

# The Seventh Realm: Volume Two

By Mantrid Brizon

## Episode 20: New Enemies

Jack, Daniel, Richard and Amanda follow along, unwilling to disobey Cyrus, who angrily sacrificed a young girl and massacred her village. Though it is rarely wise to travel on Monala at night, they march confidently, bolstered by the burning village they've left in their wake. Few survived the slaughter, and only the empty shells of stone houses with charred walls will remain, a testament to the village's twisted ways. They are led by Katero and his men and keep their weapons close, though it is something of a struggle as the fortress dwellers bear bronze china and weapons which they have plundered for scrap.

Exhausted and hungry, the party reach the Kelanethaka and return Kechana to her family just before dawn. The Kelanethaka are surprised to see them traveling by night and praise them for returning the stolen girl. Katero and his men spare no details as they regale the village of Cy's actions. Sitting in the same hut that they are always given when staying with the tribe, Zakera looks toward the hut's door-flap, listening to the chatter of the villagers outside. Her lips curl around her snout in a pleased grin as they speak of Zakera and her human companions. Her own actions are almost as impressive to the Kelanethaka as Cy's, as their females simply do not act as warriors do.

It warms her heart when a young female child in the distance expresses a desire to be like the pink furred feline. All of the villagers

now seem proud to be associated with the fortress dwellers as word of their exploits spread throughout their humble home. Cy and Yasmin earn the lo'kan moniker; Jack, Daniel, Richard and Amanda aren't quite so pleased. Johnny already knew who Cy was before, so none of this came as a surprise. He is more shocked that Cy remained so restrained before finally destroying the village. The others, however, glance to him with apprehension, even fear. The hardened Jack, a world war one veteran, looks terrified of the quiet, black haired American.

"Cyrus? May I speak with you?" Zikata's voice asks from outside.

"Of course!" Cy chirps, rising to his feet and approaching the flap.

"Take a walk with me." Zikata urges.

Zakera peeks out from the hut, watching her mate as he leaves with her father. Though worried at first, she notes her father's demeanor and quickly relaxes, waving to Cy who promptly waves back. They two men wander through the village in silence. The others point and speak in both English and Ketlanic about the human, all of it in reverence. Cy notes a compounded word that many of the Kelanethaka keep repeating as they see him, but it is not lo'kan. They murmur sa'kesh repeatedly, which when combined means 'three-trees'.

"Zikata, why do they keep saying 'three-trees'?" Cy asks as they walk.

"It is what we have named your tribe. Your fortress has three trees growing from the center."

"Oh... That makes sense." Cy murmurs.

Zikata clears his throat and begins to speak at length. Still looking ahead as the morning sun rises, the sky glows its usual faint red hue.

“I understand that you have a relationship with my daughter. I admit that, at first, I was quite unsure of you. For Zakeria to turn away from her people to be with a lesser species was almost too taboo for me to bring her back, and I would be lying if I said that I still did not have my doubts. However, you have proved yourself worthy of her. More than that, you have proven our assumptions about your race to be wholly untrue; we underestimated your kind and for that I apologize. We have much to learn from you and your tribe. If it is your intention, then you have my blessing to pledge to my daughter.”

“Wow.” Cy stammers. “I uh... I really don’t know what to say.”

“Thank you? If you intend to pledge to my daughter, then it would be ‘thank you, father’.” Zikata grins.

“Thank you, father.”

“Then the rumor is true... I hope you make my daughter very happy and take good care of her. She is all that I have.” Zikata turns to Cy, resting his hands on his shoulders.

“I intend to devote myself to her, and I would never let her come to harm; she’s all that I have too.”

Zikata flashes a toothy smile and subtly chuckles, briefly sniffling before patting Cy’s shoulder. It’s obvious to the human that Zikata is genuinely worried about his daughter’s wellbeing, as any father would be.

“If that is true, then she will be in good hands.” Zikata remarks.

“It is.” Cy nods.

“When is the ceremony?”

