

The Seventh Realm: Volume Two

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Episode 22: Lackey Blues

With the liberated villager's blessing, the Sa'kesh spend the night in a large tent near the center of their camp, at their leader's insistence. Yasmin lies back, stretching out as she crosses her arms behind her head. Zakera and Cy prepare a simple bedroll and lie down together, snuggling with each other. Lara and Jack both seem lost in thought and Rico naps about a foot to Yasmin's left. Johnny rolls over and turns to Cy and Zakera, watching the couple for a moment. Zakera is buried under his arm; they look quite peaceful. Johnny turns his eyes to Rico and Yasmin as she slides over. Though they aren't nearly the affectionate couple that Cy and Zakera are, Yasmin still sleeps with her side or back against him.

Johnny sighs and rolls over, staring at the cloth wall of the yurt. As the night drags on, he struggles to sleep. The wind rustling the trees and the strange noises of the local wildlife is almost as distracting as his crushing loneliness. After a time, Johnny notices that neither Cy nor Yasmin seem to have their typical nightmares; he looks back towards Yasmin, and sees that Rico is now holding her in nearly an identical fashion as Cy holds Zakera. The assassin's peaceful sleep only confirms his suspicions of what he is missing out on and a small pain develops within his chest. It's a nagging pain that's been gradually worsening since they first began living at the fortress.

He grumbles as he tries to force himself to sleep, and though his eyes feel heavy, he simply cannot shut himself off like a light switch, although he certainly wishes that he could. The weight of his

loneliness and depression sink into his thoughts. He sits up and looks back to Cy and Zakera. Though he realizes how bizarre they look together, at least they are happy. Looking at Yasmin and Rico once more, he's finally had enough. He climbs up from his bedroll and walks towards the flap of the yurt.

"I guess this is why people invented alcohol." He thinks to himself.

Stepping outside, he walks towards the Panzer IV tank and sits on the right guard that covers the tracks. He taps his feet on the ground and looks at the yurts surrounding the tank. Lying back on the track guard, Johnny stares at the night sky and admires the purple night moon. He looks all around him and takes a deep breath. The air is sweet smelling and the warm breeze of the tropical planet somehow eases his pain. Johnny closes his eyes as he rests on the hard metal track guard, which is cold against his body, finally drifting off to sleep.

"Rise and shine!"

The voice, accompanied by loud banging startles the teenager, who rolls off of the tank and falls to the ground below.

"Ahh!" He yelps as he lands with a thud.

"Sorry!" Cy exclaims, standing at the front of the tank.

"The hell, man?" Johnny grumbles.

"Hey, I'm sorry, bro. I didn't think you'd freak out like that... It's time to head out."

"Yeah, alright..." Johnny murmurs as he climbs to his feet.

"Did you sleep out here?" Cy looks to him with concern.

“Sure did.”

“You didn’t want to be inside with us?”

“The tank was a little softer than the ground.” Johnny quips.

“Alright...” Cy shrugs. “Come on. We’ve got to make tracks.”

“Tee hee...” Johnny grumbles.

The nomadic villagers tear down their campsite, packing up their yurts as Cy and the others prepare to leave. Cy talks to the older man from before, clearly the leader of the travelers, and points toward the trail they had blazed. From his distance, Johnny can’t hear them talking, but Cy seems to be explaining how to travel to the fortress. Johnny quickly joins the others as they head home, glancing back to see that the nomads are indeed following at a distance. Having already formed a nice path, the return trip takes one fourth of the time. At just past noon Johnny is already walking upstairs and toward his room to drop off his heavy pack. As he stands in his room, staring at the pack on the floor, a knock on his doorframe draws his attention.

“Hey, Johnny.” Cy says as he peers inside.

“Hi...”

“Are you alright? You haven’t been yourself lately. Is it because of last night?” Cy asks.

“No... I... Never mind.” Johnny murmurs.

