

The Seventh Realm: Volume One

By Mantrid Brizon

Chapter 08: Settling In

Lying in his hammock, Cy gently sways from side to side. It has been several days since the crew had arrived at the fortress, and they have been hard at work since the morning after their first night. Looking around his little room, he glances at his personal effects that decorate the walls. The large steamer trunk and record case sit beside his hammock, while a small shelf acts as a bookcase for his private library. His muscles burn from the many trips, carrying their supplies and equipment to the fortress and from the Malevolence by hand. If only that had been the hardest part. As he relaxes, he recalls the long and arduous journey.

“Hey, Cy. We’re heading back to the Malevolence to get our stuff. Want to tag along?” Johnny asks.

“Maybe tomorrow.” Cy smirks.

“Like you have something better to do?” Johnny chuckles.

“So, what’s the plan? One-hundred trips with that dinghy?”

“Hell no. We’re bringing it closer to the fort.” Rico replies.

“I spoke with Chris for a while, and there’s a cove beyond the Kela... Kena... ... Beyond that girl’s tribe.” Norv says.

“There’s a game trail leading to it; it attaches to a field not far from the fort. We can moor the ship in the cove, where it will be safe, then we can use the gang plank and crane to move the supplies we need.” Rico adds.

With a plan in place, Cy and the others gathered their supplies and head out for the beach, easily a full day's hike. As they leave the fortress, Gabby and Isabella stand with Lara and Amanda.

"So where do you get your drinking water?" Gabby asks.

"Screw that. Where can I take a bath!" Isabella rudely interjects.

"There's a stream that flows near the fort. We collect drinking water from there. It's perfectly fresh, and it's never made us sick." Lara replies.

"And down the stream, it turns into a river. We bathe there. I'll show you." Amanda adds, motioning for them to follow her.

"Thank God. I feel so disgusting." Isabella murmurs.

"Because you are." Johnny jokes as he walks by.

"Fuck off!" She snaps.

Jack takes the lead as they pass by the girls, his vintage Lee Enfield Mk. III rifle slung across his back. Chris walks to his left and Cy to his right, while Richard, Johnny, Rico, Norv and Yasmin form a staggered column behind them. They walk the same path that leads toward the Kelanethaka village. Falling back, Chris can't help but speak with the others, striking up a conversation about the wonders of the twenty-first century. With nothing otherwise interesting to say, they regale the bewildered Chris and Richard: Television, personal computers, cell phones, modern cameras, movies, television, radar, sonar, video chat, the Internet, helicopters, and even space flight and the moon landing.

To Cy and Yasmin's mutual annoyance, their talk lasts throughout the day. They pass the fallen carcass of the creature that had attacked the crew the previous day, the body already ravaged by other carnivorous predators. Jack glances at the bullet wounds, turning back to Cy and glancing at the man's advanced SKS rifle.

“That was a good shot, Mr. Richter.” Jack compliments him.

“Thank you, Sir Carter.” Cy nods.

“Please, just call me Jack.” He chuckles.

“Then you can call me Cy. What was that thing called, anyway?”

“The Ketlan call it a kodana, but I call it a pain in the ass.” Jack smirks.

Jack leads them through a separate, smaller trail, bypassing the path that wraps around the edge of the Kelanethaka village. This new trail also avoids the forest that Zakera had gone through, and they soon come upon the massive crimson field. Trudging through the field, the faint outline of broken grasses reveals their original path in the distance. Following the signs, they soon discover the blazed trail through the forest that leads directly to the yellow sanded beach. Coming to the edge of the trail, they find their dinghy, still tied up to the Borlan tree. Untying the boat, they drag it along the beach as they come upon the light blue water. The Malevolence waits patiently in the distance, bobbing gently with the waves.

“That’s your ship?” Jack asks.

“Yup. That’s my baby.” Norv says with a smile.

“Amazing...” Chris says in awe.

“It’s just a ship.” Yasmin mutters quietly.

