

# **The Seventh Realm: Volume One**

**By Mantrid Brizon**

## **Episode 02: Coming To Terms**

Cy's head pounds as the sounds slowly grow louder around him. He opens his eyes, staring at the ceiling as Yasmin, Johnny and the ship's crew stand over him.

"Are you alright?! How many fingers am I holding up?" She asks.

Focusing on her hand, he sees the single, raised middle-finger of her right hand.

"Charming..." He chuckles.

"Good. You probably don't have any brain damage. Just don't fall asleep, alright?" She smirks.

Cy sits up, wincing in pain at the aching in his chest.

"Sorry about that. You broke my fall." Jonny chirps.

"Your welcome... Help me up." Cy holds out a hand.

Yasmin and Jonny yank him to his feet, brushing him off as he regains his bearings. Cy stumbles towards the front windows and gazes outside. The ocean looks different; it's more clear and vibrant, reminding him of the reefs of Jamaica. What's most striking, however, is the sky. Not only is it no longer dark outside, it's also red. To everyone's surprise, a blue-tinted moon hangs in the sky. Juan opens the waterproof bulkhead door, stepping out onto the catwalk that wraps around the superstructure. The crew spreads out on the catwalk, looking around at the now frighteningly calm ocean.

"We better get to land as quickly as possible." Cy suggests.

"Our instruments are down." Rico states. "How will we know where to go?"

As if God himself had heard his question, the mist recedes further, revealing a distant landmass off the starboard bow.

"I think that's answers your question. Let's get moving." Cy smiles.

"You heard the man. Let's go!" Norv orders.

The crew head back inside as Cy remains outside, leaning against the railing. He watches the landmass bobbing in the distance, an illusion created by the ship's gentle sway. Heading back inside the superstructure, he takes a seat near Norv.

"How do we get off this ship if we don't find a port to moor too?" Jonny asks.

"The Malevolence has a large dinghy. We'll just be careful not to overcrowd it and it should be fine." Yasmin replies.

"Only about four or five people can safely fit in that dinghy." Norv adds.

**"Two trips?" Yasmin quips.**

**"Or we could just scout the area for a bit." Cy suggests.**

**After looking around the room, all parties, except for Isabella, nod in agreement. While the ship's crew head to the main deck to check and prepare the dinghy, Cy quickly returns to his cabin and collects his Micro-Uzi. As he heads back up to the bridge, he is stopped by Norv who had come looking for him.**

**"The radio still isn't working, so... What are you doing with that gun?" Norv demands.**

**"Uh... Carrying it." Cy raises an eyebrow.**

**"Not in Columbia you aren't."**

**"Who says we're in Columbia?" Cy snickers.**

**"Listen, we can't get caught with weapons in pretty much any country. God only knows where we are. Best to leave it here." Norv reasons.**

**Cy grunts in frustration, but heads back to his quarters. Placing the Micro-Uzi back underneath his pillow, he opens his musette bag, the only thing he didn't put into the container crate. Digging through it, he pulls out his Kahr CT9 pistol, inside-the-waistband holster and a military web belt. He knows that Norv is right, but damned if he is about to leave the ship unarmed. Before putting on his gun, he changes into the clean set of clothes in his pack. He slips on a pair of black jeans, a vibrant orange T-shirt, and then his gun, hiding it underneath his shirt. Once dressed and armed, he slips on his brown leather vest and puts on an orange and black Keffiyeh, wrapping it loosely around his neck as a scarf. He closes and locks his cabin door and heads for the main deck, where he meets the rest of the boarding party.**

**"I didn't realize that it was Halloween." Rico jokes.**

**"I always look like this..." Cy replies in a dry tone.**

**The Malevolence anchors offshore as the scout party, consisting of Cy, Yasmin, Jonny and Juan, prepare the dinghy. They gently lower it over the side of the ship, plopping it into the picturesque water. They climb down a rope ladder and board the boat. Turning on the motor, they putter along the surface and head for the shore, which is nearly a kilometer away. Cy looks at the water and notes how fresh and clear it appears, almost as if it's pure. He dips a hand into the waves, bringing it to his nose; he can't smell any salt, or minerals any kind. After a short ride, they land the dinghy on a beach of vibrant yellow sand. It's indescribably beautiful.**

