

The Seventh Realm: Volume One

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode 03: Metamorphosis

Sighing in frustration, he walks to the bulkhead door. Stepping out, he sees Zakera leaning against the wall just outside. She stands upright, turning to face him.

“I have to take care of something. Did you want to wait somewhere else?” He quietly asks.

“Is something wrong? May I help?”

“No, that’s alright.” He raises up a hand. “I just don’t want you to see this.”

“Alright.” Zakera nods.

“Hey, what about me?!” Isabella growls.

“You’ve already killed a boy or two, I’m sure. This isn’t new to you.” Cy chuckles.

“... Dick...” Isabella grumbles.

Zakera turns and walks away, heading back toward the galley as Isabella follows close behind, more to be away from Cy than to keep tabs on the humanoid creature. He walks back to the corpse and pushes past the crew, grabbing a sheet from the bed and roughly yanking it off. He waves his hands, motioning for everyone to move aside as he spreads out the sheet on the floor. Gabby turns and runs out of the room in tears. She had never seen violence up close and

personal; her father made sure of that. Cy sets the revolver down on the desk near his body and grabs Juan's ankles.

"Give me a hand please..." He barks at the crew.

"Shouldn't I be saying that?" Yasmin snickers.

"I don't see you wrapping him up by yourself." Cy retorts.

"Maybe I didn't feel like it?" She snaps.

"Hey! This isn't some piece of garbage!" Norv growls at the assassins. "I knew Juan... He working with me for years..." He sniffles.

Cy nods, his lips twisting into a little frown. Yasmin wraps her arms underneath Juan's armpits and around his chest. She lifts him slowly out of the chair as Cy guides the body onto the sheet. The chair and his pants are damp with urine from the release of muscle tension. Gravity pulls his head back; it rolls, gobs of blood and brain matter spill out of the neat hole made by the thirty-eight-caliber bullet. Lying him down on the sheet, they wrap his body tightly. Norv and Rico help carry the body out of the room, carefully walking it to the main deck. Resting his corpse on the railing, Johnny scratches the back of his head.

"So, should we say some-" Jonny begins.

"No." Yasmin interrupts, pulling upward on the sheet.

It quickly unrolls, Juan's body tumbling out of the wrapping and falling limp into the water below. As it splashes, plunging deep into the clear ocean, Cy shakes out the sheet.

"Oh shit!" Johnny exclaims, his eyes wide in shock.

"Hey! Show some respect!" Norv bark, his voice trembling.

Yasmin hands pulls the sheet from Cy, handing it over to Norv before coldly walking past him without as much as a word. Cy merely shakes his head, quickly returning below deck.

"Wait... That's it?" Rico asks.

"I guess..." Johnny shrugs.

Cy returns to the galley, finding Zakera waiting patiently inside and sitting at the same booth. He is unsurprised, as it's the only part of the ship she knows so far. He sits down beside her and leans back, sighing.

"I'm sorry about your friend." She says softly.

"He wasn't my friend. I barely knew the guy." Cy begins. "It's just that..."

"Yes?"

"He could have been useful, that's all." He murmurs.

"Don't you feel upset?"

"I should... Maybe I do?" He shrugs.

"You don't know?" She raises a brow.

Cy lowers his head, staring at the empty table before him. He recalls Juan's gunshot wound, then countless others he had seen, many of which he had inflicted himself.

"We only just met. There's so much that you don't know about me." He turns his icy blue eyes to her.

"I learned what I needed when you saved me." She says with a warm smile.

They sit alone, gazing at each other for a long while. She reaches out, resting a hand over his as it sits on the table. Her comforting touch brings him solace, though he doesn't feel that he deserves it.

"We still need to prepare for the trip tomorrow." He says softly.

She nods, and they both climb out of the booth. Leaving the galley, she follows close behind him, her eyes glowing faintly in the dim light of the hallway. He climbs down the steps and enters the lower decks of the superstructure, walking into the cargo hold with Zakera close behind him. She stops, looking apprehensively at the large container crate as Cy grabs the latches, unlocking and opening the container. He swings the doors open, exposing its dark interior. Cy reaches for a switch to turn on the wall mounted florescent lights, but they don't activate. Feeling around inside the drawers of a nearby workbench, he finds a small flashlight inside one of them.