**“I’m not sure. We’ve had delays with the Zajak attack, the repairs to our fortress, and then this thing with Kechana... Soon though!” Cy explains.**

**“Well, do not wait too long. I want to be youthful enough to walk to your tribe and witness the event.” Zikata jokes.**

**“It won’t be that long, but there is something that I want to do first...”**

**“What is that?” Zikata tilts his head curiously.**

**“I want to teach the Kelanethaka... I want to improve your weapons and battle tactics, and give you a better way of life. I want you to become the strongest of all of the Ketlan tribes so that you may form a true alliance with the Sa’kesh.” Cy bows his head respectfully.**

**“Why would you want to do that?” Zikata can’t help but ask.**

**“These other tribes that we’ve met are brutal, both Ketlan and human; They kill innocents to appease their fictitious gods and goddesses, kidnap strangers and probably much worse.” Cy begins.**

**“Well, no one ever said that life would be easy.” Zikata retorts.**

**“It doesn’t need to be, but it doesn’t need to be unduly cruel either. The Kelanethaka are nothing like these other tribes; your ways are superior, as are ours. If I teach your people and make you stronger, then together we can get ride of the rest of these tribes and finally live in peace.”**

**Zikata can see the fire in Cy’s eyes as he speaks. His words are impassioned and genuine. He leans in and embraces the human, patting his back. After the hug, he pulls back but leaves and arm draped over Cy’s shoulders.**

**“As soon as you have finished teaching us, I believe that I will be proud to be your father.”**

Returning to their temporary hut, Zikata returns Zakera's mate to her. He gives his daughter a tight embrace and whispers into her ear before letting her go. Cy can only assume that he is revealing something about their conversation, or granting her his blessing to pledge to Cy and become his wife. With dawn creeping over the horizon, the weary group wish to stay, but Cy and Zakera make an executive decision. With Yasmin and Johnny supporting them, the others concede and march back to the fortress, bearing their bronze plunder for Chris' forge. Though they have their weapons back, the original fortress dwellers seem afraid of speaking out against Cy.

Feeling the change in their attitudes, he has Johnny lead them while he, Zakera and Yasmin walk behind them. After marching for several more hours, they return to the fortress around noon, all of them promptly retiring to their bedrooms. Before heading upstairs to rest, Yasmin and Johnny take it upon themselves to gather the crew of the Malevolence. Yasmin enlists Rico and Johnny asks Gabriella for her support, which she promptly grants. They switch around their rooms so that they all remain on the same floor as Cy. Norv and Isabella, however, both seem uninterested in the unfolding drama that envelopes the fortress; they want no part of whatever Cy is planning.

Once they are safely concealed within their rooms, a door slowly and quietly opens. Jack peers out and walks barefoot from his room and down the stairs, surprising Michael who sits in the dining hall.

"We need to talk. Get everyone who stayed behind." Jack quietly demands.

Michael obeys and promptly fetches Chris, Lara and Samantha. To Jack's surprise, Amanda, Richard and Daniel are still awake, quietly joining them downstairs. Now well out of ear shot, Jack and the others tell their friends about the events of the previous night. The group is shocked at Cy's ruthlessness, but Lara brings up an interesting point:

“Cyrus has never harmed any of us. Actually, he has done his best to protect the fortress and everyone in it.”

“Do you recall how he shot Donald in the face?” Richard scoffs.

“I recall him ending the suffering of a man who was going to die no matter what we did for him.” Lara retorts.

“And that makes it alright?” Samantha sneers.

“He shared his medical manual with me so that I could better treat our injuries. I don’t think that was some offhanded gesture.” Lara sternly replies.

“Lara’s right. He’s done a great deal for us, sharing weapons and ammunition, giving us tools and knowledge from his time. Cyrus may be vicious and a killer, but it’s obvious that he is on *our* side.” Chris interjects.

“For how long? Until it no longer suits him?” Jack murmurs.

“Are you seriously considering keeping him here? He killed a girl... *A human* girl.” Amanda chokes out, looking to her friends with shock.

“Cyrus was making a valid point. They kidnapped one child, and he made them give up one of their own instead.” Michael suddenly speaks out, against his own sister.

