

Star Beagle Adventures Episode 7: The Roundabout

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1118) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1118>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Fandom:	Star Trek: Multiple Series
Character:	Pel , Original Character(s)
Language:	English
Series:	Part 7 of Star Beagle Adventures
Stats:	Published: 2023-10-25 Completed: 2023-11-19 Words: 18,303 Chapters: 19/19

Star Beagle Adventures Episode 7: The Roundabout

by [LordRobertBruceScott](#)

Summary

The Beagle Task Force runs into some trouble at Roundabout Station...

Notes

Throughout this episode, snippets of lyrics are quoted. These are from the song, "Roundabout" by Steve Howe and Jon Anderson. The song first appeared as track 1 on "Fragile", the fourth album by the progressive rock band, YES, 1971, Atlantic Records. The song peaked at #13 on the Billboard Hot 100.

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 1: Signal Traffic

Chapter Summary

We stand to lose all time a thousand answers by in our hand...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 1: Signal Traffic

7.1

Signal Traffic

“Signal traffic indicates a large space station used by at least five separate species, at least three of whom are indigenous to the star system that is home to the station.”

Cultural Systems Team Leader China Lane had taken over analysis of potential first contact situations following the death of Dr. Arthur Rush. Lane did not have the front line experience or the history of negotiating treaties with recently contacted species that Dr. Rush had. But she was considerably older and had written a number of textbooks on the subject, making her easily the person with the most expertise. She had never held a position with the United Federation of Planets until being asked to serve with the U.S.S. Beagle’s faculty.

“It’s not so much a federation, more of a series of trading agreements that benefits all of these groups,” Lane continued. “Two of the three indigenous species are very closely related, having speciated within the past million years. At least that is what the genetic evidence tells us.”

“I’m not even going to ask how we obtained samples of their genetics from a probe located 2 light years outside their home star system,” Commodore Yui Song intoned. “So what is the level of their technology?”

The Beagle Task Force was in orbit of a gas giant in a star system about 70 light years distant from the system they were studying. The leadership of the task force, including Captain Rhonda Carter and Commodore Yui Song, were gathered in the Beagle’s executive conference room. The minuscule ferengi businessman, Trader Pel, was also present.

“From our probe readings, it seems that their best warp engines can manage Warp 2.5 in stable flight and can go up to 3.5 at flank speed,” opined the masked luchadore, the U.S.S. Beagle’s first officer and chief engineer, Commander Dutch Holland. “The majority of vessels have an effective upper limit of Warp 2.5. The remainder of their technology seems to be a comparable level. Oddly, they seem to have remained at this level of technology for well over a hundred years.”

“I was captivated by some of their mass media,” said Sakura Nakamura Holland, the U.S.S. Beagle’s Dean of Ship. “They appear to have a fascination with one-on-one unarmed combat. And they don’t seem too concerned with how badly they get hurt. People don’t die in the ring often, but they do get horribly mangled. I’m not sure how effective their medical system is...”

Dr. Uto had taken to carrying a large thermos of sog and sipping it through a small opening, which at least slightly blunted the impact of the horrible smell of this drink and allowed him to have it with him at all times. Following the incident with the QLock, Dr. Uto found he missed the relative mental silence of the Betazoid Royal School of Medicine - which had been bizarrely represented in his memories of the events that had not actually happened.

He was reminded of all of these conundrums with every sip of sog... “None of these species exhibit any familiarity with telepathy. I can hear their minds from here like a distant roar of the ocean and the cry of ocean birds.” Uto sighed heavily. “Millions of these people die from

conditions we long ago learned how to address... disease... accident..."

"You need to tread very carefully as you make contact with these people," said Trader Pel. "The knowledge in the head of any single person in this room, in this entire task force, any single one of us is a potential economic tsunami to these people. Any one of us could cause their entire economy to collapse. When you set foot on that station, the premature deaths of millions of these people, possibly hundreds of millions, steps onto that station with you."

"I should go first," Pel concluded.



SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 2: Aliens

Chapter Summary

One mile over, we'll be there and we'll see you...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 2: Aliens

7.2

Aliens

“Do you really think this is a good idea?”

Commodore Yui Song was more than a little doubtful about Captain Skip Howard’s endorsement of Pel’s bizarre and roundabout plan. One thing had become very clear - the minuscule ferengi had an enormous capacity for digesting vast amounts of information.

Skip Howard was amused. “I seem to recall a mission not too long ago when our bold, direct action led to the immediate self-destruction of a machine intelligence. And I recall a certain Star Fleet commodore saying that we need to do better...”

“Oohh - touche...” Yui Song grimaced. “I suppose from that viewpoint, Pel’s plan is very conservative. It just seems very risky for the personnel involved.”

“Pel wanted to go it alone,” Howard rejoined. “I’m thinking having an armed guard enhances his ploy in several ways.”

“And gives you some leverage,” Yui replied with an amused noise. “I was just amused at the visual - he just looked so tiny standing among those marines. But even as big as Sgt. Lone Wolf and that Soko kid are, are you sure six marines will be enough?”

Howard smiled. “If those six marines can’t handle it, sending in 20 or 30 marines isn’t likely to make things much better. And I’m sending Spike along. It’s a bit of a wrench, I prefer having her and her group detailed to me. But I trust her instincts and so does Chavez. They came up together.”

Abelind was a mid-level mining bureaucrat. That’s what his people were born for - born mid-level managers, bureaucrats, squadron to brigade military officers. And they had thick, rubbery skin, that was very useful for bureaucrats. Thick, rubbery skin; thick, rubbery lips; hairless, armor-plated heads, backs and bellies. Born bureaucrats. That’s what it meant to be orseld. Oules ruled. Eadh led. Orseld managed. Oeast worked. Heethed were tolerated and dealt with - the heethed often refused to recognize the natural, sacred order.

The ghoal mine was located on a distant moon on the far border of oules territory. The only reason anyone traveled to this star system was for the mass shipments of ghoal, a multi-purpose chemical that served as fuel and also an important building material.

Abelind’s miners were mostly oeast, but there were about a dozen heethed scattered among them. Abelind had a hard time telling the two apart. There were only two other orseld who worked in the mine - both of them junior administrators. One of them, Ephanistad, came into his office. It was clear she was unusually excited - an emotion that Abelind detested. Never get excited. Never let anyone know what you are thinking or feeling as it was so easy for such things to be used against you.

“We have strangers out here,” Ephanistad said.

Abelind didn’t demonstrate his rush of anxiety, maintaining the semblance of boredom that was the key to his success. Maybe his breath was just a little faster, his vocal pitch just a little higher: “Eadh?” He could tell from Ephanistad’s expression it was worse than that. “Oules?” Could it possibly be worse than one of those predators showing up at the mine?

Ephanistad was even more shaken than the sudden presence of the large, predatory oules would make her. Orselds were tough, armored, difficult for either the oules or eadh to seriously harm...

The junior administrator was out of breath with fear:

“Aliens...”

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 3: Working in a Ghoal Mine

Chapter Summary

Your silhouette will charge the view...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 3: Working in a Ghoal Mine

7.3

Working in a Ghoal Mine

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask for your weapons...”

Abelind had never been so nervous in his life. The tiny, self-described ferengi would have been unsettling enough. While Pel didn’t look like anything the mining director had ever seen, the ferengi did have the look of a grabler, a mythical magical mischievous miscreant... Some horrible little creature that had walked out of a fairy tale. But it was the six self-described marines that were truly unsettling. They looked too much like oeast or heethed. But really big, well fed, scary, heavily muscled and even more heavily armed heethed.

An orseld, Abelind had natural armor plating on his head, his back and his belly. His race were not really fighters, but they were extremely tough and difficult to harm. The expressions on the faces of the marines told him they were quite confident their weapons were more than adequate to the task of severely harming him in very short order. Abelind could not keep his thick, rubbery lips from quivering or his large, round eyes from watering.

“If you are afraid, then I suggest you ask them very, very nicely,” said Trader Pel. “And be prepared to take “no” for an answer.”

Abelind had no clue how to respond to this. The marines were not behaving in a threatening manner. Their rather nasty-looking weapons were clipped to the front of their uniforms and they were not brandishing them. But each marine was resting a hand on top of some sort of carbine and it was clear they could become deadly at a moment’s notice.

Pel turned to the leader of the marines, not the biggest, but decorations on their uniforms seemed to designate a hierarchy. “Lieutenant Pushkin, it is a little crowded in Director Abelind’s office. Could you designate one marine to stay with me and, perhaps, ensure our privacy from the outer office?”

Without breaking eye contact with Pel, 2nd. Lt. Iov Pushkin said, “Spike, stay.” He then turned and led the other marines out of Abelind’s office.

The mining director was relieved only for a moment. The marine called Spike was the smallest of the marines and evidently female. But her relaxed stance and expression, the way she positioned her weapon, everything about her attitude screamed “KILLER!” in capital letters with an exclamation mark. He was far from certain that things had improved for him.

The minuscule ferengi businessman, by contrast, was completely relaxed. “Let’s talk elevators.”

“Elevators?” Abelind’s mind was on nasty-looking weapons and people who looked like they belonged as his inferiors behaving as if they were the apex predators in the galaxy. He was far from certain that they weren’t.

“Your workers drive large carts through narrow passages to carry massive amounts of ghoal up from your mines,” Pel continued. “They do this because the freight elevators break down every time you try to use them for the purpose they were designed for. Well, designed is probably too strong a word. Designated for.”

“The elevators are used for carrying workers, supplies and equipment down into the mines,” Abelind retorted. “They were never used for carrying payloads up.”

“Of course they were,” Pel responded. “They just kept breaking down every time because this particular mine is located on a moon, not an

asteroid. So the elevators that are easily adequate for carrying raw ghoul in other facilities, are completely inadequate here. But what if they weren't?"

"What are you getting at?" Abelind's brain was slowly getting into gear.

"Every 10th orbit of this moon around that gas giant out there..." Pel pointed at what appeared to Abelind a random spot on one of the walls of his office, near the floor. Had he known it, he might have realized the small businessman was pointing directly at the current location of the planet about which this moon revolved. "Every 10th orbit, you load 7 freighters with raw ghoul. What if you were able to load 8 in that amount of time? Would that benefit you?"

Abelind's feeble imagination went into overdrive. There would definitely be a reduction in the regular death threats from his overseers. And there was a bonus system in place that he would almost certainly benefit from. His eyes started to gleam a little and while he didn't forget about the bored-looking, trained killer slouching against a corner wall in his office, she suddenly took up far less of his attention.

"Now I'm a deal maker, not a miracle worker," said Pel. "What I want is one of your shuttles. In return for which, I will connect you with a team of people who will, within 5 orbits, rebuild your elevators with far greater tolerances. But they will want something as well."

"Why isn't a shuttle enough?" asked the suspicious, but newly ambitious mining director.

"The shuttle is my fee for connecting you with these people. I am the gate keeper. Without me, there is no deal. But what they will want is different. They care about the condition of your workers. You will need to be prepared to reduce their hours, improve their living conditions and their diets, and provide some other concessions - but these people will provide you with the means to accomplish all of that and still improve your own living conditions even more..."

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 4: Roofing Material

Chapter Summary

I'll be the roundabout...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 4: Roofing

7.4

Roofing

“I thought you said we could cause an economic tsunami,” Spike mused.

