

The Seventh Realm: Volume Three

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Episode 33: Salvage

Early in the morning, several days after returning to the Sa'kesh village and settling in, Cy speaks with his principal advisors, Chris, Daniel, Lara and Yasmin. Each is the agent for a separate but specific matter: Chris handles logistics and infrastructure, Daniel handles public relations and smooths out cultural misunderstandings, Lara runs the Sa'kesh version of the public health and safety department, and Yasmin, the official war-guide of the Sa'kesh, is Cy's right-hand and acting general of sorts; Katero refused the post. Her entire goal in life is the safety and security of their tribe and the people who live within, regardless of their race. Zakera, acting as Cy's wife and queen, is the de facto second in command, with Yasmin ranking third below her.

"So, what's up? Who called the meeting?" Cy asks as he enters the library.

"We both did." Chris says, waving a hand between himself and Daniel.

"Alright. What's going on?" Cy asks again as he takes a seat.

"Well we've been thinking about all of the planned expansions to the city and the upgrades Yasmin has asked for the fortress." Daniel begins.

"We have decided that there is only one way to make this viable in the time allotted." Chris continues.

"We... Need to strip the Malevolence." Daniel sheepishly finishes.

“Woah, what?!” Yasmin growls.

“That ship is *the* most technologically advanced thing on this planet... That we know of... With enough manpower, we might even be able to unstick it.” Cy interjects

“We don’t need to take everything out of it, and we did not mean we wanted to remove the hull panels. Just the copper wiring and most of the non-essential electronics. Maybe comfort items as well.” Chris retorts.

“Everything non-essential to the actual sailing of the ship.” Daniel adds.

“I don’t know about that...” Cy murmurs.

“She will probably never sail again anyway, Cyrus. The position of Monala’s moons does not allow for tidal fluctuations like on Earth, but the last time we looked, nearly the entire propeller was exposed and above the water.” Chris says.

“I don’t know if that’s such a good idea, Cy. We might need that ship...” Yasmin interjects.

“Maybe... But we need to make these upgrades and continue expanding. A dead ship is useless to us at the moment, even if we can fix her later... Do what you have to do, guys.” Cy orders.

“Thank you, Cyrus!” Chris chirps.

“Oh, and there’s one more thing.” Daniel says.

“Yeah?”

“We’ve come up with a form of currency that we think will work. We’ve based the coinage on the Roman Denarius.”

“Money? ... You want to invent money? One of the single worst ideas since we crawled out of caves...” Cy snickers.

“Barter is only good for so much, and it’s inevitable with a nation like the one we’re creating. Besides, Roland introduced money already. I’ve seen Mirkon and some of his original villagers trade with it. All we’d be doing is creating a standard for everyone to use.” Daniel rationalizes.

“And anything with the Sa’kesh brand would be advertising. Imagine where one of our coins might end up?” Lara adds.

“Around the neck of a Kaladez or in Zajak shit?” Yasmin laughs.

“I’m serious. If merchants travel far enough, someone might get their hands on a coin, see our logo and think ‘I wonder where that came from. I want to go there!’” Lara retorts.

“That’s a good point. Besides, with coins I can finally bathe in it and not get papercuts.” Yasmin quips.

“Alright.” Cy chuckles. “Put it out there.”

“Right away, Cyrus!”

“Wait... What *is* the design on the coin?”

“The Ketlanic numbers of the coin’s value for the face, with the Sa’kesh tree logo for the back.” Chris answers.

“Hm... That sounds nice.” Cy smirks.

With currency now planned to enter production, Daniel and Chris recommend a treasurer to Cy. To his surprise, they nominate Samantha Davis. Samantha, like Isabella, had been content to simply exist with her companions. Her only actual duty seemed to be consorting with Jack, who is very obviously fond of the dainty blonde human. However, it was brought to Cy’s attention that Samantha’s fortune was created by her father, but managed by the girl as early as fourteen-years-old. He assigned her that task and oversaw her duties to teach Samantha proper finances. As the Davis fortune tripled after she began managing the family’s accounts, Samantha is an easy choice for a treasurer.