“You know that you can always talk to me, right? I mean, I know that I haven’t been as close to you as I use to be, and I’m sorry about that. It’s been really crazy since we got here, what with the monsters and the racist knights and falling in love with a cat girl.” Cy lightheartedly explains.

“It’s alright. I get it, bro.” Johnny feigns a smile.

“Hey.” Cy rests a hand on Johnny’s shoulder. “I love you like a brother, and if you’re having a problem, I want to fix it.”

Johnny looks to Cy, his eyes welling up as he feels the urge to cry. He hasn't felt appreciated or cared for since the day they've arrived. Johnny's lack of companionship only makes the struggle to adapt that much more arduous for the teenaged boy. Cy notes the change in Johnny's demeanor and gives him a hug.

"Hey, it's alright. I'm here now, Janice." He teases.

"Fuck you." Johnny chuckles.

"That's better." Cy steps back. "Hey, did you want to come with us? We can hang out more." Cy asks.

"Where are you going?"

"Katero just showed up."

"Again?!" Johnny snickers.

"Yeah. For once he's not asking for anything. Zikata wanted to show us something, and Katero looked excited."

"Sure." Johnny sighs.

Reaching down, he takes up his pack from the ground and begins removing the excess gear that he won't need. With a much lighter pack, he follows Cy downstairs, who isn't even bringing one. Slinging his SKS rifle and wearing his usual gear belt, Cy and Johnny join Zakera in the courtyard as she talks to Katero. Chris and Daniel both seem curious, opting to join the party, while everyone else stays behind. Johnny walks with them in silence as they hike for several hours along the path toward the Kelanethaka village. Cy regularly attempts to talk to Johnny, but he only gives brief answers, if any at all. Everyone notices how depressed he seems, though neither is sure what to do for him.

They arrive at the Kelanethaka near mid-afternoon and the group is immediately surrounded by happy looking Ketlan. Many are armed with macuahuitls made of native wood and precisely knapped stones, while some have copper knives and khopesh swords. They

usher them through the town rather forcefully and Johnny falls behind; the adult Ketlan seem to forget about him.

“Sure... Leave me behind... Again.” He mutters angrily, struggling to follow along.

Katero presents the Sa’kesh envoy to Zikata as he stands before his hut. The chieftain gives Cy the traditional Ketlan warrior handshake, before doing the same for Chris and Daniel. Zikata hugs his daughter and then motions for them to follow. They enter his hut, accepting his invitation. Johnny arrives just as Katero’s golden and black spotted tail slips inside. He sighs, feeling left out once again. Not wanting to barge in, he stands outside and listens to the conversation from within. He turns around and sits by the door, his back to the wall of the hut.

“We are so glad to see you again. We have made much progress since you were last here. See what we have made for you!” Zikata happily exclaims.

“I’ve never seen that metal before.” Cy replies.

“Fascinating color!” Chris exclaims.

“We could not find ‘tin’ or ‘lead’, but we have this mineral instead. We mixed it with copper and made a knife for you.” Zikata explains.

“It looks just like my knife!” Cy remarks.

“Katero carved the mold himself from memory.” Zikata adds.

“It is very pretty!” Zakera adds.

“Hell yeah, it is!” Cy exclaims.

“Thank you, my friend. I am pleased that you like it.” Katero says.

Johnny grumbles as he sits outside, the pain in his chest turning into a slowly burning anger. He looks back at the entrance to the hut and then around him, as though his wandering eyes will help pass the time. He takes his hands and places them through his wavy hair, moving it back and away from his face. He leans his head back and suddenly sees a Ketlan watching him out of the corner of his eye. Turning his head, Gomona sits a distance away. She grins as soon as he lays his eyes upon her and waves. Though Johnny waves back, he cannot forget their last encounter; how she so swiftly sent him away after they had sex, or how she so quickly had sex with another village boy the very morning after.

"This is an entirely new alloy." Chris comments.

"Since you have never seen this metal and it has no name, we would like to name it 'Cyrus'." Zikata says.

"Why not 'Chris'? He built your first forge." Cy asks.