“But he killed a human.” She tries not to yell.

“So? They were going to kill a Ketlan.”

Amanda looks to her brother in astonishment. Her mouth drops open and she slowly shakes her head. She cannot believe what she is hearing. For so long they lived alongside the Kelanethaka when their parents disappeared, but she never actually believed that they were equals; how could such a primitive looking species be equal to the human race? She’s only ever witnessed Michael spending time with Johnny, yet somehow Cy’s influence has rubbed off anyway.

"I didn't say that I agreed with it, but I do understand where he was coming from." Michael speaks out in his defense.

"What about the villagers that they killed after that? Was that just collateral damage?" Jack argues.

"Cyrus is a rather passionate man." Daniel interjects.

"Yes. We all saw how he behaved when George would insult Zakera... Perhaps he just took it too far?" Lara suggests.

"Too far? Innocent people are dead!" Amanda's voice cracks from the strain, unable to remain quiet any longer.

"They didn't sound innocent to me." Michael snickers.

"Those overgrown house pets burned down the entire village at his command." Jack adds.

"Either way, he's far too valuable to just try and get rid of him. I say he stays." Chris says.

"Agreed." Lara and Michael nod in unison.

Turning to the others, Jack is stunned when he sees Daniel suddenly stepping aside. He walks over to Chris and the others, silently taking their side and leaving Jack, Amanda and Richard as the black sheep.

"Well with his body guards upstairs, I doubt we could make him leave anyway..." Richard remarks, leaning back in his chair.

He looks to his companions, who all give him an odd stare. It finally dawns on him that Jack and Amanda were not considering making Cy leave the fortress. Realizing the gravity of their conversation, Richard changes his tune; he doesn't have the stomach for cold-blooded murder, even if the others do. Cy sits upstairs, taking off his belt and gear. Zakera undresses for bed as he steps over to his small camp mirror. Lying naked atop their grass mattress, she looks over to him, watching him for a moment. He stares intently at his own reflection, a sullen look upon his face.

**“Come and lie with me.” Zakera says softly.**

**Cy glances over his shoulder and smiles faintly at her, removing his clothing as he steps up to the bed and lies down beside her. The soft white fur of her Zakera’s stomach and breasts presses against his chest as the lover’s embrace. Sharing several passionate kisses, she nuzzles his face and neck with her snout. After a moment, she pauses and lies still, hugging him tightly.**

**“May we talk?” She asks.**

**“Of course!”**

**“About last night?”**

**“Oh... That... I uh... I let my emotions get in the way.” Cy shamefully explains.**

**“I know.” She says before gently kissing his neck. “You are not a bad person, but sometimes your passion can make you do bad things.” She looks up at him and their eyes lock.**

**“You think I shouldn’t have killed that girl?” His voice softens.**

**“No. I understand why you did that! I was talking about the villagers. You gave them their sacrifice; you did not need to shoot them or burn down their village afterward.” She explains.**

**“You shot too, and so did Yasmin.” Cy looks confused.**

**“I follow your lead. I am your mate, and that is what a female does for her mate. I will always follow and support you, no matter what you do. Yasmin is just a killer. She does not need an excuse; she prefers one.”**

**“Right... I’m sorry. I disappointed you.” Cy looks down at the mattress.**

**“You allowed your anger to control you.” She places her hand on his chin, lifting his head. “You should always be in control of your feelings, Cy. Acting in anger can lead to mistakes, and I don’t want to**

ever lose you to one. I merely ask that you try to be more careful in the future.”

“You’re right.” He nods.

“When am I wrong?”

She winks and grins cutely at him. Leaning in, she kisses him tenderly on his lips. He wraps an arm around her and leans forward. Zakera’s clawed hand glides down the flesh of his chest and towards his groin as she lies back and gently opens her legs for her lover. It’s all the invitation he requires, gently placing himself atop her.

“Be gentle.” He jokes as he necks her.

“No promises.” She coos, her claws gently raking across his back.