With their business completed, Cy heads downstairs where Zakera waits for him. He takes time out of his day to spend with his mate, whom he often leaves at the fortress for her own safety. After Zikata’s stabbing, he takes even less chances, and Zakera doesn’t blame him. They eat together and speak with each other before returning to their room to snuggle and make-love. It’s almost routine

now. Dashing up the stairs to the third floor, Cy gives Zakera's firm buttocks a little smack. Minoma, who stands in the hall beside Johnny, watches with an amused grin as they dart down the hall and toward their room, where they will lose at least an hour or two of the day.

"They are very cute together." Minoma comments.

"You think so?" Johnny asks.

"Yes."

"So... Are you ready to take that walk now?" He asks, holding out a hand to her.

"Always." She replies, smiling at him and taking his hand.

Heading outside to carry on with their own time together, Johnny and Minoma exit the fortress and enter the courtyard. There, they find both Katero and Gabriella sitting on the wooden bench. Both Katero and Minoma have become permanent residents of the fortress, a fact known to all Sa'kesh militia, and though Katero refused to be the war-guide, he is still an acting captain in the militia and under Cy and Yasmin's command.

"Where is the second-best knife thrower?" Katero teasingly asks.

"Who? ... Oh! Cy is upstairs with Zakera. They're... Busy." Johnny responds.

"Or at least they will be soon enough." Minoma giggles.

"Heading out for your usual walk?" Katero asks.

"Of course!" Johnny grins.

"Yeah. Who needs to work." Gabriella jests.

"Hey, I'm still a juvenile. Until my ceremony, I might as well enjoy not being a full-fledged member of the tribe. No work, long walks, and free food." Johnny smirks.

“We will be responsible when we are adults.” Minoma chirps.

With that, Johnny takes a moment to check his Sig P232 pistol before once again taking hold of Minoma’s hand. They head for the gate where designated guards, who understand the procedure, deactivate the electrified gate before opening it for them. Katero and Gabriella watch as the pair head for the small city a short distance away. They often wander the streets together, admiring the buildings and watching the construction. When that grows tiresome, they walk toward the farms and ranches on the outskirts, where they spend hours together just talking. No sooner than Minoma is out of earshot, Katero turns to Gabriella.

“Do you think that Johnny has mated with her yet?” He asks.

“I have teased him about that a few times already. Johnny denies ever touching her, but they *are* juveniles. Who knows! I’m just glad that he found someone that he can actually relate to.” She answers.

“I wonder if mating with her would make his nightmares go away.” Katero thinks aloud.

“I didn’t know that he had any.” Gabriella looks surprised.

“After Gomona... Sometimes I can hear him at night.”

A short pause ensues before Katero and Gabriella pick up where they left off; they return to a conversation about their parents. Both of them find comfort in the others company and often spend many hours simply talking with each other and sharing details about themselves. After what seems like only a few short moments together, they are surprised to see Chris marching up with two squads of militia and a band of civilian volunteers. Kanafa leads one of the squads, the same unit that helped Katero hunt down and slay Fekolza. Together, with the other Sa’kesh citizens, they will help dismantle certain portions of the Malevolence and carry the supplies back.

“Why are you back so fast?” Gabriella asks.

“I have been gone for nearly two hours.” Chris replies, holding his antique pocket watch.

“... Really?!” Katero raises a brow.

“Relativity, Katero.” Chris smirks.

The guards deactivate the gate and pull it open for Chris as he walks through the courtyard, trailed by a small entourage.

“Isn’t Cyrus coming?” He asks the pair on the bench.

“Oh!” Katero jumps up. “He is busy at the moment and does not wish to be disturbed. I will bring him when they... Er... He’s done.”

“Oh.” Chris laughs. “Well as soon as he’s done polishing his gun, he can join us. We can’t wait around for too long though. We have work to do.”