He returns to the container crate, turning on the flashlight as he steps inside. Zakera turns her head to the side in curiosity, looking over the little room, filled with strange articles. A metal beast is strapped to the wall, thick padding on its back. Its single eye is dim and lifeless. Green metal containers are stacked into a massive pile, innumerable in number and strapped down to a wooden platform. A rack contains many weapons, all safely behind a fishnet made of metal. She has never seen such things in her wildest dreams. Putting the end of the flashlight in his mouth, Cy opens the cage that shields the rack, carefully realigning many of the weapons. He takes a Chinese SKS rifle from the rack and slings it over his shoulder before closing the cage door.

Opening one of the ammo cases that are strapped to the pallet, he collects several boxes of steel cased Russian ammunition for his rifle. Opening the boxes, he dumps the rounds into the large vest pockets. He walks back to his steamer trunk, lifting the lid and

digging through the carefully packed contents that once decorated his room. Zakera looks at the cage guarding the weapon's rack, gently touching it. The metal is ice cold, causing her to jump back. She turns to Cy, watching him dig through his trunk.

"What are you taking?" She finally speaks.

Cy turns his head, the flashlight illuminating her. She brings up a hand and averts her eyes and he quickly takes the flashlight out of his mouth.

"Sorry! I have more weapons. A lot more..."

"Guns?" Zakera asks.

He stops, looking to her with wide eyes.

"You know what guns are?!" He asks in surprise.

"The other humans have them." She remarks.

"Sweet." He remarks quietly as he digs through the trunk.

"They have a taste?" She asks, looking back at the caged rack.

"No, or at least not a good one."

"Then why say it?" She asks, raising a brow.

"I'm sorry." He chuckles. "It's just a saying."

Zakera stands beside him, her tail swishing as she looks down into the open trunk, her eyes scanning his belongings. She examines his other scarfs as Cy pulls out his two-tone Bersa Thunder 9 Pro, several spare magazines and a Franchi PA8 shotgun with a top-folding stock. He sets them aside before removing his Kukri knife, recurved knife, and his beloved chain whip. He sets the weapons

aside, before closing his trunk and returning to the ammo crates, stocking up on pistol rounds and shotgun shells. Zakera looks over the cache that sits openly on the metal floor of the container crate.

“Why so many?” She asks him.

“I’m prepared.” He answers, bringing out boxes of ammunition.

“For what?”

“Anything...” He says with a confident smirk.

He stuffs the remaining non-essentials into the trunk and closes the lid, latching it shut. She can’t help but smile; his preparedness is a sign to her of his inherent masculinity. He drapes the shotgun over his other shoulder with its one-point sling and slips the Bersa pistol into the waistband of his pants, stuffing the magazines and ammunition in various pockets, with the leftovers carried in his arms.

“Where are we going now?” She asks as he walks past her.

“Well, I’m going to my room. I guess you can come if you want too.” He answers casually.

Zakera immediately accepts, walking with him as they leave the cargo hold. She decides not to tell him the cultural taboo that she is breaking by joining him in his private quarters. They climb the stairs and Zakera suddenly stops. Cy only turns around and looks back at her when he doesn’t hear the clicking of her claws on the steel grate steps anymore. She appears to be listening to something. Cy listens as well, but he doesn’t hear anything.

“Ahem.” He clears his throat, drawing her attention. “Are you alright?”

“Yes.” She nods. “Thank you for your concern.”

He chuckles and presses onward. Approaching his quarters, he struggles to carry the boxes while also opening the door. Using his side, he gently pushes the door open. Rushing inside he sets the boxes down onto the bare desk within the room, then his handguns, and finally both long guns, setting everything atop the desk. He sits down in his chair and sighs in relief, then rubs his upper arms for a moment. Zakera sits on his bunk, surprised by the comfort of the bed. She gently bounces on the bed for a moment. Cy can't help but chuckle at the sight.

"What?" She turns to him.

"Nothing." He murmurs.