**"Which way do we go?" Juan asks.**

**"Follow the leader." Cy says, pointing at a small trail already cut through the sand.**

**The beach is surprisingly deep, with the nearest vegetation nearly as far away as the ship is to the shore. As they come closer to the jungle, Cy falls behind. He walks slower, looking at the sand and admiring the view of the ship in the distance. The scout party enters the jungle, but it doesn't appear as any they have ever seen. Although dense, hot and humid like a jungle, the tree barks of the various species are an off-yellow, silver, faded red and bright green. The leaves are equally bizarre, as the silver trees have light blue leaves, the off-yellow trees have teal leaves, the green trees have pink leaves, and the faded red trees have light purple leaves. Crimson grasses cover the brown dirt beneath their feet. Small rocks and pebbles in the dirt appear identical to those found anywhere on earth.**

**The rest of the group looks around in amazement but manages to keep walking. Cy stops and looks down at the red grasses. He stands and turns to see the group leaving him behind. Rather than call out, he stops to look back at the ship. Somehow, he feels rather comfortable here, wherever here is. By the time he decides to keep following the**

group, they are gone, and he is standing at the edge of the yellow sand dunes and the vibrant and bizarre jungle. Suddenly, he hears a noise, and it doesn't sound like the wind in the trees. He hears a muffled scream and a faint thud. Turning to where the sound came from, he runs through the jungle, away from his comrades. He hears another muffled scream and runs faster.

Past the colorful jungle trees, he sees three dark figures standing over another, tearing wildly at their defenseless victim. As he draws closer, he sees the only the upper back of figure on the ground, who looks like they are wearing a tie-die coat. Cy draws his pistol from underneath his shirt and rushes towards the three attackers, but he stops when he sees them clearly. He skids as he comes to a halt, kicking up dust and drawing their attention. The figures are not men, but something in between. They have the elongated faces of a goat, with large horns atop their heads and black fur covering their bodies. Scaly but stubby tails like that of a crocodile are a glossy black, jutting out above their buttocks. They wear no clothes.

Their animal like genitalia hangs visibly as they stand over the cowering figure lying on the ground. They stand on two hooved feet with a bizarre three-pronged shape, like a "W". Cy aims his pistol and squeezes the trigger as one of the creatures approaches him. The 9mm round drills into the creature's skull, dropping it onto the ground like a sack of concrete mix. A second creature rushes Cy, grabbing him and lifting him from the ground. Its grip is incredibly powerful as it begins to choke the life out of him. He nearly forgets the pistol in his hand. The creature makes a loud sound, as though it were trying to speak to him. He aims the pistol up and between its arms. Squeezing the trigger, he fires a second round into the neck of the creature.

Dropping Cy to the ground, it stumbles back and clutches its throat. Cy, lying back on the ground, aims down and fires two more rounds at it, hitting it in the chest and killing it. He sees the third creature already running away. Worried that it might go for help; he quickly aims and fires two more rounds, hitting it in the back. As it

falls, it begins to crawl. Cy rushes past the victim and the two corpses on the ground, coming upon the third creature. It turns back to him and places a hand up to its face as though to shield it. He doesn't hesitate, firing one round which travels through the palm of the hand and out through the back, before lodging itself into the right eye socket of the creature. It slumps dead on the ground.

Cy suddenly remembers the scream that drew him there and runs back to the victim. A small pile of what look like leather clothes lie near them. He turns to the assaulted being, who is clearly a woman, lying on her side in the dirt. As he extends a hand to help her up, he has his first real look at the girl, who is not a girl at all, or at least not a human female. She has noticeable human features, but with animal-like traits. What appeared to be a tie-die coat from a distance is actually a layer of short fur covering her unclothed body. Her fur is a light pink, with white fur on her chin and running down her neck, chest, belly and inner thighs. Thin cyan tiger strips run horizontally along her back, outer arms, legs and along the top of her tail, a speck of cyan on the tip.

She slowly removes her hands and arms from above her head. Triangular pointed ears bounce up as her hands retract from her skull, placed on either side of the top of her head, much like a cat's. Cyan fur dots the tips of her ears. Her vibrant, light-pink hair is nearly identical to a human's, covers the top of her head and drapes over one side of her face. The girl turns to look at Cy, fear in her cat-like eyes as he keeps his hand held out to her. Her vertical pupils are bordered by a beautiful and vibrant shade of cyan. Her entire face is covered in short fur, much like any cat or dog. Her lips curl down in a frown around the front corners of her short but broad snout. She has no whiskers, but a feline-like nose.