“I’m really pleased you were listening,” Pel responded. “Sakura’s engineers will need to be very careful that none of the natives see what they’re doing to those elevators. We won’t be giving them any technology they don’t already have. In 20 years, they could take those elevators apart and not find any evidence of advanced technology. What is revolutionary is how fast those improvements will be made. Nakamura Enterprises will be using advanced technology, well, radically advanced as far as these people are concerned, to make those upgrades. So the contamination danger comes not with the improvements themselves, but with any chance that the natives might see how those improvements are being accomplished...”

Spike and Pel were in the U.S.S. Puppy, which was towing Pel’s new shuttle. It was a large vehicle, designed for carrying mining supplies and even small payloads. It was neither the best nor the worst shuttle available, but was not currently spaceworthy and had been left derelict for decades. Spike and the other marines were surprised the mining director had been willing to part with even a non-functional shuttle just to get the elevator project started. Pel had explained to them the relative economics from the director’s point of view, but the economics went well over everyone’s head. Which Pel, frankly, found astonishing - ferengi children would understand these concepts intuitively. He sometimes found himself wondering how humans had managed to make it into space at all.

Not only had Abelind provided a shuttle, but he also, in return for a taste of several exotic foods, had thrown in a small shipment of raw ghoal.

“I actually understood all that,” said Spike. “So how are Sakura’s engineers going to make sure the locals don’t find out about all the advanced tech they’re using to fix those elevators?”

Pel laughed. “They’re Nakamura Enterprises engineers. Corporate secrets, ultra-high tech espionage, and general skulduggery are their stock in trade. Star Fleet could learn a trick from them.” Pel made an amused noise. “The Ferengi Commerce Authority could learn a trick from them. But they’re not sharing. That’s the one thing they don’t do.”

“So what is the value of all that nasty smelling tar in the back of your new shuttle?” asked Spike.

“Not very much to the vast majority of people in this system,” Pel rejoined. “Ghoal has to be refined and it takes a lot of that stuff to make an amount of either fuel or building plastics to be of economically significant value. No merchant is going to purchase that payload - it’s an insignificant amount. Which is why there’s no effort to provide security at these mines.”

“I know you have a plan for that stuff, though,” said Spike.

Pel laughed. “I can see why Skip Howard likes you. Yes, that ghoal is very valuable to us. I’m giving a quarter ton of it to Sakura and her engineers to study. If we get in trouble and need to leverage some serious economic power, it could be very helpful to have a new refining technique to barter with.”

“I thought you were worried about creating an economic tsunami...” Spike prodded.

“Backup planning only,” Pel rejoined. “In a pinch it would be better to leverage economic power than military power. I’m far from certain

which would be more dangerous to them in the long run. But it's always best to have some soft power options in case things go horribly wrong. And with these people, especially given the nature of their society I've been able to discern so far, there are a lot of ways that first contact with them can go horribly wrong both for them and for us."

"Okay," said Spike. "So what do you plan to do with the other ton and a half or so of that stuff?"

The minuscule ferengi smiled. "When I was researching the coin of this realm, it became obvious that their entire economy runs on ghoal. So I became a ghoal expert - I studied everything about it that I could find in their radio traffic. And there is a lot to be found. The substance was created by an unusual stellar event - a sort of failed super-nova well over 2 billion years ago. The stellar explosion created the chemical and sent billions of tons of it into the local systems."

Pel gestured toward the port and stern of the craft. "That moon we just left is almost entirely made of the stuff. But ghoal was first discovered on a planet colonized almost exclusively by the heethed. The local farmers used it for a roofing material. They made the mistake of trading a small amount of it to interstellar merchants, who discovered it was a powerful fuel source and within 20 years, millions of miners pretty much destroyed the local ecology and removed almost the entire planetary store of it. Even taking the roofs off of the houses and barns of the local farmers."

"Which means?" Spike asked.

"Which means there are a large number of farmers on the planet Gheethal who would really like to have a few tons of ghoal for roofing. There are better materials, but they can no longer afford those materials. The merchants who sell those materials don't think it's worth their while to drag a shipment of refined ghoal to a remote planet to trade for a pile of agricultural products from a grumbly lot of suspicious farmers."

"Not worth their while, but worth yours?" Spike asked.

"It's an old ferengi business strategy," Pel replied. "Build a network of customers and business partners and leverage those relationships. Economic diversity within such a network is a strength. Especially if you are the one and only person that those disparate economic actors have in common."

"Which is why your shuttle is going to Gheethal," Spike concluded.

"We'll dock with Beagle first, to offload some cargo, make the ship operational, and pick up a few other items that might be helpful in developing a relationship with the farmers of Gheethal," said Pel.

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 5: One Big Pile

Chapter Summary

Call it morning driving through the sound and in and out the valley...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 5: One Big Pile

7.5

One Big Pile

Pel named his new shuttle simply: Pel's Shuttle. He called in a marker from archeologist Arizona Kind, who was a capable graphic artist, to paint the words (in the Eadh language) "Pel's Shuttle" along with a quite flattering portrait on the port and starboard sides near the shuttle's bow. Just for fun, Arizona also painted a large mural that wrapped around the stern of the shuttle and covered the rear half of the port and starboard sides with a collage of stylized landscapes from the desert state she had been conceived in and named for.

This intense decoration made the shuttle look much more high end than it actually was... And the upgrades provided by Nakamura Enterprises - nothing that wasn't currently available to the local civilizations, but as good as anything the locals might be able to obtain, transformed it into, not a top end shuttle, but more of a jalopy that had been overhauled and souped up to the point of being possibly more valuable than most indigenous shuttlecraft.

The appearance of Pel's souped up shuttle might not have provided the optimal first impression for the suspicious farmers of Gheethal. Nearly the entire population was heethed, humanoids with skin tones very much like humans, although significantly shorter and much thinner on average.

Their noses were much flatter, with nostrils to the side instead of downward, their eyes somewhat larger and their hair was much more like fur, coming all the way down, covering their foreheads until it joined with very bushy eyebrows. Their ears were reminiscent of cat's ears, located closer to the top of their heads, moving independently both to catch distant sounds and express emotions.

Of the five major species that made up the Oulheadhry, the heethed were very much the lowest caste. Not that they behaved as if they were - most heethed rejected the caste system imposed by the other species and had, over the decades, proven more than capable of making enough trouble that they were largely left to their own devices and were more tolerated than included within the Oulheadhry social structure.

The landing of Pel's Shuttle on the outskirts of the village was met with suspicion. It had been so long since the last shuttle landing that the landing pad had been completely grown over. The sky was dark and cloudy at mid-day and rain had gone from pelting to drizzling before the ferengi businessman exited his craft.

In order to not panic the locals, Pel took only Spike with him to conduct negotiations with the quite suspicious farmers.

The buildings were in bad shape, largely because of the patchy condition of the roofing. The rain was incessant, often torrential, and rather acidic, meaning that without a protective coating, the roofing needed constant replacement.

On learning that Pel's Shuttle contained more than enough raw ghoal to repair every roof in the area and still leave quite a bit for trade with other villages, negotiations were abandoned as the villagers came out and rushed the shuttle. None of the villagers attempted to take Pel hostage. Spike's well-armed and competent appearing presence may have helped dissuade them from any such attempt. The negotiators simply joined the throng rushing toward the shuttle.

It became necessary for the 5 marines who had remained with the shuttle to provide a show of force.

Beam weapons were rare within the Oulheadhry, and were usually only carried by the oules.

Instead of ordering phasers to be set to stun, out of concern that the use of non-lethal force might start a panic, 2nd. Lt. Iov Pushkin instructed his marines to tune their phasers to a very high, tightly focused cutting beam and to clear a circle around the shuttle landing pad, creating a ditch around the pad about 5” wide and nearly a half-meter deep.

With the incessant rain, it took only seconds for the narrow ditch to become a miniature moat. Pel and Spike stepped across this mini-moat to join the other marines.

“I came to trade with you,” Pel said loudly. “Not to be robbed by you. So I must recommend for your safety that you not cross this line.” He indicated the trench-moat that the marine phasers and the incessant rain had conspired to create around his shuttle.

The villagers reluctantly returned to negotiations, which Pel now required to be conducted outdoors in the rain. A table and chairs were brought to the trench line, a few villagers designated to negotiate on behalf of the village and the shuttle’s navigational deflectors were extended to shield the marines, Pel, and his negotiating partners, from the ever-present rain.

It took the minuscule ferengi only a few hours of negotiation and the villagers a few hours of heavy labor to exchange the half-load of ghoal in the back of the brightly painted shuttle for a full load of...

manure... tons and tons of manure...

None of the marines seemed enthused about getting back into the shuttle for a trip that would take several hours.

It was Spike who put into words the cogent observation that was on all of their minds. She was shaking her head slowly, looking at the new cargo as the villagers finished filling the hold to its limit:

"Now that's one big pile of shit..."

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 6: Feathered Nuptials

Chapter Summary

I spend the day your way...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: [The Roundabout](#)

Scene 6: [Feathered Nuptials](#)

7.6

Feathered Nuptials

“Okay, I think I’m starting to get it,” mused Lance Corporal Petra Spitz.

Even with the hold of Pel’s Shuttle first being thoroughly washed and aired out, the entire atmosphere exchanged, and the hold even more full of some of the most interesting and pleasant-smelling flowers Spike and her fellow marines had ever encountered, the rich, loamy, unsettling barnyard smell of manure had still occasionally wafted throughout the cabin.

The U.S.S. Mako had carried Pel’s Shuttle and its small crew at Warp 9 from the Choutbro system on one edge of the Oulheadhry to Edzella, the home planet of the eadh, on the other extreme, in less than a day. A trip that would have taken any normal shuttle months.

The U.S. Marines had been met by a force of 3,333 eadh warriors, decked in brightly colored leather armor. Like the heethed, the eadh were, on average, about 5’0”, considerably shorter and smaller than average for humans. The similarity ended there... While they did not have wings, the eadh resembled birds in many ways. Instead of teeth and lips, their beak-like mouths, while flexible, were hard and had layers of serrated ridges on the inside. Their eyes were widely placed and their heads, arms and legs sported large, brightly colored, fully fledged feathers. The rest of their bodies were covered with a layer of fine, downey feathering, including their faces.

This feathering reflected different colors depending on how the individual feathers were turned, and the this color shifting reflected subtle shifts in mood. The mood today was delighted. Pel was paid extravagantly in coins and some sort of paper currency in return for his payload of brilliant, freshly cut and arranged flowers, making the wedding of the regent of the largest continent on Edzella to her fifth husband, the most splendid ceremony in living memory - or documented history.

Lance Corporal Petra Spitz was standing next to Pel, who was seated on a high stool at a table designed for people slightly taller than Pel to stand at and take food. This table was located in a reviewing stand some distance from the royal veranda that had served as the focal point for the wedding ceremony. Considering the thousands of well armed and evidently expertly and exhaustively drilled eadh soldiers, neither Pel nor 2nd. Lt. Iov Pushkin, nor any of the other marines had any desire to be closer to the nuptials.

“One man’s garbage is another man’s treasure,” Spike opined. “Or in this case a big pile of shit turned out to be really valuable as fertilizer for flowers...”