Turning back, Chris and the others head for the growing city. There, the once dense jungle trail leading to the grass field and the cove has since been cleared; a wide-open path now occupies that land. Gabriella stands from the bench and rests her hand on Katero’s forearm, gaining his attention.

“So... Now what?”

“I suppose I will wait and tell Cyrus that Chris and the others are waiting for him.” He replies.

“Alright. I’ll be reading in the library if you decide to skip that.” She says with a warm smile.

Lying atop the purple grass mattress, Cy and Zakera snuggle, relaxing as they catch their breath. He kisses her cheek and holds her, his muscles softening and his eyelids feeling heavy. She growls

sweetly and strokes his head, her fingers running through his matted hair. Arching her back as she presses tightly against her mate, she returns each kiss two-fold. It is always a comforting feeling for her, being in his arms.

“Nadamu, Cy.” She coos.

“Nadamu, Zakera.”

“Finally...” Katero grumbles.

Sitting on the staircase near the third-floor landing, which is on the opposite end of the fortress, Katero rises to his feet. He had been waiting for the pair to finish for nearly ten minutes, and it was growing tiresome. He turns to begin climbing the remaining steps to the third floor.

“Are they done y-. Oh wow...” Gabriella suddenly stops.

“Hm?” Katero turns his head to her.

Climbing the staircase from the second floor, she stands parallel from him, her mouth agape. Her eyes look down at his groin, staring intently. It is only then that he realizes his display. With only the traditional hide loin cloth of the Kelanethaka for his garment, there was nothing to pull against him. His focus to try and tune out the sounds of the couple’s mating further prevented him from noticing. With a quick turn, he inadvertently reveals his length and girth for her before his back faces her. It is more than she expected. Gabriella feels her temperature increasing slightly. She slowly continues up the stairs.

“I apologize! I...” He turns his head down, visibly embarrassed.

“Did it sound that good?” She asks.

“It has been some time for me; as you know, I am not pledged.”

"Did you want me to take care of that?" She jests.

"I beg your pardon?" He raises a brow.

"I mean! ... That's not what I wanted to say. I don't know why I said 'me'..." She flushes.

"You know that unpledged adults should not do that." He replies.

"I know. It was a stupid joke. I'm sorry. I... See you later?"

"Alright." He nods.

As they lie together in their bed, Zakera turns her head toward the door. Cy immediately prepares himself, unsurprised by the subtle knock that soon follows.

"Are you busy, Cyrus?" Katero asks.

"You already know the answer to that." Cy chuckles.

"Right... Well, Chris and the others are preparing to leave for the Malevolence. We should hurry if we want to go with them."

"Alright. I'll be there in a moment." Cy replies.

He says goodbye to his mate before dressing in his black trousers, tunic, cloak and keffiyeh; he prefers the peasant clothing of his human citizens over his old garments. They are not made out of linen or cotton, as neither exist on Monala, but from a plant called 'vishkachay'. A lightweight material, it's as strong as traditional denim, as water resistant as thick canvas, softer and more comfortable than cotton, and highly breathable. Vishkachay woven clothing is superior to all but the highest quality synthetic materials produced back on Earth. In fact, many Zelkona are learning to appreciate the woven clothing that the humans produce. Quite a few have ceased wearing their primitive hide clothes, opting to assimilate and wear clothing similar to their leader, with notable alterations made to accommodate their tail and clawed feet.

Zakera is the one exception. Not only does she not enjoy the feeling of woven clothing, Cy is quite fond of her hide skirt and breastplate. As Minoma also prefers her traditional clothing, Katero had long continued to wear only a loin cloth, however, now he questions that decision. Standing in the hallway, he waits only a few minutes before the bedroom door opens and Cy steps out. Closing the door behind him, he pats Katero on the arm as he walks by and the pair soon glide down the staircase and toward the ground floor. They pass Gabriella, who looks unusually nervous and refuses to join them, though Cy had given her the option.