The following day, Cy and Zakera prepare for an extended trip to the Kelanethaka. They plan to spend at least a week there, teaching them more advanced skills in construction, combat, medicine and even metallurgy; they pack all of the necessary books, and several more of Cy’s decorative swords. With his plan revealed to the others, Jack, Amanda and Richard are strongly against it, however, their own friends are less hostile. Seeing the brutality of even the human tribe first-hand, and with a full night to dwell on it, Daniel’s opinion has shifted; he would rather a tribe like the Kelanethaka rise above the others. Chris, ever the pragmatist, knows that a strong ally only bodes well for the Sa’kesh, an opinion shared in part by everyone but the three dissenters.

In an attempt to prove his loyalty and hasten the task, Chris even opts to join them on the trip, help that Cy gladly accepts. The balance of power sways heavily in the American’s favor; Cy is in command of the fortress now. He places Yasmin and Johnny in charge while he is away; Yasmin will take the lead with Johnny acting as her right hand. However, worried that the unhappy trio might somehow

stage a coup, Cy quietly gives Yasmin another order. The cold-blooded assassin and the rest of the Malevolence's crew will watch the original fortress dwellers like hawks while Cy is away and act if the dissenters force their hand. Cy, Zakera and Chris then bid farewell to their friends and march down the well-worn trail and back to the Kelanethaka.

Immediately upon their arrival Zikata greets them with open arms, as does the rest of the village, giving the three the same hut as before. Cy notes that in only a day's time, the Kelanethaka have already reproduced several copies of the Aztec weapons that he left with them. They are especially fond of the macuahuitl, as they have never had a weapon of its kind before. Cy and Chris start small, teaching the Kelanethaka how to make simple clay pottery and mud bricks, skills they both learned from their shared interest in ancient cultures. Within their first lesson they seem to grasp the concepts and begin mass producing bricks for construction.

Chris then teaches them how to craft the bricks into a working furnace, as described in Cy's at-home knife crafting book. Using leather scraps left over from making the Kelanethaka's clothes, along with Zakera's sewing skills, they stitch a simple bellows to use with the furnace. Chris explains each step to the intrigued Ketlan as he creates their first forge. Taking a group of Ketlan into the jungle, they collect the copper ores they had found on the surface. Without tin or lead, Chris settles, teaching them how to use stone and sand to cast knives, spear heads and other simple tools out of molten copper. Cy offers to give them bronze as soon as they can discover a source of metal to create the alloy.

Cy, meanwhile, uses his knowledge of hand-to-hand combat and battle tactics to train the Kelanethaka warriors. He teaches them formations, various stances, close quarters knife fighting techniques, and improves their already proficient skills with the spear. He goes a step further and introduces new weapons that he had read about in his historical books, teaching the Ketlan warriors how to craft the

Atlatl and a hide sling. Though untrained in these weapons himself, he is at least capable of giving them basic instructions. In short order the Kelanethaka are the first Ketlan tribe to have true, ranged weapons, as far as they know.

As Cy, Zakera and Chris spend the week teaching the tribals what they can, Yasmin and Johnny keep the fortress together and life continues as it had before the Zajak attack. The days pass by as they continue their routines. Richard, Michael and Daniel work on their respective projects, Amanda and Jack hunt regularly, and Gabriella, Isabella, Samantha and Lara forage and collect water. It's a simple life. One morning, a full ten days after the trio left for the Kelanethaka, Yasmin is roused from her sleep. Johnny barges in on her and Rico, gasping and looking as though he had just run a marathon.

"What the hell happened to you?" She sits up.

"We've got company. They're not far now." Johnny pants.

"Who?" She demands, getting out of bed and putting on her pants.

"I don't know. I was walking to the stream, just to take a walk, you know? I saw a group of guys coming up the path towards the fort. They looked like knights or something." Johnny explains.

"Knights?" Rico sits up.

"Are you fucking serious?" Yasmin holsters her Bersa pistol.

Before Johnny can answer, Jack peeks inside of the door.

"We have visitors." He says apprehensively.

"Shit..." Yasmin mutters, walking past Johnny.

