

The Seventh Realm: Volume Two

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Episode 16: Newsflash

Yasmin leaves Rico's room, her plaything lying naked on his grass mattress. She adjusts her clothes as she walks down the stairs from the second floor and toward the dining hall. She had not heard Cy or Zakera returning from their walk yesterday, though as soon as she came home, she was too busy indulging herself with Rico to hear much of anything. She glances over her shoulder toward the third floor, briefly wondering what might have happened to Cy. Her heart stings slightly at the thought that he may be in danger, though she quickly pushes it from her mind. Stepping into the grand hall, she scans the room but Cy and his humanoid feline companion are nowhere to be found.

Heading for the bread box she walks past a hungover George, his body slumped over the crescent shaped table as he snores loudly. Gabby's shrill cry startles her and she closes the lid on her own hand. Grumbling, she storms outside to see why the woman is yelling. Before she can reach the large, solid wood double-doors, Johnny joins in.

"Cy's back!" The teenaged boy exclaims from the courtyard.

With a spring in her step, Yasmin pushes open the door and runs through the yard. Before the humans stands a group of Ketlan warriors, led by the now familiar Katero of the Kelanethaka. Cy has some visible wounds and a cloth bandage around his head. Though he

walks without aid, he seems to hang on Zakera, who walks with him, tucked underneath his arm.

“What the hell happened to you? Where did you go, you bastard?!” Yasmin yells.

“For a walk.” Cy smirks.

“You’re hurt!” Gabby exclaims.

“He will be fine.” Katero chimes in, a little grin on his face.

“You should see the other dozen guys.” Cy chuckles.

Cy, Zakera and the others move swiftly from the courtyard and into the fortress, while Katero leads his men back down the path and toward the Kelanethaka village; he still needs to inform Zikata of his daughter’s wellbeing, and her intention to pledge to Cy. Entering the fortress, Cy takes a seat at a table near a corner, separate from the crescent shaped table that lines the far-side of the large dining room. Zakera helps him ease into the seat, his muscles sore from the exertion of yesterday’s adventure, as much as the hike home. She quickly darts over to the bread box and adjacent fruit bowl, grabbing food for her mate and returning to him.

She presents the meal, saving a single loaf for herself as she sits down beside him. Yasmin takes a seat across from the couple as Johnny and Gabby bring most of the fortress dwellers into the hall. Jack, Chris, Donald and Rico look elated at the return of the pale American, standing near the table as the room quickly fills. Even Samantha and Isabella are curious, standing at the back of the room. They bombard the duo with questions. Where have they been? Why didn’t they return sooner? How did Cy attain his injuries? After taking a pause from his meal, Cy begins to speak. He explains in great detail the events of the previous twenty-four hours, beginning with the walk down the path that led to their assault by the cultists.

"I knew there was something weird about that kid in the bushes!" Johnny interrupts.

"He was a scout." Zakera chimes in.

"A group of cultists wanted to find a virgin to sacrifice and thought more humans would be taking that road. I've been told that we aren't the only ones; tribes of other humans live many days walk into the forest." Cy adds.

Though the other fortress dwellers seem unsurprised, this is news to the crew of the Malevolence.

"There are more humans?!" Norv asks, in shock.

"Some." Chris replies.

"Are any from our time?" Gabby wonders.

"Oh, no. The few we ever encountered seemed quite primitive. At the time we thought they may be natives, but in retrospect, they could be ancient Greeks or Franks." Daniel says.

"Hold up... They wanted a virgin?" Yasmin asks with a raised eyebrow. "Then why take Zakera? Her race screws like rabbits."

"Well, turns out they found one." Cy turns his head to Zakera.

The Ketlan can feel herself flushing underneath her white and pink fur, gently nibbling on her bottom lip as the room stares at her in shock.

"You're a virgin?!" Amanda asks, visibly stunned.

"I never heard of an adult Ketlan virgin." Michael comments.

"Well, I was." Zakera blurts out.

She turns back to Cy, taking his hand and giving it a squeeze. The room is silent enough to hear a pin drop. The fortress dwellers all stare with mouths agape as Cy and Zakera gaze to each other, little smiles on their faces. They cannot believe their ears. The human and his Ketlan companion have mated?