Heading outside, Cy's human guards open the gate for him. Unlike Zikata, who was unarmed and living with dissenters, Cy always has his steel falcata sword, chain whip, cykera recurve knife and a pistol; he is competent in their use, though some more than others. Being both beloved and feared by his people further ensures his safety. The two friends walk the streets and toward the path that leads to the large field and eventually the cove. Workers and villagers stop to look at Cy and Katero, both of whom are dressed far more humbly than many of them. Reaching the path, they find that a single squad of militia stand there. They are led by Kanafa and wait for them, as the others have gone ahead. With the militia stand Johnny and Minoma.

"Well, what a pleasant surprise! I didn't think I'd be seeing you two here."

"Hey, Cy. We're going to come with you!" Johnny chirps.

"Whose idea was that?" Cy chuckles.

Johnny and Minoma simultaneously point to one another.

"Really?" Katero raises a brow.

“Well, we’ve walked all over the town already and Minoma has never seen the Malevolence before. We’ve got so many guards and both one-man armies, with you and Yasmin going.” Johnny explains.

“If that’s what you want to do, but don’t get too distracted.” Cy warns with a smirk.

“Don’t respond to that.” Johnny says to Minoma.

“Distracted with what?” Minoma asks.

“I warned you.” Johnny chuckles.

“We’re bringing the mattresses home, so those bedrooms aren’t available.” Cy teases.

“And I have excellent hearing...” Katero adds.

“Oh...”

Minoma flushes beneath her fur, her head lowering slightly from embarrassment.

“Dude...” Johnny glares at Cy.

“I’m sorry. I was only teasing.”

“Yes Cy. Do not tease her.” Katero says.

“Thank you!” Johnny exclaims.

“... That is *his* job.” Katero continues, making a provocative gesture with his fingers.

“You guys are assholes. Let’s go, Minoma.” He says, taking her by the hand.

Her grip is exceptionally tight as they walk near the front of the squad, beside Kanafa and her second, a human male. Johnny grins in amusement at Minoma’s expression as she walks with him. It is obvious that she has never been so far from either tribe before; every tree, every rock and every blade of colorful grass is a new experience for

the girl. After a moderate hike toward the cove, the silhouette of the Malevolence comes into view. Minoma stops, staring in awe at the vessel.

“You came in that?!” She asks with bewilderment.

“We sure did.” Johnny replies.

“I have never seen anything like it. It is beautiful.” She says in reverence.

Approaching the vessel, they are amazed to see that the first team have already begun to remove the excess gear from the ship. A large stack of mattresses sits in a neat pile, arranged into a pyramid. Beside that pile is one of the full fuel drums that Cy had stolen when they fled J.T.’s compound. The original fortress dwellers never helped them remove the barrels due to the incredible weight and the fact that there wasn’t a functioning dolly on board the Malevolence. Cy’s eyes grow wide as he witnesses a five-foot and one-inch-tall Zelkona male carrying a fuel barrel precariously in his arms, unaided. Katero notes his expression and raises a brow.

“What is the matter, Cyrus?”

“I can’t believe they can carry those...” Cy chokes out.

“What do they weigh?” Katero asks.

“Fifty-five gallons of unleaded gasoline, plus the barrel... About three hundred and forty pounds.”

“What are ‘pounds’?” Katero still looks perplexed.

“Oh, right... I’m about one hundred and eighty pounds. Those barrels weigh as much as two of me.” Cy explains.

Now with context, Katero is equally amazed and somewhat fearful. Though the Zelkona male appears to struggle with the container, the fact that he can walk at all with the heavy object in his

arms is a feat in and of itself. Chris, Jack, Yasmin and Rico, carry jerry cans and assorted electrical components. Neither Cy or Johnny recognize any of the parts, but as a permanent crewmember, Rico is trustworthy; he would never pull anything from the ship that would even remotely inhibit its function.

“Nice of you assholes to finally show up!” Yasmin growls, sweat beading on her forehead.

“Glad to see that you’re in a good mood today.” Cy grins.

“Abso-fucking-lutely... Feel free to pitch in anytime.”

Climbing aboard the ship, Minoma stares in awe. She turns her eyes toward a strange device; even on board this wonderous craft, she cannot fathom what this artifact is.