“You’re close,” Pel replied. “The greatest profits accrue to the conduit for the flow of goods and services from the greatest surplus to the greatest effective demand.”

“Is that one of the Rules of Acquisition?” Spike asked.

The diminutive ferengi shook his head. “The Grand Nagus Rom’s Commentary on Rules #3, 5, 7, 9, and, most importantly, 22.” He looked from side to side, then leaned in to whisper conspiratorially, “That actually comes from his mother. She’s the one with the lobes for business. But you didn’t hear that from me...”

Spike got a wicked gleam in her eyes: “Are you saying the Nagus isn’t all that bright?”

“Quite the reverse,” Pel retorted. “Rule #11: Never hesitate to profit from the labor and creativity of other people. But do not claim their creations as your own, unless you can get away with it.”

As they were speaking, an unusually powerfully built eadh approached their table.

Pel leaned toward Spike: "Rule 46. Beware of the shrewd customer..."

Nalconi had unusually brilliant blue plumage and a bright green vertical stripe painted on his beak-like mouth. His uniform was brilliant white with crimson epaulettes. The use of camouflage by the marines seemed quite strange to him. His eyes were black with white irises and black pupils, creating an unsettling effect. He was carrying a large, blue satchel.

"Trader Pel..."

"Martial Nalconi," Pel responded.

"You did not disappoint," Nalconi replied. "The flower arrangement you provided was easily the most splendid on record since the great climate shift. And Her Excellency noticed and rewarded me, as you predicted. Which triggers the bonus clause in our contract."

The eadh courtier placed the satchel on the table. "You do want to count this?"

"It will be counted," said Pel. "Just not here at this table. You and I should make a show of trusting each other. Even if it is only for the benefit of onlookers."

"I have never had dealings with a self-described businessman," responded Nalconi. "So I am unsure of the proper order of things."

"And I have never had dealings with a royal martial," Pel smiled. "So we are both making this up as we go along."

Nalconi rolled his head, then shook it quickly, causing the bright blue feathers on his head to fluff out. "Your shuttle could not possibly move fast enough to have brought those flowers here from Choutbro before they reached full bloom. Your engines are not different from any I have ever seen. And these splendid, if strangely decorated warriors, are not your personal guard. They are here as much to watch over you as to protect you..."

"Nothing escapes your eye, Martial," Pel confirmed. "These marines are the representatives of my business partners. And while a margin of the payment for my role in this ceremony is reimbursement for my effort, the vast majority of it is due to my business partners."

"For getting you here from Choutbro in less than a day when for any ship made in the Oulheadhry, that voyage would take many a week. Your partners own a fast ship. A ship large enough to carry your shuttle as cargo. A shuttle that until 5 days ago belonged to a minor orseld bureaucrat and was not spaceworthy. But now is as fine a vessel as any in the Oulheadhry. Your partners are exceptional engineers and artists. And, if I am any judge, deadly and exceptionally well-armed warriors. I am correct?"

"I would not say that they are warriors, but rather that they have a small, very professional military force and they can take care of themselves when pressed to do so," Pel responded. "They describe themselves as peaceful explorers. They are relying on me to develop relationships with potential business partners among your people."

Nalconi's head feathers turned slightly, revealing more crimson. His pupils dilated and he leaned in toward the minuscule ferengi. "So what is their purpose? Are they looking to expand into the Oulheadhry?"

"That would not be to their advantage," said Pel. "Far more advantageous to trade with a stable business partner than to expend resources that are needed elsewhere trying to subjugate a populace that includes a superb warrior race such as yourselves. I think they should look upon you as potentially very valuable allies."

"So you are not a hostile scout?" Nalconi asked.

"My role is to ensure that my partners do not inadvertently destabilize the Oulheadhry," said Pel.

"Diplomat and businessman?" asked Nalconi.

"Diplomacy and commerce are inextricably intertwined," Pel opined.

"You are going to Roundabout station," Nalconi stated. It was not a question. "These docking vouchers will be very useful to you." He patted the satchel and nudged it toward Pel. "Be very careful on that station. Things there are far less stable than anywhere else in the Oulheadhry. Order is not to be found in many places. You have been very, very useful to me, Trader Pel. I hope you will be useful to me again in the future. I will not come to your aid on that station, but you may use my name for whatever doors my name might open for you."

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 7: Pel's Exchange

Chapter Summary

The words will make you out and out...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 7: Pel's Exchange

7.7

Pel's Exchange

It had taken a few months for everyone to get used to Pel's marker system. It would have been a horrible mess without Pel's guidance. And it would have been a horrible mess without the rules committee, which consisted of Commodore Yui Song, Captains Skip Howard and Rhonda Carter, Major Janet Carter, and Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland... And, of course, Trader Pel.

Each person could request up to three markers from another individual for favors to be provided at a later time - when the marker would be called in. All exchanges were recorded and the entire system was available for everyone to view via Pel's Exchange, which updated continuously. The system noted who owed a marker to whom, but did not explain the basis for the exchange.

A set of arbitrary rules, unofficially known as Pel's Rules, was designed and updated periodically to keep the market friendly. No person could carry a negative balance of more than 9 markers at any time. And if there was any dispute, both parties were required to surrender their markers to Pel, who would immediately call the markers in and always managed to find an acceptable resolution. Pel held that good will was also of economic value - and he had certainly managed to amass quite a store of it.

Pel was explaining to Commodore Yui Song the strange web of business relationships he had developed that had caused the task force to carry his shuttle from one system to another: Elevator improvements traded for ghoal and a locally built shuttlecraft from the Ghoal moon, the ghoal traded for high quality manure from the farms of Gheethal, which was of no great commercial value to anyone except the florists of Choutbro, a planet located nearly 20 light years away.

The flowers weren't of great local value, but in the high courts of Ead, 18 lightyears away, the freshness of the displays Pel was able to mysteriously provide netted 80,000 Eadhels (a considerable amount of spending power) and, more importantly 1700 docking hour chits for Roundabout Station.

"I will leave 60,000 eadhels and 1500 docking chits with the task force," said Pel. "You have to understand that this is a significant amount of wealth. A single chit will provide one docking hour for any of our shuttles. Docking any of your ships for an hour would cost 10 chits."

Pel was looking up at Commodore Yui Song, standing next to Pel's Shuttle, which was docked in the U.S.S. Mako's secondary shuttlebay. Pel was looking up at the commodore because, at about 5'7", the elderly Chinese woman was about 9" taller than the minuscule ferengi trader. Behind them, U.S. Marines were offloading 60 small, but heavy cases, each containing 1,000 eadhel coins.

"Of course, given your beaming technology, you wouldn't have to dock. But none of these people have transporter technology. And even letting them know such a thing exists could cause that economic tsunami we were talking about..."

"Our plan is to keep our ships well out of scanning range from the station," Commodore Yui responded. "You have done exceptionally well, Pel. It will be 18 hours before we arrive in the Roundabout system. I'm sure you need some down time."

"Once this mission is complete, if you're willing to give me a berth here, I plan to remove my quarters to the shuttle," Pel replied. "But for now, I'm very much looking forward to a big plate of tube grubs and a long nap." He yawned widely, then: "And not necessarily in that order."

Yui Song smiled at the minuscule ferengi businessman as he walked away. She was surprised that she had become rather fond of him. She looked up at his marine escort. "Lieutenant Pushkin, your team has performed well. It will be another 18 hours before the next leg of your

mission. Transporter room 5 is on standby to return you to the U.S.S. Beagle.”

The marines stood at attention and saluted. “Thank you sir,” 2nd. Lt. Iov Pushkin replied.

Pel was already exiting the shuttlebay en route to his quarters...

Only to find Captain Skip Howard in his quarters waiting for him.

“Captain,” Pel said, rather exhaustedly, “to what do I owe the honor?”

“You can take the ears off, Pel. You’ve had them on for days. I’m sure they’re hurting by now,” Howard responded.

Pel sank into a chair. Captain Howard brought over an instrument that somewhat resembled a dermal regenerator. “Shall I?”

The tiny ferengi leaned forward, elbows on knees. Made an exhausted noise, then a heavy sigh. “Go ahead, Skip.”

Skip Howard deftly and carefully unsealed the prosthetics that adhered the large ears to Pel’s head, revealing the smaller ears of a ferengi female. Pel sighed heavily in relief and massaged her ears gently as Howard carefully stored the large prosthetics in a case that was designed not only to store but also to repair the edges of the prosthetic appliances.

“Would you like for me to disrobe too? Become the compliant little ferengi female?” Pel asked with some asperity.

“You know that won’t work on me,” Howard replied. “I told you a long time ago, you cannot lie to me.” Howard produced a dermal regenerator and used it to treat the pink and irritated parts of Pel’s ears and scalp where the prosthetics had been anchored, causing the small ferengi to sigh in relief.

Howard took a seat across from Pel and regarded her with a look of admonishment. “You’ve been avoiding me like the plague, which means you’re hiding something. Something you really don’t want me to know about. There’s something about the Roundabout station that you’re not telling me about. Something that will put my people at risk. You have to know I will never accept that.”

“This would be so much simpler if you were to allow me to go there on my own,” Pel said, with some small amount of heat.

“Can’t risk that,” Howard said.

“I am a free actor,” Pel replied. “You have no legal right to stop me.”

“Except to prevent the development of threats to the Federation or to local cultures,” Howard retorted. “It is in our contract.”

Pel sighed heavily again. “Okay. Okay, I’ll tell you. But then I want you to put yourself in my place before you make a decision whether or not to let me go...”

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 8: Onboarding

Chapter Summary

They make the children really ring...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 8: Onboarding

7.8

Onboarding

“So why didn’t you tell us this was about the ancient history of your people? You have to know puzzles like this are candy to Captain Howard.”

Lance Corporal Petra Spitze was unhappy with Trader Pel. Skip Howard had taken Spike aside for a long conversation and given her a sense of Pel’s point of view. But Spike was still upset that Pel had not trusted her or, more importantly, Captain Howard, enough to trust him with what he had learned about from his extremely detailed study of the cultural records out of the immense radio transmission produced by five separate species.

“I’m sorry, Spike. And I’ve apologized to Skip, too,” Pel replied. “When you have made a lifetime of hiding, well, pretty much everything... That and we ferengi are trained to not trust other species. Especially humans. And especially people who want to be trusted.”

“Rules of Acquisition,” Spike said. There was a sound of disgust in her voice.

“That,” said Pel. “That right there. You humans try to hide your prejudices from yourselves, but a little scratch and out they come.” Pel sighed. “Look, most ferengi don’t understand the Rules. They think they’re rules to be followed. Some sort of guide for living.”

Curiosity, hurt, and suspicion battled for dominance in Spike’s mind. Curiosity won. “So they’re not a guide for living?”

“No,” Pel replied. “They’re a collection of observations on how people behave. What they’re really like at heart. And they hold true for more than ferengi. They’re even true for you humans. You try to be better than them, you really try. But when that thin veneer of a few hundred years of civilization gets stripped away, those rules are who you are. They’re how you behave. You study the rules to understand yourself. They’re not who you should be. They’re just who you are. Who you really are.”

Spike let this sink in for a few moments. Then: “I’m not prejudiced against ferengi...”