She grabs her MP5K and leaves Rico's room, where she has been staying on a semi-regular basis. She rushes downstairs and exits the fortress, an envoy standing before their electrified fence. She pokes the structure with the tip of an iron aged sword in a medieval European style, startled by the huge sparks that fly between the two conductive points.

"Who are you, and what the fuck do you want?!" Yasmin demands.

"His Majesty, King Roland the First, hast hath sent us on a quest. We seeketh thy King. Where is Cyrus?" A rather meek looking man replies in Early Modern English.

"How do you know Cyrus?" Yasmin eyes the visitors with suspicion.

"That gent is thy leadether, or is that gent not? The black-haired sir with the Ketlan mistress." The man continues.

"What the fuck are you saying?! How do you know Cyrus?!"

Yasmin draws her pistol, aiming at the men. Johnny immediately steps forward, placing his hands upon Yasmin's arms and lowering her pistol. Jack steps forward from the crowd, snickering at her as he takes the lead.

"Prithee forgive the maiden. The lady hast a terrible temper." Jack begins.

"Doth not dwelleth on the matter. Where is Cyrus?" The man asks again.

"Cyrus hast taken a journey and shall returneth life. We may taketh a message for thee and speaketh to that gent at which hour that gent returns."

"There is nay needeth for yond. We needeth to speak to that gent about thy village. We shell returneth tomorrow. Hopefully Cyrus hast hath returned by then."

The man turns and walks away, the soldiers turning and follow behind him as their simple plate armor clanks. Yasmin holsters her pistol as the rest of the group approach, having watched from a short distance behind her.

“Did you see their armor and weapons? They almost looked like Roman legionnaires.” Richard comments.

“Not even close. It appeared to be medieval European plate armor.” Jack replies.

“How did you know how to talk like that?” Johnny asks.

“The benefits of a classical education.” Jack smirks.

“How did they know Cyrus’ name?” Yasmin wonders aloud.

“They must have heard one of us say it back at that village. Maybe they are part of a larger kingdom.” Amanda suggests.

“We can head out and fetch Cyrus... Bring him back in time for nightfall.” Jack offers.

“No... He should be back soon on his own. If these guys are serious, they’ll be watching the road; they’ll come as soon as he is back, regardless of what they said.” She retorts.

“And if they aren’t serious?” Johnny looks to her.

Yasmin turns to Johnny and silently chuckles, patting him on the shoulder before turning around and heading back inside. She doesn’t bother to answer him. That afternoon the Kelanethaka finish casting their first copper sword, copying the Egyptian Khopesh from Cy’s collection almost verbatim. Zikata holds the rough blade high as the other Ketlan admire it, gasping and murmuring amongst themselves at the wondrous weapon which they have created. The unpolished blade, still with seam marks from the mold, doesn’t seem all that impressive to Cy but he can’t help but smile at their creation; this is just the beginning. Returning to their hut, they had already packed in

preparation to leave. Chris waits inside, taking a nap after a long day building the foundation of their first mud brick house.

**"I cannot wait to return home." Zakera admits.**

**"I miss the bed." Cy remarks.**

**"I miss more than that." Zakera turns to him with a lustful gaze.**

**"I miss that too. Nearly two weeks without... Well... It's been really tough." He finishes, walking up to Zakera.**

**"Indeed. Ten days as the third wheel is quite a chore." Chris suddenly murmurs.**

**He lifts his pith hat from over his eyes and grins at the couple before sitting up and collecting his pack and gear. The couple embrace and share a few passionate kisses before doing the same and leaving the hut. They walk toward the trail, followed by a large group of grateful Ketlan who continuously praise them for their gifts of knowledge. The trio walk together along the path, heading for their home. Cy and Zakera stay locked at their sides, his arm over her shoulder and hers around his back, tucked just beneath his musette bag. As twilight approaches they return to the fortress. They are immediately rushed by a group led by Yasmin, all armed. They quickly let the trio into the courtyard, closing and charging the gate behind them.**

**"Thank God you're both back! Everything was fine, but this morning a group of men in knight's armor showed up and asked for you by name!" Yasmin begins, speaking a mile a minute.**