“Alright, we’ll come back to that. How did you rescue her from the cultists?” Yasmin demands.

Without missing a beat Cy continues his story, explaining how he survived the attack, retrieved help from the Kelanethaka, and followed the cultists back to their tribe. Yasmin and his companions from Belize seem rather impressed by his story. Jack, Richard, Samantha, Chris and Donald look horrified as the man explains in graphic detail how he and his Ketlan allies slaughtered their way toward Zakera’s prison, killing many of the female guards in the process. He isn’t certain if they are bothered by his callous attitude towards their deaths, the cult’s hedonistic lifestyle, their plan to sacrifice Zakera, or a mixture of all three. It makes little difference to him as he explains the story.

After detailing the rescue and subsequent massacre of the cultists, and with Zakera having already revealed her former virginity, Cy continues. Explaining their journey to the Malevolence with Katero and his men, he glosses over the graphic details of his night with Zakera, only revealing that they spent the night together and mated for the first time. They all stand in awe as they listen to the epic tale, which takes him nearly half an hour to tell. Many seem unable to fully comprehend some of the details, staring at Cy as though he had two heads.

“I-I uh... Ahem... Did you really need to shoot so many of the cultists *after* freeing her?” Donald asks.

"Yes, you could have merely fired into the air and scared them away. Few Ketlan can stand the sound of firearms the first time." Jack adds.

"I didn't want to make any more mistakes, and I don't intend to repeat them in the future. That's why I killed as many as I could, that's why I made love to Zakera, and that's why I asked her to accept my pledge and be my wife." Cy explains.

Zakera rests her head on the shoulder of her lover, nuzzling his neck with her feline nose. Her pink and white muzzle gently rub his neck, his arm pulling tightly around her slender body. The room is as silent as a tomb as they watch the couple, now open about their relationship with one another. Yasmin's eyelid twitches slightly.

"Well... We had a bit of fun ourselves, yesterday." Yasmin speaks, breaking the silence.

"Really?" Cy asks, his eyes closed while Zakera nuzzles him.

"We brought some of it back. Do you want to see?" Yasmin grins.

Looking to his lover, Zakera gives him a quick kiss on his lips before rising from her seat. Taking his last piece of fruit, he uses the table to rise from his chair, moving slowly as he feels the aching in his arms and legs. Chuckling, Yasmin reaches for an arm to help him up but Zakera is quick to step in. Though she doesn't show it, Yasmin burns with anger as Zakera stands between her and Cy. Gritting her teeth, the attractive Colombian moves through the crowd, leading the pair toward the corpses of the creatures that lie in the lab across the hall. Cy and Zakera follow close behind as she regales them with a synopsis of the cave and the battle that followed.

"Amanda and Michael said the things are called 'Zajak'," Yasmin comments.

"Zajak?! You brought them here?!" Zakera exclaims in a panic.

“So, you’ve met before.” Yasmin chuckles.

“What are ‘Zajak’?” Cy asks his mate.

“They are carnivorous hunters that prey on solitary or weak animals, devouring their prey alive. The only come out at night; stories say that they live underground in many caves that connect. The elders spoke of them as a warning to the children not to leave the village at night. My father once said that they were quite real and that a cave of the beasts terrified them until it collapsed when he was a boy, sealing them inside. They aren’t worth the flesh they are made of.” Zakera explains.

“Well, these three aren’t doing any harm, not with bullets in them.” Yasmin smirks, standing beside a table of Zajak corpses.

“We should destroy these bodies right away!” Zakera urges.

“That’s what Amanda and Michael said.” Richard remarks.

“That’s because they know better. They lived with the Kelanethaka and grew up hearing the same stories that I did.” Zakera retorts.

Cy turns to her, placing a hand on each of her arms and rubbing her soft fur gently. She rests her head on his shoulder as he leans in, placing his cheek alongside her head, his lips mere centimeters from her triangular feline ear.

“It’s okay, they’re dead.” He says softly, wrapping his arms tightly around her.

“Okay, Cy.” Zakera whimpers, subtly nodding her head.

Yasmin balls her hand into a fist, squeezing tightly as she grits her teeth. She walks past the pair, brushing by Cy and pushing through the shrinking crowd as she quickly darts up the stairs toward the second floor; she still hasn’t eaten yet, but at the moment she doesn’t care. Leaving the lab themselves, Cy and Zakera head for the staircase.