“Of course you are,” Pel interrupted. A calm voice and a kind look in his eyes. “You try, you really try to be better than that. And that means a lot. It really does. It actually means more than if you weren’t prejudiced to begin with.” Pel sighed again. “You know that ferengi society is male dominated. But long ago, it was a matriarchy. We were a very, very different people back then. Most of that history has been deliberately erased. We know so very little about the people we once were.”

Pel lifted a small reader, started displaying a number of images of drawings and sculptures of faces and creatures that looked vaguely like ferengi. “These people have ancient legends of a female-led species that contacted them in ancient times. Even more ancient than our legends say the old matriarchy was. Who knows how many times our culture rose and fell. Is it possible that my ancestors got all the way out here and contacted these people?”

“But why Roundabout Station?” Spike asked.

“This station wasn’t built all at once. It accumulated over centuries. And at the very heart of it, the oldest part of the station... The legends say it was built by a mythical people called the grablers. All the artwork makes them out to look like ferengi. Female ferengi...”

It was less than an hour later that Pel's shuttle docked at what translated to Starboard Docking Port 561-12. Private First Class Guz Maxwell drew the short straw and remained onboard with Chief Flight Specialist Ho River, who had piloted the shuttle. It was 20 minutes before Trader Pel, 2nd Lt. Iov Pushkin, Sgt. Chavez Lone Wolf, Lance Corporal Petra Spitze, and Privates First Class Randa Habib and Sasha Soko were allowed to disembark the shuttle and board Roundabout Station.

The shuttle was docked inside a cargo bay, allowing the rear of the shuttle to be opened for efficient loading of mass product. Each ship in this dock had its own space door and was sealed off from the remainder of the dock except during loading. The marines that came onto the station with Pel were stopped at a check station operated by a single orseld, who inspected the weapons the marines were carrying and checked Pel to verify the ferengi trader was unarmed.

Pel paid for weapons licenses for the marines. Each was carrying a bullpup, a type 1 phaser and a U.S. Marine issue knife. Licensing for these was 100 eadhels per weapon for a 9-day period. Pel's willingness to part with 1500 eadhels marked him as dangerously wealthy.

Pel also paid for the shuttle to remain docked for 15 hours while he bargained for a number of refined products that would be useful for the task force, including refined deuterium, drive plasma, carbon filters, high tensile carbon fibre, and various medical products as well as a variety of cultural products, foods, replicas of artifacts, and a number of databases.

The marketers of these products were almost all oeast, working from a bank of small offices located a little further inside the station. These offices and docks were the newest parts of the station and had a grimy, but not run-down appearance.

Once these items were loaded onto the shuttle, Chief Ho undocked to return these to the task force, leaving Pel and the small squad of marines to find quarters aboard Roundabout Station, thence to seek out the most ancient part of the station, buried under layer after layer of construction.

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 9: The Teachers

Chapter Summary

We stand surrounded by a million years...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 9: The Teachers

7.9

The Teachers

Roundabout Station was dominated by the oeast - who shared common ancestry with the heethed. Oeast were considerably taller, on average slightly less tall than humans, and had far more human features. About the only difference was their hair was more fur-like and their cat-like ears placed higher on their heads.

All of the other species were represented on the rambling, ancient space station, although Pel and the marines never caught a glimpse of the oules, but by far the majority were oeast. There was little evidence that the caste system that prevailed throughout most of the Oulheadhry was tolerated by the oeast here. This was their place.

And the heartbeat of this spacebound city of well over a million people was the games.

Gaming fields were scattered throughout the sprawling space station, but the grand tournaments were held in what was referred to as the Sacred Quarter. General tickets to the Sacred Quarter for the great contests were quite expensive, but a full quarter of the general seating was freely available to oeast (and oeast only) by a free lottery.

Pel paid 1,500 eadhels to procure a private box for himself and the marines that would allow them to view the games both close up and in a secure location.

The private box came with a guided tour of the Sacred Quarter, which was the primary reason Pel had parted with that much money. Another reason was that the Sacred Quarter was located in one of the oldest parts of Roundabout Station.

As they walked deeper into the station, there was a definite feeling of walking deeper into antiquity. There were areas that were closed off due to the floors being too dangerous to walk on. Rust was evident in some areas (not a welcome sight on a space station). The construction became more and more primitive, with more exposed welds, more exposed bolts and rivets, and older building materials.

Before reaching the Sacred Quarter, the away team passed out of smooth, plasteel construction into more and more sections made from ancient metal. Air recycling systems became more obvious. In some areas, large fans had been installed in the corridors to route air through the corridors apparently because the original duct work was clogged. Plumbing had also been re-routed through some of the corridors, apparently because the original interior plumbing lines had either become unusable or were being used for some other purpose. A patchwork of temporary engineering solutions had become permanent.

Broad corridors gave way to more congested corridors and foot-traffic jams, sometimes with people uncomfortably compressed. At least with the heavily armed marines, and especially with the largest two - Private First Class Sasha Soko, at 6'4" and 240 pounds, up front and Sergeant Chavez Lone Wolf, at 6'6" and 275 muscular pounds, bringing up the rear, Pel's team was given room.

At a few very congested points, loud announcements instructed the oeast and others to stop and either move back or turn sideways to prevent people from being crushed. In many areas even Lance Corporal Petra Spitze was forced to duck and bend to get through areas that had initially been designed to walk through, but had become extremely constricted due to piping. This was not a place for anyone who had issues with claustrophobia.

The crowding thinned out as the group entered the Sacred Quarter. In part because this area was far more open in construction and in part because Pel's group were arriving hours before the gaming events in order to go through the guided tour.

It turned out that Pel and the marines were not the only aliens at Roundabout Station as a group of 11 large, crab-like creatures, each with 4 legs and 2 very large hands, eyes on stalks in addition to antennae, were added to their tour group. It took several minutes, a fair amount of admonishments, curses, threats, and finally a bit of slapping and shoving on behalf of both Sgt. Lone Wolf and PFC Sasha Soko, as well as their oeast guides, to convince these crab-like aliens to keep their very large hands to themselves.

Throughout this ordeal, the oeast guides kept stealing glances at Pel.

“What can you tell me about these...” Pel paused to count... “17 large sculptures of heads looking down into the stadium?”

The tour had finally entered the stadium proper - a vast space with sand-covered floors - the metal ceiling apparently supported by 17 large, metal columns, each with a giant sculpted head apparently growing out of the top of the column and looking down into the stadium. Heads that looked distinctly like ferengi with small ears - ferengi females.

There had been several other displays that included similar designs and the oeast tour guides had already appeared disconcerted to have a member of the tour who so closely resembled the “Teachers” as they were referred to.

“The games were taught to us and originally sponsored by the Teachers,” replied one of the guides. “With physical competition, we reach the greatest possible expression of our forms. The teachers were very small in stature, but were so skilled in physical combat that they could take down even the oules. The goal of sacred combat was not to kill, but to subdue and control. In learning to master others, we achieve mastery of ourselves.”

“I am interested in these teachers,” said Pel. “Is there a database or some information store where I could learn more about them?”

All of the oeast were now looking at Pel in open wonderment. Pel’s superior hearing picked up the sound of one in the back whispering to another: “It’s a test...”

“It is not a test,” Pel responded, alarming the guide who had been whispering. “You are not the only ones who have noticed the resemblance. He touched the edges of his ears. My people developed faster than light travel a very long time ago. If some of them came to this place, they would have been very, very far from home.”

“I must speak to the keepers of the Sacred Texts,” said one of the guides. “They will be very interested in your presence here. Until then, we have arrived at your boxes, so please, enjoy the games.”

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 10: Sacred Games

Chapter Summary

Of distant atmospheres....



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 10: Sacred Games

7.10

Sacred Games

Pel and the marines were relieved that their private box was separated from the private box the large-handed, crab-like aliens had purchased. Even with a nearly violent confrontation, it had still taken constant vigilance and the occasional, well-delivered jab to convince their fellow tour-group to keep their quite large and intrusive hands to themselves.

Most of the marines, along with nearly everyone else in the Beagle task force, had been keeping up with the broadcasts of the games. For most of the station's solar year (equivalent to just under 2 terrestrial years) competitors only fought members of their own species. Heethed fought heethed. Oeast fought oeast. Orseld fought orseld. Eadh fought eadh. Oules fought oules.

But the year was divided into five roughly equal segments, and every fifth, the champions from each species would meet each other. And Pel had chosen such a day to attend the Sacred Games.

The first contest pitted the heethed champion against the oeast champion. Looking at the two, it hardly seemed a fair matchup. The oeast champion was the largest of his species they had yet seen, almost as big as Private First Class Sasha Soko. The heethed champion was average size for his people - possibly 5 feet tall. But he was fast.

This created an odd mismatch. The oeast simply could not get a grip on his small, lightning fast opponent. The heethed tried any number of holds on his large, muscular opponent, but simply did not have the mass to move the oeast or lock him up.

But this contest was much more than well-regulated combat. It was a show.

Most of the crowd were oeast, and they cheered when the large oeast took a moment to stride around the ring, beating his chest and raising his fists to show off a powerful, muscular body, naked save only for some protective gear covering his genitalia.

As many cheered when the similarly naked, skinny, but wiry heethed took a moment to race from one corner of the ring to another to leap with grace and agility up onto a post, throw his hands in the air and open his mouth to hiss through an impressive collection of fangs.

After nearly a half-hour of this, the heethed champion managed to trip his opponent and pounced on top of him, trying to pin him down, and nearly succeeding for a dramatic moment before the large, muscular oeast reversed and spent several minutes pinning down his slippery, wiry nemesis. It took several minutes as the heethed did not give up and kept trying to scramble out from under his much heavier opponent, being blocked by one move or another until the two were tangled into a single knot with the heethed champion pinned underneath.

During the entire fight it became clear that Sgt. Chavez Lone Wolf and PFC Sasha Soko were both intensely interested in the fighting style and they kept up a running commentary on each move, how the two champions reacted to muscle and joint locks, indicating physiological differences from humans as well as potential weaknesses.

The second match pitted a relatively small, feathered eadh against a large, rubbery, heavily armored orseld. Again, it seemed like an uneven match. And it was...

In the first moment of the match, the eadh champion, who had entirely white feathering with crimson edges, leapt up and forward and struck the orseld in the face with his hardened stomach, knocking the orseld onto his back. The eadh flipped in mid-air, performing a full spin and landed on his feet, then pranced around the perimeter of the ring, screeching and ruffling his feathers, and receiving wild cheering from the oeast-dominated crowd.

The orseld rocked on his back, came back up on his feet and was immediately struck and knocked down again. Every time he got up, the eadh champion hit him with his full body weight and tremendous force to knock him back down again, sometimes on his back and sometimes on his side. In the opening five minutes of the contest, the small, white-feathered eadh sent the large, heavily armored orseld champion to the sandy floor 8 times.

Following his eighth landing, instead of standing up again, the orseld rolled over and stayed low to the sand all fours, essentially turning him into a battle tank on legs. He attacked with incredible speed, launching himself horizontally toward the eadh champion again and again as the eadh leapt over him, spinning to face the feathered champion each time the eadh landed behind him. The eadh would screech and ruffle his feathers for the crowd just as the orseld was charging toward him from behind, leaping high into the air and out of the way just in time. And the oeast were screaming themselves hoarse for these antics.