Cy smiles, trying to appear non-threatening. He motions with his outstretched hand, gesturing for her to take it. She reaches for his hand and promptly swats it away. Her hand appears human, with slender, feminine fingers, and white claw-like fingernails. Cy slowly

stands up and holsters his pistol, then raises his hands up to his mid-chest, his palms facing her and his fingers outstretched.

“I do not want to hurt you.” He says slowly and in a soft tone. “I just want to help you, and make sure that you’re alright.”

She stands from the ground herself, looking up at him apprehensively. She stares at Cy for a moment, her frown fading as she sheepishly looks down.

“Are you okay? Do you understand me?” He asks her gently, lowering his hands.

Looking down, her head begins to bob gently as she starts to cry. Cy feels so badly for the girl, stepping closer and extending an arm towards her.

“It’s alright. You’re safe now.”

She pushes his arm away, but abruptly throws herself against him, between his open arms. She buries one side of her face in his shirt and cries aloud. He slowly takes an arm and wraps it around her, placing his hand carefully on the soft fur of her back.

“Shh... It’s alright now.” He whispers.

She snuffles as she stops crying, standing there for a moment. Her hands squeeze his shirt, as if she’s confirming that he’s real. She slowly backs away from him, her head down. She reaches up and moves her disheveled hair from her face. She turns her eyes up to Cy, her head still angled towards the ground. Her wavy hair is parted

evenly down the middle and hangs between her chin and shoulders. Cy is unable to refrain from a quick examination of the bizarre but intriguing girl. His curiosity forces him to look her over, his eyes shooting down uncontrollably and scanning her unclothed body. Her torso is identical to that of a human female, albeit a very athletic one. Two human breasts sit where they normally would and are covered in short white fur, except for her nipples.

She has a distinct hourglass figure. Her ribcage tapers to a thin waist, with notably wider hips, like most women. Her stomach is flat, with some muscle tone showing underneath her white fur. Her upper legs appear perfectly human, with well-toned thighs from a lifetime of walking and running, and knees that look no different from a human's. Her legs suddenly change below the knee, however, taking the digitigrade appearance of a cat or dog. Her lower legs have thin but toned calf muscles that crown a pair of large but slender pawlike feet that sweep forward. Each foot has five toes. Hanging down between her legs, her long tail is at least as long as her entire spinal column and about two inches in diameter.

It sways slowly and hangs roughly six inches above the ground, attached at her lower back in roughly the same place as a human's tailbone. Regaining control of his own eyes, he turns back to her face. Worried that he was caught examining her, and possibly even staring. He is surprised to see that this cat-girl is doing the exact same thing to him, her eyes moving down and over his groin, working their way to his feet. She suddenly looks back up to Cy, appearing embarrassed to have been caught looking over his body. He smiles, silently chuckling as his guilt quickly erodes.

"I'm Cyrus." He says, placing a hand on his chest. "Cy." He repeats, tapping his chest with his palm. "Let me get your clothes."

Her head turns slightly to the side as she watches Cy kneel down, picking up her clothes from the ground. He holds them out to

her, and she cautiously grabs them. She begins by wrapping a solid piece of leather around her waist; a skirt that hangs about halfway down her thighs. She wraps a portion of the skirt around her tail, but she cannot tie it. The leather strips are broken from the assault.

“Here.” Cy says, kneeling down.

The girl watches as Cy removes his shoelaces. He stands up and hands them to her. She slowly grabs them, using one to tie her skirt together at the back and above her tail. She places her top over her chest and breasts, tying it together at the back. It appears almost like the front of a breastplate made out of animal hide. A thin collar attached to the top of the plate wraps around the base of her neck like a choker, tying with thin cordage at the back. This strip is still intact. The plate runs from her collar bone and down the center of her chest, widening as it completely covers her breasts and part of her ribcage on either side.

Just below her breasts, the plate stops, leaving her belly exposed. Straps on the sides of her top reach around and under her arms, hugging her ribcage and tying together at her mid-back. Her clothing leaves her back, shoulders, arms, belly, and most of her sides exposed to the air.

“What is your name?” He asks her.

She opens her mouth as though to speak, but she says nothing. Her eyes turn up to her savior, his smile unfading. Cy begins to wonder why he bothered to ask her. Will she remain silent like Nova in the original Planet Of The Apes? Is she even capable of speech?