"He made it known that you held the knowledge he taught us." Zikata retorts.

"Well, I'm honored, but that's not a good name for a metal... Hm... How about 'Cykera'?" He suggests after a pause.

"Oh, Cy!" Zakera coos.

"That is a much better name." Zikata chuckles. "Cykera it will be."

"Oh please..." Johnny murmurs while rolling his eyes.

He looks back to Gomona, who seems hurt by his coldness. As he takes a moment to think, Johnny wonders if maybe he shouldn't be so quick to dismiss the girl. Their ways are different, but even the most promiscuous juvenile Ketlan settles down as an adult; it is the way of the Kelanethaka to choose a mate and keep them for life once they reach adulthood. Now feeling a tinge of guilt, Johnny rises to his feet and walks over to Gomona. With her body tilted slightly to the side, he can see her bushy tail swaying as he approaches her.

Gomona's jade green eyes light up as the gold and brown wolfess watches the human approaching her.

He takes a seat beside her, resting his forearms atop his bent knees as he faces the same direction as she does. Gomona looks him over, sniffing the air for a moment. She seems to be taking in his scent.

"It is good to see you again, Johnny." She says softly.

"Yeah... It's nice to see you too, Gomona."

"You remembered my name?!" She asks in surprise.

"Do the other boys forget?" He can't help but retort.

"Some..." She frowns.

"Oh... I'm sorry." He says, feeling even more guilty.

"It is alright... So, why are you here?"

"I came with my friends." He answers.

"Do you always go where they go?" She asks.

"I'm still a juvenile. I have to." He smirks.

"True... It *is* good to see you again."

He looks over to Gomona, her eyes turned up to him. As soon as he looks upon her, the girl's tail wags again and her lips curl into a smile. Taking the initiative, he reaches an arm out and slips it around her waist, pulling the slender girl closer. Gomona does not hesitate to comply, sliding over until her leg and hip touch his own, resting her head upon his shoulder. She closes her eyes and enjoys his touch as he strokes the soft fur of her arm. Johnny immediately notes that his sorrow gradually lifts with their physical contact. Remembering the Ketlan's strange practice of juvenile promiscuity, he wonders if he has an answer to his solution, an age-old cure for pain.

He turns his head and gives Gomona a gentle kiss, her fingers coiling as she feels his lips upon her snout. Following his lead, she lifts her head and the pair are soon trading saliva. None of the other Ketlan who wander around the village find this the least bit strange. Suddenly, the group exits Zikata's hut, their commotion distracting the kissing teens. Glancing toward them, Johnny gets a look at Cy's new blade. It's essentially identical in size and shape to his Schrade SCHF18 knife, but it's made out of a single piece of cast metal. The metal is almost golden in color, with strange blue swirls throughout. The pattern reminds him of a case-hardened finish that he has seen on some reproduction cowboy revolvers and tactical knives.

Cy takes the new knife and slips it into the sheath where his original Schrade sits; it fits perfectly. Katero clearly has an eye for detail, as he made the mold from memory.

"You do fine work." Cy compliments.

"We learn quickly." Zikata grins.

"Clearly." Daniel remarks.

Cy presents his original knife to Katero, who seems somewhat confused. He explains that he considers his old knife to be a gift of friendship between himself and Katero, not an outright trade. It's a sentiment that Katero finds pleasing. After another Ketlan warrior handshake, Cy spins around, finally noticing Johnny's absence. He turns to the boy and waves, taking a few steps toward him. Johnny leans back and Gomona becomes plainly visible. Cy immediately stops and smirks, waving again and turning back.

"I'll catch up with you later, alright?"

"Sure thing." Johnny replies.

Turning back to Gomona, Johnny gives her another series of kisses, a hand reaching down and resting over one of her breasts. Her hide top squeaks as his fingers flex over the soft globe of her chest. She gasps for breath, her clawed fingers coiling on his arms as she swiftly grows aroused. Johnny necks the girl and nuzzles her cheek with his nose.

“D-do y-you...”