The advantage this tactic presented to the orseld was that it made him nearly impossible to attack. His head and back were essentially heavy cartilage covered with a thick layer of rubbery skin. The disadvantage was that it reduced his potential attacks to grappling only. By game rules, a champion could strike only with the soft parts of the upper or lower arm, upper or lower leg or their belly. (While the orseld's belly was also armored, it was not with cartilage, but only a very thick layer of skin.)

Open hand grappling was allowed and the object of the competition was to immobilize and control the other champion.

The eadh champion suddenly changed his tactics, running around and around the horizontal orseld, forcing him to spin around again and again, which quickly caused the heavily armored champion to become dizzy. This finally allowed the eadh to capture the orseld's head by wrapping his entire, feathered body around it, forcing the orseld to flip back onto his back and bracing his legs to make it impossible for the orseld to turn his head again, locking him in position.

And the crowd went wild.

The closing ceremonies included a parade of all the champions who had competed so far, and provided Pel and the marines their first glimpse of the large, bear-like oules... But all of this started to fade and swim...

Alone among the away team, Spike caught the whiff of something wrong. A bad smell. She held her breath and activated an alert and request for immediate beam-out from her communicator even as she started to lose consciousness. She entered another series of commands into her communicator badge, hoping against hope that she had remembered and entered the sequence correctly...

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 11: Naked

Chapter Summary

Along the drifting cloud, the eagle searching down on the land...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 11: Naked

7.11 Naked

Lance Corporal Petra Spitz was the first to wake. She and Private First Class Raanda Habib were in a small cell together. Maybe this room had not been a cell when it had been constructed - it looked beyond ancient and beyond primitive - almost like an escape pod. She wasn't cold. But she was naked except for a small, protective cup closely covering her genitalia.

Raanda panicked as she woke to find herself nearly completely naked. She reflexively covered her breasts and huddled back onto the padded bench she had been laid out on.

Spike hefted her breasts. "Relax, Boyfriend. I've got them too. But I'd rather have the guys in here with us, boobies or no boobies."

Spike's light hearted attitude was infectious and helped Raanda relax. She laughed nervously, then agreed: "Yeah, me too... Oh crap! Our phasers... our communicators... cultural contamination..."

"All slag if I entered the safety codes correctly," Spike replied. "I smelled something wrong and held my breath. I sent an emergency signal, then tripped the contamination safety protocols. If anyone other than one of us touches those phasers or communicators, the insides melt down. And they had to touch them to get them off of us. Just so much hot slag now."

"Our clothes? Our med-kits? Knives? The bullpups?" Raanda asked.

"All relatively primitive. These people have cloth, band-aids, canteens, knives, and automatic rifles," Spike replied. "Not as good as ours, but that's more a matter of materials technology."

"Why are we naked?" Raanda asked.

Spike patted the protective cup over her genitals. "We're not. But I'm not really wild about wearing this thing. It's a sports cup. Just like what the champions were wearing..."

"You think they're going to make us fight them?"

At that moment a series of light knocking on one of the walls informed the two nearly naked marines that their fellow marines, 2nd Lt. Iov Pushkin, Sgt. Chavez Lone Wolf, and Private First Class Sasha Soko, were in the adjoining compartment. It was a combination of Morse Code with a shorthand the United Earth Governments marine services had jointly borrowed from the Bajoran Resistance.

"Apparently they're naked too," said Raanda.

"Except for their dingalings," Spike commented. "I heard the code too. Ask them if Pel is in there with them."

Raanda stopped short of knocking out the question on the wall when the door to their cell opened, once again causing the young private to reflexively cover her breasts.

Spike was in no such mood and simply rested her fists on her hips.

The last thing either of the women were expecting was for a brightly colored eadh to lead two oeast into their cell...

Aboard the U.S.S. Beagle, Captain Skip Howard, Commodore Yui Song, and Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland were attending some sort of an odd seance between Doctor Tentis Uto and the former premiere of the Vulcan Science Academy and current Director of Astrophysics aboard the U.S.S. Beagle, T'Eln.

The ancient vulcan was framing the bald betazoid doctor's face with her hands in a classic vulcan mind meld while Uto was lightly pressing the first two fingers of each of his hands behind her ears in what was, apparently, some betazoid version of a mind meld... They were facing each other over a small table.

After a few minutes, T'Eln broke the mind meld and Dr. Uto slumped semi-conscious in his chair. He roused slightly, propped his elbows on the table, dropped his face into his hands, and began massaging his temples.

Captain Howard had a concerned look on his face: "Ten?"

"He will recover," intoned the ancient vulcan. "It was a difficult reconstruction. His brain is terribly soggy. We will need to begin detoxification today." She tapped the table firmly with two fingers, causing Uto to groan in agony. "Today, doctor. No more sog. You have become an addict. It is severely hampering your considerable and unique abilities."

Uto was only able to groan his acceptance.

"You should have come to me long ago, Tentis. I will begin teaching you disciplines that will help you silence the noise of so many undisciplined minds."

"Premiere, perhaps you could share with us what you learned from Dr. Uto?" Sakura prodded.

The ancient vulcan turned her cold, expressionless eyes toward Captain Howard, Dean Nakamura Holland, and Commodore Yui, causing each of them to experience a cold chill.

"Trader Pel has been screaming Dr. Uto's name in her mind and trying to communicate her distress..."

"Her???" asked Sakura Nakamura Holland.

"Later," said both Howard and Yui in unison.

T'Eln was completely unfazed. "I was able to briefly enhance Dr. Uto's telepathic ability to a fraction of his actual potential before he damaged his brain with excessive amounts of sog. I cannot tell you at this time whether that damage is permanent. Pel is, apparently, naked, bleeding from where her prosthetic ears have been ripped off, alone, and very frightened. She is in a very ancient part of the Roundabout Station..."

"Could we locate him and, um... Beam her out?" asked Sakura, with some level of confusion.

Dr. Uto was still squeezing his temples. "I'm not a transporter targeting sensor, Sakura," he said with some bitterness.

"It might not be beyond your abilities, eventually, with significant training and a very long detoxification period," T'Eln responded. She turned her attention back to the task force leadership. "But it is not achievable any time in the near future, if at all. And no one else in this task force has anywhere near that sort of potential. Additionally, I sincerely doubt that even if it were possible, that even the Beagle's enhanced transporter system would be able to reach that deep inside that ancient space station. Imagine a spherical New York City, in space..."

Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland turned to look at Skip Howard:

"Her???"

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 12: Saving Trader Pel

Chapter Summary

Catching the swirling wind, the sailor sees the rim of the land...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 12: Saving Trader Pel

7.12

Saving Trader Pel

Neither Lance Corporal Petra Spitzke nor PFC Raanda Habib could understand the harsh screeching noises made by the eadh, nor the whining, yowling noises made by the oeast, although they clearly seemed to understand each other. However, as harsh and alien their vocalizations, the body language of the new intruders was clear, furtive moves, slippers and cloaks offered by the oeast...

This was a jail break.

Raanda had the presence of mind to inform their fellow marines, unseen in an adjoining room, with a quick series of knocks, before accepting the new clothing and allowing herself, along with Spike, to be rushed out of their makeshift cell. The oeast demonstrated how to use the hoods that came with the cloaks, then activated and handed each of the two, now cloaked marines, a broach.

On attaching these broaches to their cloaks, both Spike and Raanda suddenly found that the alien screeching and yowling resolved into plain English:

“We must rescue the teacher,” the eadh said.

“Our friends are in the next room,” Raanda said as they exited the cell. Her heart dropped as she realized that the adjoining cell containing the male marines was still separated by a wall.

“We can’t get there from here,” responded one of the oeast. “It would take more than an hour, time we don’t have, to find a corridor that leads to that compartment.”

“You’re too tall,” the second oeast said to Raanda. “Hunch down or you’ll get noticed. Both of you.”

It was only now registering with the two young marines, as they hunched and allowed their rescuers to lead them through a twisting maze of what were clearly back and maintenance corridors, that both their oeast rescuers and the eadh who seemed to be leading them were females.

Raanda pointed at her broach. “These must be some sort of universal translators.”

“Yes,” responded one of the oeast. “You have spoken enough since your arrival that the Roundabout language matrix was able to add your language and update our translators with it. It was also able to identify the teacher’s language - a derivative of the language of the teachers...”

The eadh stopped them. “The teacher is in a room just ahead. She is damaged and in trauma. One of you will need to carry her. I will tranquilize her.”

“I’m bigger and stronger than you, Spike,” said Raanda. “I’ll carry Pel. Besides, if there’s any fighting, you’re the better fighter, so we need to keep your hands free.”

“If you are a good fighter, I may need your help,” said the eadh. “There will be at least one guard in there with her.” She held up a simple looking device. “Electronic key.”

“Unlock the door and wait for the guard to investigate,” said Spike.

The eadh fluffed her feathers and clacked her beak-like mouth twice.

“That means ‘yes’,” whispered one of the oeast women.

Spike and the eadh took up positions on either side of the door. The eadh activated her device, the door unlocked and opened just slightly.

A moment later, a curious oeast guard opened the door to look out into the hall, only to be yanked out into the hall by the eadh and slammed into a wall. Twice. After the third violent encounter with the wall, the guard slid to the floor, unconscious. At that same moment, a second guard rushed out, only to be caught painfully between the door and the door frame as Spike slammed the heavy, metal door on him. He, too, slid senseless to the deck.

The only weapons the guards carried were heavy, metal batons. The eadh handed one of these to one of the oeast. Spike armed herself with the other and opened the door wide. She hurled the baton into the room, and followed it, slamming into a third guard who had ducked to avoid the baton, only to be completely unprepared for a full body assault by a very pissed off U.S. Marine.

Spike grabbed the guard’s head fur with both hands, bending him down as her knee came up into his chest, then sent him stumbling, bent over, across the room, where he encountered another very pissed off marine... Raanda delivered two solid jabs to the side of his head and he dropped, unconscious, to the floor.

The eadh was already to a shocked and still wailing Pel. She made some squawking noises that might have been her species’ equivalent of a shushing noise, as she uncapped a small bottle and held it under the distressed ferengi’s nose.

“Oh, Pel...” Randa started, then realized that the tiny, completely naked ferengi was not what she had expected... “You’re a... girl??”

“Pick her up and let’s get her out of here,” Spike ordered. “Rescue now. Questions later.”

PFC Raanda Habib picked the tiny, now unconscious ferengi up into a fireman’s carry. Spike helped her drape her cloak around Pel as they quickly exited the room.

“I hope you have a retreat strategy,” Raanda said.

In response, the eadh unlocked several doors, then backtracked to take one of the revealed corridors. She unlocked a second door in this corridor and one of the oeast locked it behind the group as they scurried down this narrow tube, occasionally having to pass Pel back and forth to get through extremely narrow passages.

It took nearly an hour before they ended up entering through what appeared a rear entrance to a room filled with eadh and a few oeast. These were clearly group quarters and Raanda was finally able to lay Pel on a bed in a back room. She stayed with the tiny, unconscious ferengi, along with yet another oeast, this one male, who began treating the wounds on Pel’s head, neck and face where the prosthetic ears that had made her appear to be male had been anchored.

Spike remained in the outer room with the group of eadh warriors. One of these provided her some clothing, which she pulled on under her cloak. It was rather tight.

