticed until the next day that they were missing their collars and leashes.

"I want a new collar with diamonds," said Sunni. "That's what a Princess deserves! And I'd appreciate it if, in the future, you would refer to this as my palace, not just our house."

A few days later, Sunni noticed that BJ and Bailey were watching Junior as he got up from in front of the TV to get a soda.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"How do we know he's the real Junior?" Bailey asked. "How do we know they didn't switch him out? Or how do we know they didn't plant something in his mind?"

BJ said, "We'll just have to watch...."

THE END