

The Seventh Realm: Volume One

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Episode 00: Prologue

The tall, red grasses shift and crunch beneath the pawlike feet of the young Ketlan woman as she walks through the forest and away from her village. Zakera, the nineteen-year-old daughter of her tribe's chieftain, is spending time alone, something she does quite frequently. Her father, Zikata, has urged her to pledge to the male Fekolza, but she is less than interested. If only Fekolza himself felt the same. Zakera has often been prized as the most beautiful of the females of her tribe, the Kelanethaka. The light pink fur on her body is broken by white on her chin, neck, chest, belly and inner thighs. Her fur is accented with thin cyan stripes on her outer arms, legs, back and long tail; cyan tufts cover the tip of her feline ears and are both vibrant and eye-catching.

Her healthy and athletic build is considered the epitome of a Ketlan female; an hourglass figure with a noticeable, B-cup bust. The five-foot and five-inch-tall woman steps over a fallen log, the pink fur of her foot contrasting with the silver colored tree bark. It shifts gently under her barely fifty-five kilograms. She stops and looks up at the red hue of the sky, her cyan colored eyes gazing at the day-moon. Running her clawed fingers through her wavy, pink and shoulder length hair, she closes her eyes. Sitting atop the log, her heart and mind weigh heavy. Sighing, she looks down at the rich brown soil beneath her feet. Her father does not mean her any harm by

suggesting that she pledge to Fekolza, as she is still unclaimed, a situation considered extremely strange by tribal standards.

In truth, however, Zakera has never experienced a male before either, something even more unheard of. It is not because she has a lack of willing males or no physical desire; Zakera would love a mate of her own. She has never found a male interesting enough, or with whom she felt close enough to be intimate with. She has never considered herself one of the others. She knows how outrageous it sounds, the daughter of the tribe's chieftain feeling outcast. It does not make it any less true. Since her mother's death, she has felt even more isolated. She can't name a single true friend, only acquaintances. The feeling has driven her to become a 'Vintala', a Ketlan who actively does not participate in her own tribe's affairs, and as a result is shunned by the collective.

Though she can appreciate her father's efforts, she isn't sure if she can go through with it. Rising from the log, she brushes off the back of her animal hide skirt. She climbs back over the log and heads for her village. The red-orange glow of the rising sun warms the morning air as she drags her feet, sullenly shuffling home. After a time, the huts in the clearing come into view. She stops at the edge of the forest, resting her hands against the bright green bark of a nearby tree, the pink leaves rustling with a gust of warm wind. Her chest becomes tight, her breathing quickening as she looks at the happy villagers wandering about and enjoying their simple lives. Her white claws dig into the bark as she clenches her teeth.

Zakera turns back to the forest behind her, glancing over her shoulder. This is not where she belongs. She has always felt that there was something more for her, away from her tribe. She doesn't know what it is, but she is determined to find out.

“Forgive me, father. I cannot do this.” She murmurs.

She retraces her steps, heading back towards the fallen log. As she returns she stands atop it, looking to the vast horizon. This is the furthest that she has ever been before, but today that is about to change. Stepping off the silver log, she jogs through the forest. After a considerable time, the trees grow more sparse and the grasses even taller. Her fur mats with sweat, darkening as she gasps for breath. Burning muscles force her to slow to a steady walk. The sun passes its zenith and inches towards the horizon as she approaches a large and vast field. She had heard of this field from the hunters but had never seen it with her own eyes. She stares in awe at the sea of crimson leaves.

She blinks hard and shakes her head, breaking her trance. This field, though quite far from the village, is well-known enough to be easily found by the hunters, whom her father may send to find her. Zakera presses onward, wading through the field. Faded red blades sway in the breeze and brush the bottom of her ribcage as she struggles to maintain her pace. It takes over an hour to traverse the entirety of the field, and the struggle to push through it forces her to stop and rest once more. She halts at the edge of the field, sitting with her back against the silver bark of a Borlan tree, it’s gray vines with thin, blue leaves hang like a weeping willow. She looks up at the sky and wonders where she will be when she makes her camp for the night, though in truth, she could care less.

No sooner than her muscles cease their screaming, she rises to her feet, heading into the vast unknown of the forest. She walks for several hours, stopping only when she discovers several Goshan trees. The man-sized trees with off-yellow bark bear large teal colored leaves shaped like palm fronds; the upturned sides often catch substantial quantities of rain water. She reaches for a branch,

tilting her head back and bringing the tip of the leaf down to her short snout, carefully pouring in small quantities of water. After drinking the water from several leaves, she sighs, refreshed and ready to continue her journey. Walking even deeper into the forest, she can hear a familiar sound; water laps a shoreline somewhere in the distance.

As the planet, Monala, has only freshwater, this would be the ideal place for her to build a camp for the night. Turning slightly, she struggles to wade through thick secondary jungle. Spiny thickets and entangling vines slow her pace as she struggles to make her way to the source of the sound. Undaunted, she pushes through a patch of red-leaved shrubbery, coming upon a vast expanse of bright yellow sand. Her cyan eyes grow wide as she looks on at the impressive beach. Crystal clear water gently laps the sand, glowing a faint teal in the sunlight. Her elation is quickly crushed under the realization that she has wandered to the great lake, which wraps around the coast and ends not far from the Kelanethtika village; this area is not unknown to her people.

She walks toward the water's edge, standing close enough to allow the liquid to wash over her toes. Though unsure of how far the beachhead stretches, she must keep walking; she can't stop until she finds a place that her people have never been to before. Turning to follow the coast, a sudden thunderclap startles her. Gazing up and into the sky, she looks for rainclouds, but doesn't see any. Though rainstorms aren't unheard of during this season, the faintly red sky is clear. Another thunderclap echoes, this one accompanied by a large bolt of purple lightning. The bolt lands into the water, causing the sea to shiver. The storm rapidly builds in intensity as a purple orb of light grows in the sky, hovering several meters above the water.

She turns to face the mysterious storm, shielding her eyes with her hands as the sphere begins to oscillate. A large and strange form

sits in the center of the orb as lightning bolts streak the sky. She takes a step back as the light begins to fade, though the object within it does not. As suddenly as the electrical storm had begun, it ceases, releasing the object which freefalls roughly five meters before striking the water. Zakera jumps back as the craft slaps the lake loudly, creating a massive splash that dies out before reaching the shoreline. To her amazement, the long object floats upright in the water, bobbing like a small stick in a puddle. Though her people have fishing canoes, she has never seen a boat so massive, or colored so unnaturally.

Zakera sits on the soft sand, resting her feet flat and bending her knees. She drapes her forearms across her knees as she admires the gray boat that floats in the distance. She watches it for a long while, wondering if there could be anything interesting inside. As far away as it is, she contemplates swimming out to it, to see for herself. Suddenly, her feline ears prick at the sound of a hideous grunting and groaning. It is the unmistakable noises made by the Kaladez; the brutish and primitive beast men, and the enemies of the Ketlan. Jumping to her feet she runs for the woods to hide from the creatures; hopefully they won't discover her, lest she suffer a fate worse than death itself.