“The largest clothing we could find for you,” apologized one of the oeast. “You marines are much, much larger than our people and you’re constructed a little differently. I’m sorry we weren’t able to retrieve any of your clothing or possessions.”

The eadh warrior who had rescued Spike, now brought her some water. “I am Nalancessel. You have met my grandfather. How is the teacher?”

“His... Her name is Pel,” said Spike. “And I really don’t know. What did you give her?”

“A mild sedative,” Nalancessel replied. “She should wake within the next hour. My grandfather told me to keep an eye on the teacher to keep her from harm. There are many religious factions here. You and your friends were captured by a warrior faction. We were unable to rescue the others. They will be made to fight each other in the ring. I can only hope they don’t fight like you just did. The punishments for breaking the sacred rules of the ring are quite harsh...”

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 13: Reverse

Chapter Summary

One mile over, we'll be there and we'll see you...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 13: Reverse

7.13

Reverse

Shortly after learning that PFC Raanda Habib and Lance Corporal Petra Spitze were being rescued by an unknown party, 2nd Lt. Iov Pushkin, Sgt. Chavez Lone Wolf, and PFC Sasha Soko were removed from their cell by what were quite clearly their well-armed and determined captors. Each of the marines was given a medallion that included a translator, allowing them to understand their captors' instructions.

Being U.S. Marines, they carried on their own conversation with a very subtle sign language. At the moment, Lone Wolf and Soko were following Pushkin's lead - which was to comply with their captors and play for time. All three men were naked with the exception of the sports guard over their genitals. Being large, heavily muscled young marines, none of them seemed disconcerted - if anything, they were taking the opportunity to furtively flex and show off a little.

The three men were led through a winding series of ancient corridors and airlocks long frozen open from disuse, into the stadium. One of the oeast captors wrapped an arm around 2nd. Lt. Pushkin and placed a knife against his neck. Iov Pushkin relaxed.

"You two, into the ring," said another oeast to Soko and Lone Wolf.

"Do what they say," Pushkin said, quietly, then: "Remember the rules."

"Begin!" said one of the oeast captors as the two young marines squared off in the ring.

"Open hand grappling only," said Sgt. Lone Wolf as he and Soko began circling each other. "No striking with hands, feet, knees, or elbows."

Lone Wolf was dark skinned, with a wiry brush of jet black hair, and bright blue eyes. He was about 2" taller and nearly 40 pounds heavier than the young, blonde private, but his primary advantage was experience. Within moments of the two engaging, Sgt. Lone Wolf had PFC Soko locked down and on the sandy floor.

2nd. Lt. Iov Pushkin easily removed the knife from the hand of the oeast who had been holding it at his neck. He flipped the knife easily in his fingers, then handed it back, hilt first, to his captor. "My turn," he said simply, and walked out onto the ring. He knelt and patted the pinned Sasha Soko's shoulder, then helped him up as Lone Wolf released him.

"Schedule some individual combat training when we get back shipboard," Pushkin said to Soko.

Soko came to attention and saluted: "Yes sir!" Then walked off to rejoin the oeast that had been holding the knife at Pushkin's neck. "You might as well put that away," Soko said to his captor. "I'd prefer not to have to take it away from you again."

The oeast glared for a moment, then reconsidered as Soko, while younger, was considerably larger than the 2nd lieutenant. He sheathed the knife and took up a stance just within arm's reach of the young marine.

Iov Pushkin was a fairly large man, but even at 6'0" and 210 pounds, he was nowhere near as large as either Soko or Lone Wolf. He had an odd combination of fair skin, light brown hair and vaguely Asian facial features. He was only a few months out of Quantico and was a year younger than the experienced (and quite large and muscular) first sergeant who reported to him. Pushkin was a champion wrestler and his long training in the sport made him a far more challenging opponent than PFC Soko.

But in addition to Lone Wolf's overwhelming advantages in size and strength, was the experience of grappling for his life in desperate battles with klingons, cardassians and gem'hadar. It took several minutes for Lone Wolf to pin his commanding officer down, but after the first few minutes, the eventual outcome was hardly in any doubt.

"I'm sorry, sir. But they mean to put us seriously in harm's way," Lone Wolf said to his pinned superior. He helped Pushkin to his feet. "I have to go first." He bumped fists with his commanding officer, then saluted sharply.

In her quarters aboard the U.S.S. Beagle, T'Eln, the ancient premiere emeritus of the Vulcan Science Academy was deeply enmeshed in a mind meld with the betazoid Dr. Tentis Uto. Uto had taken a series of treatments to detoxify from his addiction to sog and T'Eln was helping him not only build up his defenses against the overwhelming noise of undisciplined minds around him, but also to sharpen his focus and realize some of the abilities that his unusually powerful telepathy might make available to him, well beyond the abilities of most of his species.

On the bridge of the U.S.S. Beagle, Lt. Cmdr. Senek removed an earpiece from its mount on his panel and placed it in his ear, then turned to obtain his captain's attention:

"Captain, we are receiving a transmission from Lance Corporal Petra Spitze, audio only."

"Let's hear it," Captain Skip Howard replied from the command throne in the center of the triangular bridge.

"Repeat, this is Lance Corporal Petra Spitze, requesting rendezvous coordinates."

"Spike, this is the U.S.S. Beagle, Skip Howard commanding. What is your situation?"

"Captain, I have Trader Pel and Private First Class Raanda Habib with me. We are in an eadh shuttle, owned by the Greater 1st Realm Regency and are seeking rendezvous coordinates to transfer myself, Pel and PFC Habib into your custody. 1st Realm Regent Martial Nalconi sends his regards and hopes at some future date to make your acquaintance."

"You may relay that I look favorably on that potential and pass along my regards. Be advised that the U.S.S. Bluebird will be dispatched to rendezvous with you. We are sending coordinates now."

"Thank you, sir. Please send along medical personnel. Trader Pel has been treated for wounds related to the removal of prosthetics, but is in need of additional medical attention."

"Copy that," Howard responded. "Well done, Spike. Safe travel to your rendezvous and I will look forward to attending your debriefing. Beagle out."

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 14: Precognition

Chapter Summary

The eagle's dancing wings create as weather spins out of hand...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 14: Precognition

7.14 Precognition

“How is Teacher Pel?”

The powerful, brightly feathered eadh courtier, Martial Nalconi, was meeting with Commodore Yui Song, Captain Skip Howard, and General Krank aboard the U.S.S. Mako. Not to be outnumbered, Nalconi had brought his granddaughter, Nalancel, and a blind priestess named Calandrass, whose exceptionally large feathers ranged from crimson to cobalt blue. She seemed to be in a trance from the moment she boarded the ship.

“It is still Trader Pel,” Skip Howard rejoined. “Recovering from the pain of mistreatment, but still emotionally traumatized by it.”

“You have a mighty ship, Captain Ronald Howard the Fourteenth,” Nalconi replied. “And I suspect you have more than one. You would not be the first powerful visitors to the Oulheadhry. There have been many who thought themselves so powerful that they could ignore the realities of this place. I sincerely hope you are not so arrogant as to make that mistake.”

“What are these realities that we must recognize, Martial?” asked General Krank.

“It is no longer Trader Pel. It is now Teacher Pel,” said Nalconi. “As long as you are in the Oulheadhry, you are the protectors of a Teacher, something not seen in the Oulheadhry in nearly a thousand years. Trader Pel must accept her new role. A role that until recently, I was completely unaware of. And you must accept your new role. A legend walks among you.”

“At the moment, my first priority is to get my people back,” said Captain Howard.

“You cannot do that,” Nalconi replied. “They are now your champions. They have been entered into the games.”

“Against their wills,” Howard rejoined.

“That is of no consequence,” Nalconi intoned. “Trader Pel told me your priority was to not destabilize the Oulheadhry. Remove your champions and war will erupt among the religious factions at the heart of Roundabout Station. But war will not stay there. It will spread.”

“The men who were taken into the ring are not champions,” said General Krank. “They are warriors. They are trained to kill.”

“We do have a champion,” said Captain Howard. “If we were to enter him into the games, could our abductees be returned?”

“The Regent might endorse such an exchange, but the faction who took your people would never honor the exchange. They would gladly take another champion for the games. But they would not release the others.”

“We send our champion in exchange. We take our people back,” said General Krank.

“I will ask the Regent to endorse that scheme,” said Nalconi. “But our people cannot be involved. At least not directly.”

Calandrass, the blind priestess, suddenly drew a shuddering breath. Her feathers bristled out, turning to expose more crimson. The other two eadh fluffed their feathers in surprise as the priestess spoke, her voice croaking with disuse:

“The Golden Darkness comes!”

“Golden Darkness?” asked Captain Howard and Commodore Yui, almost in unison.

“What does she mean?” asked Krank.

Nalconi and Nalancesel both flattened their feathers to their heads, then fluffed them back up. “I have no idea,” said Nalancesel. “This is the first time in my lifetime that she has ever spoken.”

“She will not tell us what she means,” Nalconi added. “But one thing I can tell you...”

“The Golden Darkness comes!!!” Calandrass announced. Again.

“She’s going to keep saying it for a while,” Martial Nalconi concluded. “And it won’t be long before everyone is saying it.”

General Krank turned toward Commodore Yui and Captain Howard: “I have an idea...”

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 15: Deep Mapping

Chapter Summary

Twenty-four before my love and you'll see, I'll be there with you...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 15: Deep Mapping

7.15

Deep Mapping

The liberation and return of Trader Pel, Lance Corporal Petra Spitze, and Private First Class Raanda Habib by an each regency was a tremendous boost to morale within the Beagle Task Force and also a tremendous boon for the rescue planning.

First, it cut the number of individuals needing rescue in half. And those that remained imprisoned on Roundabout Station were three well-trained marines, including a highly experienced NCO who was a veteran of two wars.

The rescue team would be headed up by another couple of war veterans, Lt. Jim Whitesand and Sergeant Manuel Guerra, along with their team, Privates First Class Robert Stevens, Marcia Salt, Kari Winters and Savage St. John. With the exception of Manny Guerra, the entire team was African American, and, like most U.S. Marines, tended to be somewhat larger and considerably more muscular than the average American.

These marines were gearing up for the mission in their dedicated mission room, located near the shuttle bays near the stern of the U.S.S. Beagle. The equipment they were laying out and putting through mission prep inspection included darkops visors, phaser rifles, spitfires, suspensor nets, transport enhancers, hologrenades, a pair of dogfish, and an exchange in uniform from the standard gray and brown fractal camouflage in favor of interactive, subdued camouflage armor. In its inactive state, this armor was a dark gray.

~*~

Inside Pel's Shuttle, Spike was leaned back in a seat, alternately massaging her temples and sipping a cup of cold sog. Commodore Yui Song, Captain Skip Howard, and Major Janet Carter had attended Spike's debriefing. But not the deep mapping debriefing that had followed - that was left to the exclusive talents of Falok with only Marine Captain Osollaa sh'Zhiathis to supervise.

Now it was PFC Raanda Habib's turn.

A very nervous Raanda sat facing Falok, the young vulcan astrophysics team leader. The young vulcan framed the young marine's face with his fingertips: "My mind to your mind: Your thoughts to my thoughts..."