“Yes. I want to mate.” He interrupts, giving her another kiss.

“I have missed you, Johnny. I have never had a better partner.” She coos.

“Neither have I.” He says gruffly, a hand squeezing her buttocks.

“Really?” She sheepishly asks.

“Really. Let’s go.” He growls, fondling the Ketlan girl.

“Ah-alright.”

Zakera looks over her shoulder as they walk away from her father’s hut, grinning as she witnesses the teens leaving for Gomona’s home. She only hopes that Johnny can understand and accept how their society works. She would hate for his sorrow to deepen when their juvenile affair ends with their ceremony of adulthood; few females of her tribe would live in such a taboo manner as Zakera, once their juvenile stage has ended. They walk through the village toward an area that was once a small field when Zakera lived there, before Cy and the crew arrived. Chris, Cy and Zakera immediately notice dozens of newly constructed huts, as well as a small mountain of dried mud bricks and several foundations built to match the one that Chris had started.

“Well they’ve been busy.” Chris comments.

“Indeed.” Zakera looks around the village in amazement.

Zikata approaches a nearly constructed, square, single-room house made of mud bricks. Long branches with mud caked sticks and large leaves are being placed by villagers as a roof. He holds out his arms toward his sides as he marvels over the new structure. Dropping his arms to his side, he turns back to the others, a wide grin curling around his snout.

"This will become my new home, though I will expand it in the future. We are eager to test the limits of this new form of building." Zikata says.

"I like it. It has a very... Egyptian feel to it." Cy remarks.

"Could that be from its vaguely mastaba-like shape, or the guards wielding copper khopesh swords?" Daniel wonders aloud.

"Maybe both."

"Soon, all swords and tools will be made of cykera. This will also be the first of many new buildings. We will soon only build with brick. We may even lay them to walk upon." Zikata continues.

"Roads? Splendid!" Chris grins.

"And you all doubted me." Cy chuckles.

Zikata shows them around the newly planned additions to their village, though few understand exactly why they are building it. The Kelanethaka already have enough homes for all, plus a few extra huts.

"May I ask why you plan on building more homes?" Daniel asks.

"Soon, all of the Kelanethaka will live in brick homes. The addition will allow a smooth transition. Once that is done, the extra homes will be for the others." Zikata answers.

"Others?" Chris raises an eyebrow.

"The others we bring here."

“But father, there are no tribes for many miles.” Zakera comments.

“I know. I have designated scouting parties to venture deep into the wilderness and look for more tribes. If they are as we are, with similar ways to our own, then we will offer an alliance. If they are not, we will cut them with the sword and bring the remnants back; they will assimilate with us and become Kelanethaka.” He says to her.

“Oh...” Chris sighs, turning to Cy.

“I believed it when Cy said that the ways of the Sa’kesh and Kelanethaka are superior to other tribes. Together, we will cut out a land where we may rule them. With all others living as we do, we may finally have true peace!” Zikata proudly exclaims.

It is obvious to everyone that he fervently believes his rhetoric, only made stronger by Cy’s own disgust with the brutality of the tribes that they had previously encountered. The other Ketlan around Zikata hear his little speech and cheer, many holding up macuahuitls and some waving khopesh swords. Chris and Daniel look to Cy, who is otherwise unphased by the display. He stands firm, Zakera by his side and with her hand in his.

“I can hardly wait for that day.” Cy grins.

“I do not think that we will wait for long. The Sa’kesh and Kelanethaka are strong allies, and our bond will only grow stronger as we move forward!” Zikata declares.

“Of this, I am certain.” Cy nods.

“Speaking of bond... When do you plan to pledge to my daughter?”

“We are planning to wait until we deal with another problem.” Zakera answers.

“Wait.” Cy speaks up.

“Yes, my love?” Zakera turns to him.

Cy looks back and forth between Zakera and her father, contemplating something. He takes both of her hands and stands directly in front of her.

"I've been thinking about this for a long time... I love you, Zakera. I don't want to wait for this other problem to be over. I want to pledge to you as soon as you are ready."