“Za...” She begins. “... Za’ke’ra...”

**“Zakera? That’s a nice name. I’m Cy.” He says with a smile. “It’s nice to meet you.”**

**Her lips curl up into a little smile. Suddenly, the rest of the scout party arrives. Startled, they stop and look at Zakera, who takes a step back.**

**“Relax.” He says to her. “Stay back, guys.” He turns to the group. “They aren’t going to hurt you. They are my friends.” He assures Zakera.**

**She takes a step closer, looking back and forth between Cy and the group. Cy also steps closer, meeting her half-way.**

**“It will be dark soon.” Zakera begins. “More will come if we stay here.”**

**Her voice is soft and gentle, with a moderate pitch, and her English has a noticeable accent. It sounds like a strange cross between Hindi and Creole.**

**“Do you live nearby? We can take you home.” Cy says.**

**“No. My tribe is very far from here. We need shelter before dark.” Zakera answers him.**

**“We came in that ship over there. You can come back with us and we’ll take you home in the morning.” Cy offers, extending a hand.**

**“Woah! Do you maybe want to talk about this?” Yasmin leans closer.**

**He turns his head back to her, glaring with narrowed eyes.**

**"No." He sternly replies.**

**Zakera looks down at Cy's hand and reaches for it, taking it gently in hers. His grasp is gentle and inviting. Her faint smile grows ever wider, though she keeps it hidden by looking away from him. Motioning to the others, he leads her to the dinghy with the scout party following closely behind.**

**"So, what were those things?" Yasmin asks.**

**"Kaladez." Zakera answers. "They are enemies of my people. Brutal and primitive beings who live only to mate, feed and kill."**

**"That sounds familiar." Cy mutters under his breath. "So, Zakera..." Cy begins, raising his voice so that everyone can hear him.**

**"Yes?"**

**"How is it that you can speak English?"**

**"Many years ago, when your people first came here, we did not. We only spoke Ketlan." She begins.**

**"Is that the name of your people? Ketlan?" Johnny interrupts.**

**"Ketlan is our race. My people are the Kelanethaka. The others like you, 'humans', built a large home far from my village. They would visit us at times and taught us their language. It proved useful for my tribe, speaking without other Ketlan tribes knowing what we were saying."**

**"Really?!" Cy replies in fascination.**

**"Do not all humans speak this language?" She asks, turning to him.**

**"No. There are many languages." He answers. "... That's quite a coincidence." He thinks aloud.**

**"Ko-in-sih-dence?" She tilts her head.**

**"Oh... It means 'by chance'."**

**“Like fate?” She suggests, her voice softening.**

**“Something like that.” He says, flashing a warm smile.**

**“Do you believe in fate?”**

**“I believe that everything happens for a reason.” He replies.**

**“So what year is it?” Jonny asks.**

**“We do not mark unimportant time.” Zakera answers.**

**“You don’t consider the year important?” Johnny scoffs.**

**“No. Only years since pledges, the birth of children, and also the length of a chieftain’s rule. Those are important to the Ketlan.”**

**They continue to walk in silence as they return to the dinghy. The red sky becomes dimmer as the sun sinks beneath the horizon, the blue moon following with it. To their collective surprise, a purple-tinted moon begins to rise on the other side of the planet. Cy helps Zakera into the boat, her thumb caressing the back of his hand as she sits down. As they let go of each other, Yasmin watches on, intrigued. Cy, Jonny and Juan push the boat off of the edge of the sand and into the open water. Zakera looks apprehensive, gripping tightly to the ropes along the edge of the boat and glancing repeatedly between the distant ship and the shoreline. The three men climb into the boat as Juan starts the engine. Cy sees her nervousness and leans closer.**

**“It’s alright. You’ll be fine.” He quietly assures her.**

**She turns her eyes up to him, nodding slowly. The dinghy closes in on the Malevolence and Zakera’s eyes widen, her jaw hanging open. She has never seen such an amazing and foreign vessel. The material is as alien to her as the humans and their personal affects. Cy looks to her and smiles, amused by her childlike awe. His head turns slightly as he gazes at her cyan eyes, staring intently. Yasmin raises an eyebrow in confusion, sitting near the back of the boat as she watches the pair. Jonny also watches as he sits beside Yasmin,**

appearing uncomfortable with the humanoid woman's presence. Zakera looks over at Cy, who promptly averts his eyes.