~*~

Commodore Yui, Captain Howard, and Major Carter had moved on to the probe lab, where they joined Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland and a very annoyed Lt. Cmdr. Senek to listen to a very excited Sgt. Tommy Richards:

"There is no indication that any of these people have ever encountered transporter technology. But the station is fully shielded at all times due to a fair amount of orbital debris, which makes beaming anyone in or out very problematic. It also makes scanning difficult. Difficult, but not impossible..." Richards brought up a number of displays. "As you can imagine, there isn't a single screening system. There are layers of different screens, using different screening technology, covering different parts of the station and they overlap. Where mismatched technologies overlap, regular gaps in the screens occur due to uncorrected harmonics."

"If there were a single authority for providing this screening, problems like that might be worked out. But the bureaucracy that provides the screening is a hodgepodge of departments and individuals representing different political units in different parts of the station," Richards

continued.

“Make a long story short, Tommy,” Captain Howard interrupted. “Do we have a map of the deep interior the station? And can we beam people in and out?”

“We have a very comprehensive map, thanks to a combination of our scanning and the very detailed maps provided by our fine, feathered friends. But we do not yet have the exact detail on how that mapping matches up to the descriptions we have of where our people were last known to be. I’m hoping the vulcans can help us with that, once they finish digging around in Spike’s head,” Richards replied. “As for beaming people in and out, that can only be done at specific locations.” He touched a control and locations on the map lit up. Thousands of them.

“There are about 3,000 locations. That may sound like a lot until you remember just how big this station is. And we will have to coordinate the transporter cycle with the unique harmonic shield overlap convergence cycle for each individual location. Some locations cycle 2 or 3 times a minute. Some cycle 2 or 3 times an hour. Some cycle 2 or 3 times a day.”

Howard turned toward the Beagle’s Dean of Ship. “Sakura, how about the holotransporter? Can it get through that shielding?”

“No, not directly. I mean, yes we can do it, but it’s going to take some serious math,” the lovely Japanese woman replied. “I could use your help. You and Senek. Tommy and Janet will have their hands full here. We’ll have to program the system to transport continuously through the various weak points... pretty much all over the station... as each one cycles in turn. It’s not going to provide a clean projection by any means, but for what you and Krank described to me, it doesn’t really have to be.”

-*_-

In the U.S.S. Beagle’s Medical Center, Trader Pel was in a curtained area, receiving more restorative surgery from Dr. Bettes Uto, the assistant medical director.

“Your skin took some serious and deep damage in areas where, because of your continual use of prosthetics, the skin is always inflamed. This caused a few tumors that had to be removed. I strongly advise against applying prosthetics for at least three weeks so that you give these areas time to heal.”

Pel was even more distressed. “I can’t remain hidden for that long!”

“Have you considered reconstructive surgery, to make the changes permanent so that you don’t have to use prosthetics?” Dr. Bettes Uto asked. “We would still need some time for you to heal, but the reconstruction could start in a few days.”

“I don’t want to be male!” Pel almost wailed. Then she realized she was only separated from the rest of the medical center by curtains and quickly lowered her voice. “When I take the ears off, I’m me. I can only be me in private. I have to pretend to be male in public.”

“You don’t have to pretend with us, Pel,” Bettes retorted. “Everyone in this task force would accept you as female. It might take them a few days for them to get used to it, but no one would think anything less of you for it. Everyone would understand.”

“But I want to go home,” Pel said, quietly, but fervently. “Maybe the Grand Nagus will change things and I can go home as a woman, and be me, and still do business. But maybe he won’t manage to do that. Too many people in this task force already know about me. It would get out. Too many people know...”

-*_-

In another area of the Medical Center, two more betazoid doctors, Mistroya Utru and Macerio Rossel, along with two medical engineers from Nakamura Enterprises, Mimi Minimari and Diya Mody, were all busy with an enormous, extremely delicate and extremely detailed full body tattoo. Their enormous patient was stretched out on the table and rolled over as instructed to accept this painful and extensive procedure. Fingers, toes, elbows, ears, eyelids, scalp... no body part had previously been tattooed, and every part was now being tattooed...

-*_-

In premiere emiritus T’Eln’s quarters, the series of mind-melds between the ancient vulcan and the betazoid Medical Director, Dr. Tentis Uto, entered its 29th hour...

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 16: Rough Crowd

Chapter Summary

Go closer, hold the land...
Feel partly no more than grains of sand...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 16: Rough Crowd

7.16

Rough Crowd

“They want us to put on a show. The fighting has to be real, but we need some showmanship as well.”

Private First Class Sasha Soko and Sgt. Chavez Lone Wolf were far from enthused. Their expressions made it clear to their commanding officer that he needed to provide more context. 2nd Lt. Iov Pushkin took a deep breath.

“We’re playing for time here. If we’re all business, we tire more quickly and our fights don’t last as long. Which means it’s all the sooner when we have to face the next opponent. And today, the next opponent will not be one of us. So stop flexing for each other and start flexing for the crowd.”

This last failed to bring a smile to either the greenhorn or the veteran NCO.

“Maybe you need to tell us why we’re playing for time?” The normally tough Chavez Lone Wolf was feeling just a bit worn down after days of their oeast captors requiring them to fight again and again. And he was beginning to tire of being naked. He wasn’t hurt or demoralized. Just profoundly annoyed.

“Our people are coming for us, Lone Wolf,” Pushkin replied. “You’ve been through war. I know this is just a game. But we still need to stay strong. This isn’t going to be an easy rescue for them to pull off. They may need our help when they get here.”

In response, Sgt. Lone Wolf slapped his thighs, stood up slowly, then turned toward Sasha: “Buck up there, Private! The show must go on!” He winked over his shoulder at Pushkin, then offered a hand to Sasha Soko, helping the weary young private to his bare feet.

“Who knew the floor would be so hard without boots?” Soko quipped.

“Best way to fight,” Lone Wolf responded. “No false steps. No tripping over your heels. You know exactly where you stand.”

Four hours later, Lone Wolf was facing off against an equally naked heethed champion. The veteran marine was only slightly comforted that the rules prohibited, along with striking with hard parts of the body, biting and clawing, as it was apparent his opponent would excel at these... The heethed, though not much more than half Lone Wolf’s size, was endowed with rather impressive fangs and claws.

But what made the small, somewhat furry champion a dangerous opponent was his blinding speed. He had already spilled the large, muscular marine to the sandy floor by gripping a leg and taking advantage of even the slightest momentary imbalance. Lone Wolf corrected by adjusting his footing.

The heethed champion had not tried to take advantage of those early spills, instead quickly prancing away from the downed marine and leaping with astounding agility to the top of one corner pole or another to display his fangs and hiss, spreading his arms and drinking in the screaming, fawning adulation of the large and excited crowd.

Chavez Lone Wolf took up a stance, and summoned his opponent with his fingers. The heethed spotted a momentary imbalance and raced forward to take advantage of it, only to encounter Lone Wolf’s chest, then the inside of the enormous marine’s right thigh, pushing him into Lone Wolf’s left bicep, essentially clotheslining the small, rather cat-like biped, spilling him hard onto the sand.

Lone Wolf might have been able to end the fight at this point by pinning his stunned opponent, but instead, he took a victory lap, fists in the air, bulging muscles on display, sending the crowd first into stunned silence, then roaring adulation.

For the next 30 minutes, Lone Wolf lured his opponent into one trap or another, occasionally taking a fall to allow his opponent to try for a victory lap, only to leap to his feet and hurl the heethed champion to the sand and steal his applause. In the contest between stamina and speed, Lone Wolf's cunning prevailed.

In the following match, the oeast champion pretty much mopped the ring with the much larger and stronger, but far less experienced PFC Sasha Soko. For his part, Soko managed to stay in the fight for nearly 10 minutes, despite being thrown to the sandy floor a dozen times and finally succumbing to an obviously painful combination arm, shoulder and leg lock.

Which set up the next fight, pitting 2nd Lt. Iov Pushkin against a massive, heavily armored orseld. It was the last match for the day.

While Pushkin was a fairly big man, the nearly 400-pound orseld dwarfed him. Pushkin remembered the strategy the eadh champion had used against one of these behemoths a few days previously, but was well aware he had neither the speed, nor the ability to jump so high. So he employed another of the eadh's strategies.

Pushkin circled his opponent, changing direction often, forcing the slower orseld to continue turning to avoid allowing the marine to get behind him. Pushkin was entirely unable to play to the crowd as his nemesis was only teasing him... Fortunately, Pushkin was wise enough not to underestimate the orseld's reaction speed. Each time the enormous, armored champion lunged, he was just a little faster. And Pushkin was barely quick enough...

Until he wasn't.

Pushkin would have been fast enough but the orseld, unexpectedly, came down to all fours, grasped Pushkin's ankles and, in a single move, yanked his legs out from under him, spilling the young man to the sandy floor. The orseld champion leapt a few feet into the air and landed his armored belly heavily on the marine, driving the air from his body.

Sgt. Lone Wolf and PFC Soko leapt to their feet but were prevented from entering the ring to help their fallen comrade by a number of spear-wielding oeast.

The victorious orseld champion bellowed from atop 2nd Lt. Pushkin, eliciting screams of adulation from the vast crowd. Through all this noise, the shouted curses and threats of Lone Wolf and Soko made it to the armored champion's ears and he leapt up and stomped his way toward the young marines, forcing the oeast guards to hold the orseld champion and the marines apart at spear point.

After a few moments, during which the orseld champion went back to bellowing at his fawning crowd, Pushkin struggled to his feet and slowly hobbled out of the ring. He couldn't stand up straight. Soko and Lone Wolf were not allowed to help him until he managed to get out of the ring.

"That was not fun," Pushkin croaked, painfully as he accepted help from his comrades.

"Those people sure ate it up," Soko said, looking up at the still screaming onlookers. "They really got off on you getting hurt."

"Rough crowd," Lone Wolf observed.

Chapter Summary

Next to your deeper fears...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 17: Premonitions

7.17

Premonitions

The Golden Darkness Comes!!!

The eadh prophesy had swept throughout the Oulheadhry in a day. In two days, it was on the lips and minds of everyone in Roundabout Station. More than a million spacebound people of five different species, all gripped with this single idea.

A darkness that was more than the absence of light. It was like a racing black smoke that light could not pass through. No amount of light could pierce it, only shine on its black, roiling borders, occasionally catching the glint of gold within. And the voices in the darkness, menacing, but indistinct. Curses mumbled in a mystical language, sending a chill of pure terror - a darkness of the soul to match the darkness of the eye.

A darkness that moved like a living thing. Or more like a collection of living things... A thousand swirling pieces of darkness advanced, united, and the darkness swept forward. Not extinguishing light, the lights still glowed. Glowed, but illuminated nothing. Feeble lamps glowing uselessly, forlorn, unable to illuminate the mumbling darkness.

Ty Yul dropped down out of his bed onto the floor. He struggled to overcome sleep paralysis. The terror of being awake but unable to move. Unable to focus. The mumbling darkness of his dream was slow to release his eyes so that he could see. His mind so that he could think. His body so that he could move.

Terror, unthinking, formless terror, was entirely new to the massive oule. He was a champion. The greatest champion in living memory. He was not supposed to be afraid of the darkness... The darkness had always been afraid of him!