Zakera is stunned, as are their many witnesses. Rarely is a pledge request made publicly like this, and Zakera finds herself growing increasingly nervous and even a little embarrassed.

"D-do you mean that?" She sheepishly asks.

"I wouldn't have said it if I didn't." He smiles warmly.

"Cy... I have been ready." She says, embracing her mate tightly.

"Then tell me when, and we'll do it."

"Is tomorrow too soon?" She asks with a toothy grin.

"Tomorrow is just fine." He answers, stroking her back.

They share several impassioned kisses in front of her father, Katero, and dozens of random Kelanethaka villagers, who immediately whoop and cheer for the lovers. Zakera giggles with joy as she clings tightly to her mate, jumping up and wrapping her legs around his waist. Nuzzling her cheek and neck, Cy is interrupted by a hand on his shoulder. The couple remember where they are and Zakera drops back down to the ground as Zikata gives them both a strong embrace. Zikata agrees to gather the tribe in the morning and bring them to the Sa'kesh fortress for the pledging ceremony; it's an act that must take place before the male's home.

With a long hike ahead of them and an eventful day in the morning, the Sa'kesh decide it best to head back to the fortress to eat their dinner and rest. Before they can leave, however, they need to find Johnny. As his guardian, Cy cannot leave the village without his ward. They head off in search of the teenage boy and his Ketlan female companion. Cy turns to Zakera, who already seems to know where the pair have gone. Chris and Daniel note the odd behavior of the other Ketlan who lead them, searching around the village in circles. As Daniel passes by the new construction site for the second time, he leans closer and whispers to Chris.

"I don't think they are taking us the right way."

"I know..." Chris quietly replies.

"So, should we look on our own?" Daniel asks.

"Johnny is probably with that girl."

"Then why don't they take us to her?" Daniel persists.

"They're probably... Indisposed." Chris grows frustrated.

"Doing what?"

Chris glances over his shoulder and shakes his head. It takes a moment for Daniel to realize just what the man is implying, immediately feeling foolish for not realizing it sooner. He clears his throat and resigns himself to another circuit around the village.

"Nng... Nnngggshit..." Johnny grunts.

"Aaahh!" Gomona squeals.

He thrusts harder and faster into Gomona's tight loins, pummeling her body with his engorged phallus. She rocks back and forth as she holds her lover, her claws raking the sweat drenched flesh of his back. Their musk fills even his nostrils, driving both teens wild with desire as they enjoy the carnal pleasures that their age-

group are allowed. Having already brought her to climax, Johnny prepares to finish. His full testicles slap the damp and matted fur of her buttocks as he draws near. Gomona can feel every stroke as he works her, never before having a lover of his caliber or endowment. The way he touches and pleasures her makes her sorrows fade away. Though she would never say it, it's the primary reason for their current union.

"Nng-yeah. Hhhff, nng..." He grunts.

"Aaahh, Johnny! Hezan Gomona! Nnggaahh! Fanush dortha! Aaahh! Gomona volo jade!"

"Rrrgg. Hhhnnnggg!"

Slamming in hard, he presses firmly into her as he releases his seed, Gomona squealing and writhing beneath him. Feeling his flow deep within her loins, she orgasms for a second time, and with her lover. Though Johnny cannot speak Ketlanic, he has a sneaking suspicion that this was exactly what she was asking for in her pleased cries. With each blast from his body into hers, he feels his pain dissipating. Gomona enjoys every sensation that he gives her, the ache in her heart dissolving. Removing himself from her body, Johnny lies beside her and catches his breath before putting on his clothes. As the pleasure of mating with him eases her own anguish, Gomana quickly rises.

"Will I see you again?" She sheepishly asks.

Johnny turns back and looks to her. He knows that Gomona probably doesn't care for him beyond this, and he doesn't know her enough to care in kind. However, whenever he visits with Cy, so long as they are juveniles and allowed, this could be their therapy.

"Of course." He says with a smile.