Calling out to the boat, Jonny hails and asks for the rope ladder. Rico and Norv both look over the side before pushing the coiled rope ladder over the side. It falls a few inches above the side of the dinghy and bangs against the metal hull of the Malevolence. Cy leans forward, steadying the ladder with his hand.

"So, who's going first?" He asks, looking at the three humans sitting across from him.

Juan immediately rises, pushing past Jonny. He seems afraid as he quickly hurries up the ladder. Jonny climbs aboard second. Yasmin stands and holds the ladder, looking at Cy expectantly. After a pause, he raises his brow, waving a hand as he presents the ladder to her. Her head turns slightly to the side as her eyes narrow, her brow gently pushing forward. Her big brown eyes scan over the fur covered creature. She opens her mouth as if to speak, but she hesitates. Grabbing the ladder, she climbs the wooden rungs and makes her way aboard the Malevolence.

"We have a guest..." She grunts as she climbs over the railing.

"What?!" Norv exclaims in surprise.

Cy ties the dinghy to the end of the rope ladder, then steadies it for Zakera. His hand brushes her lower back as she begins to climb. He grabs both ropes, steadying it for her. After a moment she reaches the top, her paw-like feet swing over the railing. Now alone, he climbs out of the gently bobbing dinghy. The remaining crew of the Malevolence looks on in shock at the girl, staring at her. Cy heaves himself over the railing, landing with a thud on the main deck. He turns to see their stares, which make Zakera visibly uncomfortable.

“Ahem...” He loudly clears his throat. “It’s not polite to stare...” He says in a stern tone.

Norv turns to him and opens his mouth to speak. Cy’s face is blank, he lifts the left side of his shirt to reveal the back of his holstered Kahr CT9 pistol. Norv and the others look down at Cy’s pistol, not daring to speak against him.

“She’s going to be our guest for the night, and then we’re going to take her home, to her tribe.” He continues, lowering his shirt.

Norv gently nods, accepting the not-so-subtle hint. He turns away, extending his arm toward Rico and tapping his chest with the back of his hand to get his attention. Cy guides Zakera past the crew, leading her away from the railing and disappearing through a door inside of the superstructure.

“Did you see that?” Rico asks.

“Cy found a new pet.” Norv quips.

“Hmph. I don’t trust her.” Yasmin comments as she leans against the railing.

“You think we shouldn’t have helped her?” Jonny asks.

“We? *Cy* helped her. She’s not our problem.” She replies.

“Jealous?” Rico smirks.

“Oh please...” She mutters, pushing past him.

“Quite an answer.” Gabby jokes.

The crew enters the ship and wanders the structure, splitting up to cover more ground. After wrapping around the quarters, Jonny and

Rico find Cy and Zakera in the galley, along with Gabby and Isabella, who obviously found them first. Zakera sits at a galley bench, while Gabby and Isabella sit at the second table across the room. Isabella doesn't seem to care at all, not even remotely fascinated by the alien creature in the kitchen. Isabella leans back, her arms crossed across her chest as she taps a foot on the floor.

"I'm waiting!" She growls.

"Keep that up and I'll feed you another hand sandwich." Cy retorts.

"... Ass..." Isabella murmurs.

Turning to the opposite end of the room, Johnny and Rico find Cy standing at a counter beside the refrigerator, preparing several sandwiches and a fruit bowl. Johnny turns to Gabby, who motions with her eyes between Zakera and Cy. Shrugging his shoulders, Johnny announces himself as he walks over to the table, joining his sisters. Cy walks across the room, presenting the sandwiches to the sisters before returning to Zakera's table. He sets the bowl and plate before her, then sits across from her on the bench. Zakera looks to Cy, nodding gratefully. She picks up a sandwich, examining it carefully. Cy grabs the second and holds it in front of her, taking a slow bite as if to show her that it was safe to eat. Yasmin and Norv suddenly enter the galley.

"There you are!" Yasmin exclaims, sitting beside Cy.

"Where else would I be?" He says with his mouth full.

"I don't know. Maybe anywhere else?" She retorts in an angry tone.

"Right..." Cy remarks before taking another bite. "She was hungry."

"She said that?" Norv asks.

“Okay. I was hungry, and I assumed that she might be too; I made an effort to be hospitable.” Cy replies.

“How gentlemanly of you.” Yasmin murmurs.

“So... You said there were other humans here?” Gabby asks Zakera.