**"Woah! Slow down there." Cy holds up a hand.**

**"Knight's armor?" Chris asks in disbelief.**

**"You fucking hear me!"**

**"Is yond thee, Cyrus?!" A voice yells from beyond the fence.**

Spinning around, Cy looks back at a man dressed like a Catholic monk. With a traditional haircut, shaved only at the top of his head, he wears a flowing brown robe tied at his waist with a thick brown rope. Beside the monk are several soldiers, six in total. They bear wooden round shields and iron swords, one of them drawn and very similar in appearance to a dark age Viking longsword. Their armor is a thick plate, with a linen gambeson visible beneath the plates. Their full-face helmet visors are pulled down, hiding their faces from sight, probably as a subtle terror tactic. Cy walks up to the fence as Zakera, and Yasmin follow him.

“I am Cyrus. Who is't art thee?” He calmly asks.

The others are thoroughly surprised as Cy speaks. Even Yasmin didn't know that Cyrus had ever read Shakespeare.

“Ah... A polite king. How refreshing. Thy mistress wast not polite this morning.” The monk begins.

“The maiden doth take timeth to becometh comforting.” Cy smirks, glancing back to Yasmin.

By now the entire fortress steps outside, even the rarely seen Samantha and Isabella. Many are armed and ready for a firefight, while the other show their support by staying back and watching. Cy holds up a hand for those with weapons to stop. He does not look too concerned with the men at the gate, and the others lower their weapons, standing at the ready.

“Valorous. So, shall we beginneth?” The monk asks.

“Beginneth with what?” Cy raises an eyebrow.

“I representeth His Majesty King Roland the First.” The man says proudly.

**“Roland?” Cy mutters with a quiet laugh.**

**“That gent is our first king and hath founder of our nation. King Roland hast already did collect over a dozen villages under his banner, and anon that gent hast a proposition... Unfortunately, I hast confirmed one suspicion, and therefore can only offer three two of the original three bargains.”**

**“And what art those bargains?” Cy asks.**

**“One: Surrender thy fortress and leaveth or assimilate but without her. The Ketlan art not welcometh in his kingdom and art a threat to humanity.” The monk points his finger at Zakera.**

**“I beggeth thy pardon?!” Cy’s face flushes with anger.**

**“Uh oh...” Johnny mutters in the background.**

**“Two: Square us and perish.” The monk calmly continues.**

**“May I asketh what wast the third bargain?” Cy grits his teeth.**

**“Three: If’t be true thee forsooth were human and didst not liveth peacefully with Ketlan, King Roland wouldst alloweth thee to liveth in thy fortress, so longeth as thee served as an outpost for his kingdom. Yond is impossible, however.” He glares at Zakera.**

**“And what maketh the Ketlan mistress so unworthy?” Cy takes a step towards them.**

**“The lady is Ketlan. Ketlan art a raceth of beasts.” He laughs.**

**Cy draws his pistol, aiming at the men. The guards draw their swords and bring up their simple wooden round shields.**

**“T’wouldst serve nothing to killeth me. It tooketh us more than two weeks to cometh here from his kingdom, and if’t be true we doth not returneth within another two weeks, his army will marcheth here and destroyeth thee. If’t be true thee alloweth us to returneth alive with thy answer, thee may beest spared.”**

**“What if’t by true mine own answer is less than pleasing to thy king?” Cy tilts his head.**

**“Twill not maketh any difference. Thee shall all beest cutteth down by the sword.” The monk admits.**

**“Valorous...” Cy grins sinisterly.**

**He flips off the safety and fires a single round from his Bersa pistl, striking the monk in the forehead. The guards rush the fence, but are electrocuted as their metal armor touches it. A single guard presses his wooden shield against the fence, but Cy and Yasmin begin firing; their armor is not capable of deflecting modern cartridges, which easily pierce the plates and strike the warm flesh beneath. They are all swiftly killed as the others watch on.**

**“Well... It seems we have a problem...” Cy murmurs as he holsters his pistol.**