As they push the dinghy into the water, Kaladez suddenly charge them, springing up from the sand dunes. Roaring loudly, they rush the group as Cy brings up his SKS and fires. Yasmin draws her full-sized Bersa Thunder 9 Pro with black finish, the side arm she had carried for years while working as J.T.’s captain of the guards. Norv climbs into the dinghy, falling onto the floor. Sitting up on his knees, he draws his old Makarov PM pistol and fires at the beast-men. Rico pulls Juan’s Colt Detective Special from his front pocket, pushing the dinghy further into the water, with Johnny’s help. Rico fires at the

Kaladez as Johnny pulls out a Sig Sauer P232, jumping himself into the boat.

Chris pulls out a Remington 1875 revolver, chambered in .44 Remington. Jack takes a shot with his Lee Enfield, but quickly slings it as he pulls out a vintage 1911 pistol; the Kaladez are simply too close to use his bolt-action rifle effectively. Richard draws a Webley Bulldog and fires. Yasmin and Cy take up defensive positions as the Kaladez charge them wildly and without any strategy. Cy fires until his SKS locks open, then drops it as he kneels, drawing his two-tone Bersa pistol. As quickly as they had begun their assault, the Kalasdez turn and flee from the group. With his pistol at the ready, Cy picks up his rifle as it sits in the yellow sand, dropping it into the dinghy and hopping in backward as Yasmin covers him.

Yasmin and the others converge, never turning their backs on the fleeing Kaladez as they all climb into the now very overcrowded dinghy. The boat sits low in the water, moving slowly to the Malevolence. Reaching the ship, they tie down the dinghy and scramble up the rope ladder. Once aboard, they hoist up the dinghy and lock it back into place on the main deck. Cy looks at the Kaladez on the distant beach as Norv, Rico and Johnny make their way to the bridge. Yasmin vanishes below deck as Norv and Rico head for the bridge. The Malevolence soon roars to life as Norv starts the engines. Yasmin returns from below deck, a Sako rifle in one hand and a case in the other. Returning to the deck, where everyone except for Norv and Rico stand idly, she sets down rifle and case.

“What with the toy?” Cy asks.

“I want to play.” Yasmin coos.

She takes a laser range finder from the case and tosses it to Cy.

“Spot me!”

Cy turns back to the shore while Yasmin loads the Sako TRG 22 rifle, unfolding the bipod and stepping up to the rails. Resting the bipod atop the rails, Cy tells her the wind speed and distance to the shoreline.

“What are you doing?” Jack asks.

“Showing you what the twenty-first century looks like.” Yasmin answers.

She calmly adjusts her sight, never taking her eye away from the scope. She takes a deep breath and holds it for a moment as her trigger finger slips gently behind the guard. Exhaling slowly, she simultaneously fires the rifle. The deadly needle flies out of the barrel, slamming into the chest of a Kaladez a split-second later, dropping it to the ground.

“Kill confirmed.” Cy comments, looking through the range finder.

“Why did you do that? It wasn’t a threat!” Richard exclaims.

“Just having a little fun.” Yasmin grins.

She brushes past the men, heading below deck and back to the cargo hold. Johnny shows the fort dwellers around the ship as Cy returns to his quarters. He collects his remaining weapons and gear, setting them aside as he stretches out on his bed. Cy turns his head, looking at the space where Zakera had slept. Several strands of pink hair line his pillow, while pink, white and cyan fur dot portions of his bedsheet. Sighing, he takes out his phone from his pocket and looks over her picture once more.

“Well now!” Yasmin suddenly says.

Cy bolts upright and shuts off the screen of his phone. Yasmin stands in his doorway, a strange little smile on her face.

“What are you doing here?!” He asks.

“I can’t come to visit a friend?” She retorts.

“Well, you’ve visited. See you later.”

“Touchy. I don’t know why you are hiding her picture. We all know you have it! Are you pining for your little kitty?” She teases.

“She’s bigger than you.” He chuckles.

“Not where it counts.” Yasmin says as she grabs her own breasts.

Cy turns away, waving a hand dismissively. Yasmin’s eyes narrow, her brow lowered as she glares at him. She steps into the room, closing the door behind her.

“You know, we used to be close before we came here.” She begins.

“We’re close now.”

“Not the way I like.” She coos.

She leans over the bed, moving close to Cy. He leans back as her substantial cleavage inches close to his face.