“Hey, you dug it out for me!” Cy chirps.

“Yeah. It was in the way. I almost threw it over the side, but I didn’t feel like dying today. Maybe tomorrow, instead!” Yasmin grins.

Cy approaches his 1975 Honda CL200 motorcycle, wiping the dust from the fuel tank. He straddles the small vehicle before looking into the tank, checking the fuel lines and the petcock. Everything is still in perfect working order. Climbing off of the bike, he gently pets it as though it were a beloved dog or cat.

“What is it?” Minoma asks.

“It’s a lot of fun.” Cy cryptically replies.

“Just stay out of the way when it’s moving.” Johnny warns.

“It moves?!” Minoma gasps.

“When I ride, it does. Johnny never liked giving her any throttle.” Cy quips.

Walking toward the superstructure, Kanafa stops, her cobalt blue eyes scanning the vessel. Her thick, fleshy tail sways heavily as the blue raptor looks over the craft.

"It seems like it was only yesterday..." She murmurs.

"What's that?" Cy asks.

"My tribe was marching away from a rumored kingdom of humans. Zia led us to a beach to rest for a night. There, we saw this very ship sailing toward where we came." Kanafa explains.

"That was your tribe?!" Cy exclaims.

"Yes." She nods.

"I've been meaning to ask you... How did you end up with the Kelanethaka, if you are so strong and such capable warriors?" Yasmin interjects.

"Zia met with a group of Ketlan who bore strange weapons that were not made out of wood or stone. She spoke with the leader of this group, who explained that they were scouts for a tribe with powerful allies who held the knowledge of these weapons. Worried that these scouts and their tribe might be a dangerous foe, and seeking a new home for our people, she simply agreed to follow them without conflict." Kanafa explains.

"Just like that?" Yasmin raises a brow.

"Yes. At first many did not want to obey and we nearly fought them, before Cyrus arrived and prevented that. Zia did what was best for us, and it has proven to be a wise decision; none of us are bitter. Zelkona pride strength, but we pride our tribe more. The Sa'kesh are strong and yet noble, powerful and yet generous, idealistic but not naïve; it is everything that we seek in ourselves. We are proud to call ourselves your kin." Kanafa replies.

"Well, we're honored to have you with us!" Cy chirps, ending the dialog.

Entering the superstructure, Cy and the team assist Chris and Rico in dismantling and carrying out the materials and equipment. Even Johnny and Minoma lend a hand, carrying bundles of wire, pillows, textiles, and other miscellaneous items from the ship and piling them outside. They maintain idle chatter, never having more than a few moments of silence between them. Down the hall and inside the cargo hold, another team works to dismantle a bundle of electrical wiring that Rico has deemed nonessential, while also collecting power tools that they had left behind from the first time they collected supplies from the ship. Jack, Chris, Cy, Yasmin, Rico and Katero pile tools into old crates and pull wires, bundling them for removal.

"What's going on with Johnny? Him and his new friend aren't here with us." Rico suddenly asks Yasmin.

"I think he's sweet on that Ketlan. They're always off doing their own thing." Yasmin says nonchalantly.

"Oh. I wondered about them." Rico comments.

"Him too?" Jack mutters quietly in disgust.

"Are you alright, Jack?" Cy asks.

"I'm just fine... I'm perfectly happy with all of these mixed couples running around." Jack sarcastically replies.

"I'm glad, since that's not your business anyway. People can live their own lives." Cy retorts.

"She also appears to like him considerably." Katero adds.

"And that makes it right?" Jack snaps.

"Easy Jack..." Chris says, looking to Cy.

"No... She's a Ketlan, and there are human girls in the city." Jack barks.

"There are Zelkona girls too. I saw him gawking." Cy smirks.

"Oh, dear God..." Jack sighs in frustration.

Katero glares at Jack and Cy suddenly steps up to him.

"I like you, Jack... You're a skilled hunter and a valuable team member... Hell, I read about you in history books and thought you were a cool guy; someone to look up too... But you're trying my fucking patience!"