“Want to find us a new room? I can harvest the grass we need for our bed.” Cy says to her as they stand at the base of the stairs.

“Are you sure you are able?” Zakera asks.

“I’ll be fine. I might as well, while I still have some energy left.” He answers, kissing her cheek.

“Alright, but please be careful.” Zakera pleads with him.

“We’ll help.” Amanda says, motioning between herself and her brother Michael.

“As will I. I’d like to hear more about this cult that you encountered.” Daniel adds, taking a step forward.

Daniel barrages Cy with questions as he and his three companions head out for a large field of lush red grass about a kilometer away. Zakera climbs the grand staircase and darts past the second-floor landing as she continues toward the third. Standing on the top floor, she first heads for Cy’s old room, taking a look around and estimating how much space they will require. Her ears shift as she hears a pair of feet climbing the staircase. They are far too light to be Cy’s, or any of the men for that matter; none of the women live on the third floor. It sounds as though whoever is climbing the stairs is trying to remain undetected. Standing toward the balcony, she turns as the soft footfalls draw near. After a moment, Yasmin enters the room.

“Were you trying to sneak in?” Zakera asks.

“I should have known that you would hear me with ears like that.” Yasmin smirks as she steps inside.

“What do you want, Yasmin?”

“I don’t know what your game is...” Yasmin begins.

“Game?”

“But Cy has been taken in by it; you’ve got him wrapped around your furry little finger. I don’t know what your plan is or what you want

from him, but if you ever hurt him..." She growls, standing within arms-reach of Zakera.

Zakera's blood boils, her hands trembling and she coils her fingers.

"I know how to make you disappear for go-"

Zakera lunges, interrupting the assassin. She hisses and bears her sharp canines as she grabs Yasmin by the throat. She spins, her tail swishing through the air as she pushes the startled Yasmin to the floor. Falling with a loud thud, Zakera straddles Yasmin, sitting atop her toned stomach and holding down her strong arm with a knee, preventing her from drawing her pistol. Her claws dig into Yasmin's throat, blood seeping around her sheet white nails as Zakera leans in, her wavy pink hair hanging alongside her face.

"How dare you!" Zakera yells, her feline nose inches from Yasmin's. "Cy is the only one who matters so much to me; I love him more than I love myself. I will love him long after we are pledged, and if I bear his children I will love them even more. I would *die* for him if I must."

Zakera can hardly control her own anger; the nerve of Yasmin for accusing her of manipulating the love of her life. The untrained Ketlan girl can hardly believe her own actions, but she refuses to back down. Yasmin struggles to breathe, her body trembling and her heart racing. She hasn't felt this afraid since she was a little girl, abused and molested by her own father and his younger brothers. She would cower underneath her bed, in her closet, basement, or the attic while hiding from them, trembling like a leaf as they searched for the girl they took pleasure in tormenting. As she looks into Zakera's cyan eyes, her brow furled and her fingers clutching her throat, she knows that the Ketlan could and would kill her if she felt the need.

“Cy is *mine*, and I will *not* allow you to intervene. If you come between us, I will rip your throat from your neck and eat it in front of you while I watch you drown in your own blood.” Zakera warns, her voice cold and stern.

Yasmin knows that the Ketlan is sincere; she can see it in her eyes. She can't help but find her actions appealing and even endearing. Yasmin finds herself developing a modicum of respect for Zakera as she looms over her.

“Do I make myself clear?”

Yasmin nods her head, unable to speak from the force that Zakera is putting on her throat. Zakera hisses a final time and gives her throat a quick squeeze before releasing her entirely. She rises to her pawlike feet, her tail swaying gently from side to side as she looks down at Yasmin. Turning her eyes to the Ketlan, she is surprised when Zakera holds out a hand to her, offering to help her up. Though apprehensive, she takes hold of her hand, gripping tightly as Zakera pulls her to her feet with surprising strength.

“I hope we will not need to have this conversation again.” Zakera remarks nonchalantly, a pleasant grin on her face.

“I doubt it.” Yasmin smirks, her eyes quickly scanning the Ketlan.