“That was a good kill up there. You remember what happens after that, don’t you?”

“After-kill sex?” He says.

“Mhm.”

She pushes her body against his, lying over him. Yasmin tenderly kisses his neck, her breasts smooshed against his chest as she runs a hand down his body, reaching for his crotch. They have had this secret tradition with each other for well over a year now; no one knew about the two of them, certainly not J.T. As she begins to remove his belt and pants, Cy seems hesitant, staring toward the porthole in the wall.

"I don't want too. I don't like how it makes me feel." He suddenly says.

"You don't like cumming in me?" She raises a brow.

"I do, but I mean afterward... You don't feel like a piece of meat?"

"No." She bluntly replies, lying over him. "I get to kill something, and then I get a great fucking by a nice, big dick. Why wouldn't I like every bit of it?"

He pushes her off of him and sits upright on the edge of the bed, looking down at the floor. Growing frustrated, Yasmin tries to force herself upon him once more, but Cy pushes back and stands from the bed.

"Seriously?!" She asks in disbelief. "Nobody tells me no, especially not *my* second."

"There's a first time for everything." Cy smirks.

"Would you be more into it if I purred for you?" She taunts him.

"Fuck you."

"Alright." She winks, teasingly lifting up her tank top.

"There's more to me than that."

"I know. I like that too, but right now I just want the big dick."

"Well, I wanted more from you." He says.

**“More than my tight pussy and breasts?” She raises an eyebrow.
“What else is there?”**

“Wow... Don’t you think you are worth more than that?” He asks.

“I don’t know... Are we going to fuck or what?” She grumbles.

“I feel sorry for you.”

“Fuck you! Don’t you dare pity me!” She growls.

Quickly standing, she smacks him across the face. Yasmin storms toward the door, stopping only to blow him a kiss before leaving. She disappears down the hall and into her own quarters as Cy watches from the doorway. She slams her door and sits down onto the edge of the bed, lying on her side with her legs drawn toward her chest. A single tear runs over the bridge of her nose. Cy stretches out on his own bed, watching the scenery through the porthole. A little over an hour later, at the beginning of twilight, Cy can see a jagged cliff face nearby. Rising from the bed, he rushes out of his quarters and toward the bridge, quickly climbing the steps. There, he finds everyone except Yasmin.

“What’s going on?” Cy asks.

“We’re about to moor... Very carefully.” Norv says.

The skilled captain slowly backs his ship into the cove, Rico steps out onto the catwalk and looking at the side of the ship. He calls out to Norv, who pushes a lever forward, turning off the ships propellers. Pulling another lever, he drops the anchors. Jack and Richard walk out on deck, followed closely by Rico and Johnny. It’s too late to extend the gangplank and return to the fortress. They will need to spend the night aboard the ship. Sitting snugly in the cove, the Malevolence shouldn’t drift; they can tie her off in the morning and unload everything that they need over time, starting with the weapons and ammunition.

After such a taxing hike to simply retrieve the vessel, everyone, even Cy and Yasmin, sleep quite peacefully that night. Over the next three days, the entire band of humans travel to and fro between the Malevolence and the fortress. They carry everything by hand, bringing back clothes, personal effects, and every gun, shot shell and cartridge. On the fourth night, Cy struggles to sleep, as usual. He wanders the courtyard grounds, hands in his pockets as he kicks a small stone around the massive yard. While walking past the front door to head upstairs, Jack notices that one door is ajar. Poking his head outside, he sees Cy standing alone, illuminated solely by the purple hue of the night-moon.

"Cyrus? What are you doing out here?" Jack suddenly asks.

"Insomnia."

"Then perhaps you should take up reading or chess. It's not safe out here." Jack scolds him.

"I can handle myself."

"I'm sure, but it's better to be safe than sorry." Jack continues.

The two men return inside. Cy enters the dining hall to his left and takes a seat. Across the room, Chris and Donald debate the nature of the world they are in. Their conversations often morph into disparaging banter, and though nothing ever becomes of them, they debate quite frequently. Richard sits by them, listening and occasionally chiming in as well. Cy hangs his head back, staring at the wooden boards of the ceiling as they ramble on.