"Oh?" Jack raises a brow.

"You need to drop this bullshit right now. So what if Johnny likes a Ketlan girl? Maybe she likes him back? Maybe she understands him? Maybe they actually have a genuine connection beyond simple hormones?" Cy poses.

Jack takes a step back but seems unmoved.

"Or maybe he's just living in the moment? Maybe seeing Norv die and killing Gomona and Linsor had a real effect on him? Whatever his reasons are, it doesn't really matter; it's his life. We live utterly surrounded by Ketlan, Zelkona and humans. Whether you like those first two or not, you need to learn to adapt. Here, in this jungle, there's absolutely no place for that kind of attitude." Cy finishes.

"Are we finished?" Jack asks.

"You are... Shut up and get back to work." Cy orders in an eerie monotone.

Jack takes a crate of power tools and leaves the room. Chris glances over to Cy, visibly worried at the potential implications of his words. Taking a bundle of wire and slipping it over his body like a bandolier, Cy glances to Chris. His silent stare reveals his fears to the chieftain and former assassin.

"What? I meant that he was done talking. I'm not going to hurt him, and I won't order anything done to him either." Cy assures him.

“Good.” Chris murmurs.

“I will, however, burn him alive if he tries to pull a Fekolza on me.”

“Jack is passionate and set in his ways, but he isn’t a fool. You don’t have to worry about him, Cyrus.” Chris assures him.

“Good.” Chris murmurs.

Taking a crate of spare parts for his motorcycle, Cy walks past Chris and the others, following Jack down the hall. Minoma narrows her eyes as Jack passes the room that she occupies with Johnny. Having heard their entire conversation, she now has cause to dislike the man who already makes her feel rather uncomfortable. Returning to the surface with all of their supplies, the band of warriors gather their things and prepare to return home. For the sake of efficiency and safety, two Zelkona will carry each fuel barrel, one at either end. With his motorcycle parked on the deck of the ship, Cy orders the others to leave without him.

Only the militia have trouble with this order; even the original fortress dwellers had seen or heard of motorcycles by 1926. With Yasmin and Katero affirming Cy’s safety, Kanafa and the rest of the militia reluctantly leave him behind. Cy will secure the gangplank and head back on his own time. Marching away from the ship, Kanafa looks back several times, worried for her chieftain.

“Relax. Everything will be fine.” Yasmin tells her.

They march through the field for nearly thirty minutes before Katero stops and turns back, his ears perking. Minoma soon follows and the entire group stops to look back.

“Do you hear that?” Katero asks her.

“Yes.” Minoma nods.

The Zelkona narrow their eyes as a figure quickly comes into view. Soon, the two Ketlan can see it clearly as well. Within moments Cy races up to the others, his motorcycle at full throttle as he flies past them at over eighty miles per hour.

“What was that?!” Minoma asks in shock.

“That was Cy and his motorcycle.” Johnny explains.

“Is it always so loud?” Katero ask.

“Loud?! I thought that model was always kind of quiet.” Johnny remarks. “Oh... Right.” He chuckles as he looks at Katero’s ears.

Cy looks over his shoulder, a little smirk on his face. He eases up on the throttle, allowing the bike to coast at a comfortable fifty-five miles per hour. Reaching the fortress in barely seven minutes, he makes excellent time. Luckily the field is relatively smooth and the grasses bend easily for the motorcycle. He rides slowly through the mud brick streets of his city, drawing awe from absolutely everyone. Riding the bike up to the fortress, his guards take a moment to stare before opening the gate for him; Cy has to order them twice before they snap out of their daze and take action. Parking the bike beside the shed that houses the crystalline batteries, he walks inside where Zakera waits for him.

“What was that noise, my love?” She asks, hugging him tightly.

“Just one of my many toys.” He replies.

After waiting for a little over an hour, the rest of the group arrives, marching up to the fortress and carrying the supplies. Sitting on the bench with his mate, Cy waves to the others.

“What took you so long?” He chuckles.