He looks at the pile of firearms and ammunition, sighing and sitting back in the chair. After a moment, he rises to his feet and walks over to his pack, which sits on the bed near Zakera. She scoots over rather expectantly. Instead, he digs through the bag and retrieves a portable speaker and his MP3 player. He hooks up the device to the speaker and returns to the desk. He selects his Ill Nino playlist, blasting the first song 'When It Cuts'. Zakera immediately cringes, reaching for her ears. He immediately reaches for the device, quickly turning down the volume.

"I'm so sorry!" He exclaims. "I hope I didn't hurt your ears."

"I am fine." She replies. "You enjoy that?"

"I do." He answers with a smile, grabbing the shotgun and a box of shells.

"Why?" She stretches out on his bed.

"It's like me..." Cy says begins. "It's chaotic, and unpredictable, but also very charming." He says, inserting a shell into the magazine tube.

"I see..." She murmurs.

She reaches underneath the pillow, intending to add firmness, but her hand bumps something cold. She slowly removes the Micro-Uzi from underneath and holds it in her hands. He turns to see the barrel pointed in his direction.

“Woah!” He exclaims. “I’ll take that.” He says, sliding the chair over to her and holding out a hand.

She hands him the firearm, watching as Cy holds the grip in his left hand, pulls out the magazine and racks the slide, ensuring that it is empty. He returns to the desk, setting the weapon atop it as he continues his previous work. Lying back down, she stares up at the ceiling. The only sound is that of his music quietly playing while he loads his firearms. After a time, he turns off the devices. The silence is even more deafening than the previous gunshot. She takes a moment to think, wondering what she can say to the intriguing man who sits across the room.

“So, are you glad to be going home tomorrow?” He suddenly asks.

“Home...” She sighs. “I... Yes... That will be nice.” She murmurs.

“You don’t want to go home?” He turns to her, a concerned look on his face.

“It would take a long time to explain.” She replies, looking away from him.

“I have all night.” He jokes.

She smiles faintly but doesn’t laugh. Her expression becomes sorrowful as she appears to be deep in thought. Cy immediately regrets asking.

"I'm sorry. You don't have to tell me... I know that it's not my business." He says.

"It is alright..."

"I was just curious about you." He adds.

She turns back to him, her eyes narrowed as she scans him. He appears sincere. He turns back to the desk, taking the last pistol magazine and a handful of rounds.

"Almost done... .. There!" He chirps.

She turns her head, looking over at him as he rises from the chair. The desk is now clear, loaded magazines and spare ammunition set neatly to the side. His pistols sit on the other side of the desk, beside the Micro-Uzi. The remaining boxes are placed neatly into a strange, triangular stack and are even color coordinated. She sits up as he pulls his pack down from the bunk and sits on the bed.

"I haven't been this tired in a long time." He thinks aloud.

"Likewise." She remarks.

He wants to lie down, but she is using the bed; though there is enough space, he worries that he may offend her somehow. Suddenly, he realizes that the only free room is Juan's, across the hall. He closes his eyes for a moment and sighs.

"I should go and let you rest." He says.

"But is this not your room?"

"Yeah, but you're using it. I forgot that there are no spare beds." He explains.

“Then where will you sleep?”

He points across the hall, to the room where Juan had killed himself. She feels incredibly guilty as he moves over to the desk, taking a single weapon and loading it. If only she knew what to say.

“Please, don’t touch these unless I’m here... For your safety.” He says, a hand hovering over the desk.

She merely nods. He slips the pistol into his waistband and wishes her goodnight, before leaving the room and closing the door behind him. He walks across the hall to Juan’s room. Aside from the unpleasant odor of the rolling chair, and the solidifying gob of blood and brain matter, the room is surprisingly clean. He rolls the chair into the hall and leaves it inside of a storage room, gathering supplies to clean up the mass. He returns to the room and swiftly works, merely scraping up the solid matter and throwing it away, before giving the floor a quick spritz of air freshener. After washing his hands several times over, he sits on the bare bunk and lies back, resting his head on Juan’s pillow. As tired as he is, it feels like an eternity before he finally falls asleep. As he drifts into REM sleep, he begins to dream, as he does every night.