"Cyrus? Hello? Cyrus!" Chris raises his voice.

"Huh? What?" He looks to them.

"I was asking your opinion of this strange place. At first, we thought we were on a secluded part of Earth, possibly in a distant past or future."

"The two moons and the older, K Class star should have been a dead giveaway that this is *not* earth." Cy chuckles.

"You practice astrology?" Donald asks in surprise.

"I have hobbies..."

"We had a variety of theories, but what or where do you think we are, Cyrus?" Chris asks.

"Alright... I have a theory." Cy begins. "There's something called Superstring Theory; it's a part of theoretical physics. There are ten dimensions of this theory: length, height, depth and time are what we can comprehend. The others dimensions are possible alternate realities. The seventh dimension makes the most sense when we look at this world."

"Oh..." Chris scratches his cheek.

"It's a planet parallel to our own, formed differently than earth, and with an entirely different history, but it might as well be Earth. A seventh realm, if you will. I think that the lightning that brought us here must have acted as a kind of portal between our two dimensions. This would also explain how people from vastly different time periods could arrive only six months apart from each other."

"That's... Certainly a different approach." Donald says in shock.

"That should be a book." Richard chuckles.

"Yes, it's quite the fiction." Donald nods.

"Alright, then. Here's a simpler one for you. We are all dead, and this is some bizarre afterlife." Cy retorts.

"Then what happened to everyone else in the world?" Richard remarks.

"Maybe they are all going to arrive in their own time, or maybe only people who die from lightning are sent here. What do you want from me? I'm just a soldier who likes to read." Cy says.

Without staying to continue the conversation, Cy leaves the men to their debate, heading upstairs to his little room. Struggling through

his usual nightmares, he awakens the next morning to the sunlight beaming in. He rises from his hammock and walks to the balcony. Outside, a large group gathers as they prepare to make yet another trip back to the Malevolence.

“We really need to invent the wheelbarrow.” Cy chuckles.

By the time he has dressed, collected and loaded his weapons, and makes his way downstairs, the group has already left without him. He steps out into the courtyard with his Franchi PA8 shotgun in one hand, only to see a blank earth covered in short purple grass.

“Figures...” Cy mutters, resting the barrel on his shoulder.

“Watch where you point that!” Johnny exclaims, standing behind him.

“Oh, sorry! You stayed behind this time?” Cy asks.

“Yeah. That was a mistake.”

“Why’s that?” Cy raises an eyebrow.

“Because as soon as everyone walked out, Jack and Samantha took off for the study.”

“Oh.” Cy laughs.

“Yeah. From the sound of things, they had a lot of ‘studying’ to catch up on, and don’t even get me started with Lara and Rick.” Johnny grimaces.

“She’s nine years older than him.” Cy laughs harder.

“When you’re desperate!” Johnny shrugs.

“That’s why my room is as far away from everyone else as possible... Come on, bro. Let’s take a walk. It’ll be like old times in Belize, except that now the sky is red and the trees are silver.”

“Exactly like home!” Johnny quips.

The pair walk around the courtyard, scouting the perimeter for a few minutes. Johnny's canteen runs dry, so they head inside. Refilling their water bottles, they try not to pay attention to the moaning and thumping sounds coming from the floor above them. Cy peers into the custom made wooden barrel that stores the fortresses drinking water; it is running a little low. With nothing better to do, they grab several buckets and head for the stream, leaving the safety of the compound. Reaching the water, Johnny dips his hands in it for a moment before grabbing a bucket and dipping it below the surface.

"You know, as strange as this place is, it's beautiful." Johnny remarks.

"And when a big blue cat with a predator mouth eats you, it'll look good doing it." Cy quips, his shotgun in his hands as he keeps watch.

"Damn straight!"

With the buckets filled, Cy slings his shotgun, taking a bucket in each hand. They leave the stream and walk through the brush, soon reaching the road that stretches between the fortress and the Kelanethaka. Turning toward the fortress, they walk casually along the path.

"Do you think another storm might drop a cute blonde nearby?" Johnny asks.

"Why? Is your hand not good enough anymore, Johnny boy?" Cy teases.

"Hello Cy!" A familiar voice suddenly calls out.