“Mhm.” She nods. After finishing a bite, she continues. “They live inland, a distance from my tribe. Once we return, there is an old path that you can follow to their home.”

“Neat!” Cy chirps, looking to the others. “That’s the plan then: We get ready tonight and leave for her tribe in the morning. Happy now?”

Cy rises from the bench and walks toward the sink while Zakera watches him closely. Her eyes follow him around the room, but Yasmin’s focus is on Zakera. Though the Columbian stares directly at the Ketlan, She doesn’t seem to notice. Cy returns to the bench, sitting down beside Zakera and sliding her a glass of cool water. She nods in acceptance, her hand wrapping around the container. As she takes a drink, Gabby notices a movement out of the corner of her eye. The cyan tip of Zakera’s tail slips past Cy, curving and gently hooking around his waist. Cy doesn’t seem to notice, and if he does, he doesn’t say anything. Rico looks around the room, silently taking a head count.

“Hey... What happened to Juan?” He suddenly asks.

Norv quickly exits the room, followed closely by Rico and Jonny. Gabby climbs up from her bench seat, dragging Isabella by the wrist. She walks towards the door, then stops and turns to the three still seated at their table.

“Do you want to help us look for Juan?” She asks.

“No.” Yasmin coldly blurts out.

"I don't know him." Cy adds.

"I don't know him either. Can I stay behind?" Isabella asks.

"Unbelievable." Gabby scoffs.

She yanks her arm, pulling Isabella behind her as she exits the galley. Yasmin sits across from Cy and Zakera, eerily silent as she glares at the two. They sit for some time before she abruptly rises from her seat. Yasmin walks to the door, pausing and looking back at them.

"See you in the morning." She mutters, quickly disappearing out of the room.

"She does not like me." Zakera comments.

"I don't think she likes anyone. Don't take it personally." Cy remarks.

"I do not think that any of them do." She continues.

"They're just... Adjusting. Where we came from, there's nothing like you."

"Do you?"

"Do I what?" He asks in confusion.

"Do you like me?"

"You... Hmm..." Cy hesitates to speak, rubbing an index finger along his bottom lip. "You intrigue me."

Zakera's lips curl into a smile as she faintly giggles. He rises from the booth and clears both tables, removing all but her glass of water and the bowl of untouched fruit. He walks to the galley sink, rinsing and wiping the dishes before setting them aside. He turns back to the table, but he stops in his tracks when he sees Zakera standing barely a meter behind him, her cyan eyes fixated on him. He never heard her approaching him. She isn't gazing or even smiling, her

expression blank. She tilts her head slightly to one side, her stare somewhat unnerving him. Though her head doesn't move, she seems to sniff the air.

"We uh... We should get ready for tomorrow." He nervously comments.

She takes a single step closer. The loud report of a gunshot suddenly rips through the silence. Zakera jumps, looking around the room for the source. Cy rushes past her, dashing down the hall and heading for the crew quarters. She quickly follows behind. He stops and looks around, seeing Jonny's back just past an open doorway and Isabella standing in the hall behind him. Cy pushes past them as he steps inside.

"What the hell just happened?" He asks.

The ship's crew fill the room, blocking his view. They spread apart like the Red Sea, revealing Juan's dead body. His corpse is slumped back in a chair, his head tilted to the left as blood oozes from the fresh bullet hole in his right temple. His left eye bulges out from his head, indicating the path of the bullet. A revolver sits at the base of the chair. Cy reaches down and picks up the smoking revolver, a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Colt Detective Special with nickel plating and custom-made rosewood grips. He admires its condition for a moment, and then turns to the others.

"Well?" He asks expectantly, holding up the weapon.

"Well, he killed himself." Yasmin comments.

"Yeah, I got that... Why? Did he say anything?" Cy elaborates.

"Well..." Rico begins. "We went looking for him and found him here in his room. He seemed really disturbed, so we were just talking, you know?"

"We talked to him for a few minutes and thought he was fine."  
Johnny chimes in.

"And...?"

"And he just shot himself." Gabby chokes out, tears welling in her eyes.

"That's it? No warning?" Cy raises an eyebrow.

"No." Norv mutters.

The captain takes off his hat, rubbing his thinning salt and pepper hair before swinging his arm down, slapping the hat against his leg. Cy turns back to the corpse, sighing as Juan's arm twitches.

"Damnit, Juan... We don't need this right now." He grumbles.