After a brief but tense moment of silence, Yasmin backs slowly out of the room, leaving Zakera alone and returning downstairs. Heading for her quarters, she stops when she feels a cramping in her stomach; hunger that she has yet to satiate. Watching the human leave, Zakera stands in the room for a moment before returning to the balcony and glancing over the side. She turns her eyes to the dabs of blood crowning the tips of her white claws, chuckling to herself. She

has never been so assertive in her life. This is the kind of person that she had always assumed she was; it took an arranged marriage that she didn't want and her relationship with Cy to bring it out into the open.

Cy and his companions return from the field, carrying sheaves of harvested grasses, more than enough to weave a large bed for the couple. As they walk through the gate, Daniel closes and latches it behind them. Zakera sits with Johnny and Gabby near the goshan tree in courtyard, sharing an amusing anecdote; the siblings laugh aloud. Zakera turns her head, her eyes locking on Cy as soon as he steps within one hundred meters. Springing to her feet, the Ketlan dashes toward him and embraces her lover, causing him to drop his red grass sheaves. Her tail whips wildly from side to side as she nuzzles his face.

"It's good to see you too." Cy chuckles, his arms around her slender form. "Have you found a good room?"

"I did. It will easily fit both of us, and our first child. It even has another ledge overlooking the rear of the fort." She explains.

"It sounds perfect." He says softly.

Taking the sheaves, they head into the fortress and begin their ascent. Donald steps out from the lab, stopping the group as they stand midway up the staircase.

"Pardon me, Cyrus! Do you have a moment?" He asks.

"I'll get back to you, alright?"

Climbing the grand staircase to the third floor, Cy struggles with each step. His limbs cry out from overuse and his eyes feel as though they are made of lead. Upon reaching the third floor, Zakera leads the small group to their new suite which sits opposite the staircase near

the rear of the fortress. Even Amanda and Michael can't remember what this room once was, but it was empty when Zakera found it and it will make an excellent bedroom. Cy sits on the floor in the corner as Zakera, Amanda, Michael and Daniel lay out the sheaves. She turns to her mate to ask if he is ready to help weave the bed, but to everyone's surprise he has already fallen asleep, sitting upright in the corner of the room, his head hanging down.

Cy opens his eyes, awakened by a gentle scratching. Zakera runs her claws along the underside of his chin as she lifts his head by the lower jaw. As his eyes adjust, he can see that it is still daylight outside. Zakera smiles warmly at him as she kneels before him.

"I'm sorry. Was I asleep for long?" He asks.

"Long enough." She giggles.

Looking around the room, Cy can see that they are the only occupants. Against the far wall is a large bed weaved from the red grass sheaves sitting on the floor. Not only that, but all of their belongings have been moved into the room and placed strategically; his steamer trunk sits near his left side.

"Apparently..." He murmurs.

Taking hold of his hand, Zakera pulls at him and quickly brings him to his feet. He plants a palm against the wall to steady himself, still weak from his earlier ordeal. She leads him over to the bed, letting go of him as he stumbles, falling over onto the mattress.

"Well... At least it's soft!" He quips.

He stretches out on the mattress, resting his head on a pillow made out of an animal hide sack filled with feathers, which surrounds a core consisting of a grass sheave. It's unusually comfortable; a second pillow lies beside him.

"You should rest, Cy." She says as she pulls off his shoes. "I will come back to check on you soon."

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"There are still chores to be done." She answers.

"Come here." He says, patting the space beside him.

Zakera sits down beside him, looking down at him as he reaches out for her. His arm wraps around her waist and pulls gently, bringing her closer.

"I just want to hold you. If only for a little while." He murmurs.

She grins cheek to cheek, her heart racing as she lies down beside him. His arm remains wrapped around her slender body, his hand tucking beneath her side. His skin rubs against the white fur of her belly as he rests his nose against her shoulder. Her natural feminine scent is so soothing. She sets her hands over his forearms as the pair spoon together on the bed, her fingers gently scratching his skin. This is the most comfortable she's ever been; she has never felt such happiness as when she is with him. His unwavering desire for her company makes her heart burn. She closes her cyan eyes, arching her back and pressing herself tighter against her mate; they quickly fall asleep in each other's arms.