Oules tended to live very solitary lives. There were not more than a few dozen oules living on Roundabout and they were so widely scattered, their pursuits and purposes so various, that they rarely encountered one another. All the other people of the Oulheadhry made way in deference to the oules. Gave them whatever they asked for. Meekly accepted whatever the giant oules gave them in return.

Oules were not so large as the orseld, but far stronger and more vigorous. All furry muscle and aggression. Able to lift even the armored orseld and squeeze the life out of them. And Ty Yul was one of the largest, strongest, and most aggressive. A natural champion, he was undefeated by oule or anything else. But as he made his way through the corridors of the inmost Roundabout, sometimes having to squeeze through narrow corridors on his way to the Sacred Ring, he saw terror on the faces of the other people. They had always been terrified of him, as well they should be. But now their terror for him was an afterthought. They were already terrified before they had even become aware of him.

And around every corner, he could hear the mumbled, terrified words: The Golden Darkness... The Golden Darkness Comes...

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 18: The Golden Champion

Chapter Summary

Mountains come out of the sky and they stand there...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: The Roundabout

Scene 18: The Golden Champion

7.18

The Golden Champion

Sgt. Chavez Lone Wolf was faring badly against an eadh champion who was much smaller than him. Lone Wolf's strength was the only thing keeping him in the ring with his wiry, brightly feathered opponent. The eadh was simply too fast and while the feathered alien could not fly, he could leap high, fast, and far, making his attacks very difficult to avoid.

Lone Wolf picked up on a tell: a twitching of the eadh's top feathers signaled the angle of his attack and for the next ten minutes the large veteran marine was able to not only avoid the eadh champion's attacks, but to deliver some counter attacks that flipped the eadh on his back, although never for long enough for Lone Wolf to take advantage of them.

Finally, he was able to line up the perfect angle of attack, based on the movement of his antagonist's feathers. Only to realize he had been played... The eadh changed direction at the last moment and clothes-lined Chavez Lone Wolf in the throat with the inside of its feathered arm.

Sgt. Lone Wolf landed hard on his back, barely able to breathe. His eyes were teared up from the sucker-punch. Despite the veteran marine's tremendous strength, the eadh was able to lock up his arms, pin his legs, then, with strong hands on Lone Wolf's jaw, turn his head and neck into a painful and completely immobilizing lock, which seemed to go on forever, accompanied by the adulation of the crowd.

While he was not as badly wounded as 2nd Lt. Iov Pushkin, who seemed to be in worse condition today than he had been immediately after being crushed under an orseld champion the previous day, Lone Wolf was in extreme pain and could not straighten his neck. He had to walk kind of sideways, crab-like, to get out of the ring, where a still battered and bruised, but not severely damaged PFC Sasha Soko could help him to sit next to a nearly incapacitated Iov Pushkin on a hard, metal bench.

This left a terrified and woefully under-prepared Sasha Soko to stand alone in the ring to face the monstrous, bear-like oule.

Soko was trying his best to be brave, trying to stride confidently into the ring to face a monster. While he had not seen one fight in person, he had watched a number of broadcasts. The oules were merciless with each other and the loser, even when it was another oule, usually had to be carried from the ring.

A low murmur began. Sasha at first thought it was the crowd, commenting on his, admittedly, hopeless plight. But it was a far more sinister sound and was soon accompanied by sounds of panic from the crowd. Even the massive oule champion in front of him looked nervous... no, not just nervous... terrified...

The only words Sasha could make out from the crowd were "the golden darkness!!!"

And darkness swept into the ring, roiling across the floor and growing like a physical thing. Writhing, murmuring, cursing, fragments of darkness, sweeping in through all the doorways, joining up and rolling across the floor like black smoke. Like water. Rising like a flood. Sasha suddenly felt himself immobilized... something wrapped tightly around him. Lifting him. Washing him out of the ring...

Ty Yul tried to hold his inner panic at bay. He had no experience to compare this to. The morning's nightmare had come to life all around him as the murmuring, cursing, roiling darkness swirled all around him. Blinding him. Deafening him. Robbing him of all his senses. It was as though he had suddenly been cast into space.

The oule fought, for the first time in his life, to control his mind in the face of pure terror. He was not in space. It was warm. He could feel

wisps of darkness moving his fur, caressing his face, but it was not hurting him. He could feel the sandy floor of the ring firmly under his feet.

And before him, something was glowing in the darkness. A golden light in front of him. Resolving into a figure of light as the darkness washed away. Standing where the pathetic marine champion had been standing. A creature of the same form, but much, much larger, covered with glowing, golden lines, depicting flames on his face and body. Dark skin laced with bright, glowing patterns.

A golden champion had emerged from the darkness. The glowing champion pointed a glowing finger at the sandy floor of the ring.

Ty Yul was elated. Finally, a worthy opponent. He leapt forward as his new opponent leapt toward him... And collided with a solid opponent nearly his equal in size and strength. Nearly. Ty Yul was delighted. He had a slight edge in size and strength and proceeded to use it, wrapping his massive, furry arms around his glowing opponent.

But his opponent had a surprise advantage. He used both hands to grip the oule's massive head and turned it, making it impossible for Ty Yul to maintain his hold. For the first time in his life, the massive champion was thrown to the ground. Onto the very spot his glowing nemesis had pointed to moments before. Only to see the golden champion flying above him, and slamming his substantial belly into the oule's midsection, robbing him of breath.

While Ty Yul tried desperately to regain his breath, the golden champion, instead of taking advantage of this moment to end the fight, strode about the ring, taking a victory lap. Raising enormous, heavily muscled arms. Muscles outlined and defined by glowing golden lines.

The crowd, mostly oeast, but quite a few heethed and eadh, were shocked to silence. They had never seen anything like this before. Then they burst into screams of adulation like never before. Screaming themselves hoarse for a champion that could finally challenge one of the mighty, disdainful, dangerous oules.

Again and again, Ty Yul was thrown to the ground... Thrown to the ground onto the same spot every time... The spot his glowing nemesis had initially pointed to... And the golden champion landed a thigh or an upper arm, or his massive belly on the oule champion's belly, driving the breath from the oule's body, only to spring back to his feet and strut and flex his glowing muscles for the crowd. A crowd that was supposed to be adoring Ty Yul, but whose imaginations had thoroughly been captivated by the golden champion.

When the golden champion finally pinned the oule to the sandy floor, it was a mercy. Ty Yul had never imagined defeat. Now, shamefully, he welcomed it as an end to his ordeal. What his nemesis had that Ty Yul had never learned was skill. Immense strength paired with training and skill from years of combat with nearly equal champions. Champions for whom combat was not just a contest of strength and will, but an art.

Then the murmuring darkness returned, swirling around the golden champion, surrounding and obscuring him and when the darkness receded, the golden champion was gone.

It was only at this moment that the oeast realized that the marines were gone as well...

SBA Episode 7: The Roundabout - Scene 19: Teacher Pel

Chapter Summary

Ten true summers, we'll be there, and laughing, too...

Chapter Notes

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



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 7: [The Roundabout](#)

Scene 19: [Teacher Pel](#)

7.19 [Teacher Pel](#)

Pel was in her quarters aboard the U.S.S. Mako. She was depressed and demoralized by her treatment at the hands of a powerful oeast cult at the heart of the Sacred Games. Her prosthetic ears, designed to facilitate her disguise as a ferengi male, had been destroyed and she had not had them replaced. Her secret had been exposed to too many people. Her life had been in ruins for quite some time, but the damage she had done, the danger to which she had exposed the U.S. Marines, whom she had come to deeply admire, highlighted the final, utter wreckage of her life.

She had been living a lie for many years. And it had finally crashed into ruin around her.

She did not want to see Captain Skip Howard, but she could hardly refuse him entry. He was the one person who had always been on her side. Possibly the only person she knew who had always believed in her.

“Yes, enter,” she said when he arrived and rang her door chime.

Captain Howard walked in and placed a data card on the desk in Pel’s sparsely furnished quarters

Pel didn’t look up. She didn’t have the strength to look the Beagle’s captain in the eye.

“A gift from Martial Nalconi,” Howard said.

“That bird does not give gifts,” Pel responded.

“Perhaps not. But this is something you wanted more than anything in the Oulheadhry. And he did not have to give it to you.”

Pel looked up.

“The ancient, sacred texts. The history of your people’s contact with the Oulheadry,” Howard explained. “They had never been committed to computer. While Dutch Holland was showing the floor to that oule champion, Nalconi’s confederates were raiding the sacred library and stealing the ancient texts right under the noses of the warrior cult. They were so wrapped up in their scheme to put our people into the ring, and in our little performance to rescue them, that the library was left pretty much unguarded. Nalconi allowed me to replicate the books and their patterns are on this card. And now that he is in possession of them, he has essentially stolen the games from the warrior cult.”

“He used us,” Pel said. “I have to admire his ruthlessness.”

“A very interesting combination of ruthless and gracious,” Howard rejoined. “He played us like a Stradivarius violin. Expertly, but carefully.”

“I think he was only a few steps ahead of us,” said Pel. “He saw his opportunity, drew us in. I’m sure he realized that you would put on a tremendous show. He probably had that blind priestess plant that prophesy to see what you would do with it...”

“He does strike me as a man who loves a good show,” Howard agreed. “And yeah, that little self-fulfilling prophesy was quite convenient...”

“You have the ability to project holograms,” said Pel. “I’ve seen you do it before. That’s what all that darkness was.”

“A blend of a holo generator and a transporter,” Howard responded. “Superb camouflage for our rescue team to do their work. Dutchie’s

invention, actually.”

Pel was shaking her head. "Care to explain why I dreamed about those mumbling fingers of darkness before actually seeing them?"

Howard laughed. "That was a surprise to me, too, and I haven't decided how to address it yet... I'm far from certain I approve... Apparently Premiere T'Eln and Ten cooked up a nightmare for the oule champion to soften him up for Dutchie, and a fair number of people got caught up in the psychic backwash. Fortunately, Dutchie was awake at the moment they were broadcasting that nightmare..."

“And the glowing patterns on Commander Holland's skin?”

“Bioluminescent tattoos,” Howard answered. “He’s going to be glowing for a few weeks, but eventually, his body will absorb the bioluminescent ink. He said at first it really burned, but now it’s just a dull itch.”

Pel made an amused noise, then fell silent.

After nearly a full minute of silence, Pel looked up again: “What’s to become of me? Too many people know about me now. I’m never going to be able to go home.” Her voice cracked with grief.

“Martial Nalconi said something to me that kind of stuck,” Captain Howard replied. “While you’re in the Oulheadry, you’re no longer Trader Pel. You’re Teacher Pel. It got me to thinking... You have been Teacher Pel for some time. Ever since I met you, really. We have all learned so much from you. You are an amazing teacher. Perhaps it’s time to leave Trader Pel behind and become Teacher Pel.”

Captain Howard stood up, walked over to Pel and lightly kissed the top of her head, as if giving a blessing, then turned to leave.

“Skip...”

Howard turned at the door to look at Pel.

“You really are a weird man,” said Pel. “You know that, right?”

Captain Howard smiled and giggled lightly. “You have no idea.” He exited the room, leaving a smiling Pel behind him.

The Roundabout

Chapter End Notes

This is the final scene for Episode 7.

The adventure will continue with Episode 8: South Side of the Sky.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!