

The Seventh Realm: Volume Three

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Episode 36: Kincaid

Bursting into the fortress, Katero and Gabriella dash up the stairs and head for Lara's old medical office only to be stopped by Nendath.

"Where are you going?" She asks.

"We need to find Lara." Katero says, gasping for breath.

"I cannot allow you to simply burst in. You will startle little Darius."

"Please, tell Lara that it's important." Gabriella pleads.

"A man came out of the forest, a human from another tribe. He was wounded and spoke of 'Kincaid'." Katero adds.

"Wait here."

Nendath slips back inside of the room and within a few moments, Lara emerges, along with both Cy and Zikata.

"Are you sure you wish to go?" Zikata asks.

"If there is a threat to our people, then it's even more important and I need to investigate. Please stay here with my mate and child. I'll be back soon." Cy assure him.

"Alright. Take care." Zikata nods.

Zakera sleeps inside, unaware that her mate has left her. Heading upstairs, Cy collects his gear, putting on his duty belt with holster, magazine pouches, chain whip and then slinging his steel falcata sword. Heading downstairs and into the courtyard, he marches toward Lara's office with an entourage of only six Zelkona warriors, all of them males. In front of the office sits Johnny, Minoma, Jack, Yasmin and Rico. Leaving his guards behind, Cy enters the office to find Lara and a human female assistant stitching the wounds of the unconscious male.

Gazing at his body and the wounds he bears, Cy has a flashback to one of Yasmin's torture victims from when he still served as J.T.'s prime hitman. It jars the leader, who briefly turns away.

"Where did you find him?" Cy finally asks, shaking himself out of it.

"He was near the farmland." Katero replies.

"So close?!" Cy sounds horrified.

"Yeah. We'll show you." Gabriella adds.

Katero interjects, telling her to stay behind, but Gabriella is having none of it. She has never ventured far since they have arrived, and she has always felt like a fifth wheel. However, now that she is pledged to Katero, she wants him to see her as more than just a mate; she can handle herself as well as the others. Leaving Lara to her work, they exit the office and draft a plan to search the area. Minoma, with even less experience than Gabriella, is sent next door to fetch a squad of militia and bring them to the farmlands. Rico is tasked with waiting for word of the man's condition.

In the meantime, Cy will personally lead his six militia, Yasmin, Jack, Johnny, Katero and Gabriella into the forest at the edge of the

farms to investigate. They rush down the road, drawing all manner of attention as they head into the fields. Everyone knows that Cy is a man of action, but few are so accustomed to leaders who push themselves to the front of their forces; few chieftains and kings are so eager to endanger themselves. Pushing through the faval stalks and racing past small goshan trees and other assorted fruit bearing plants, they find themselves standing where the man had fallen. His blood still stains the tilled soil.

“This is where he came from.” Katero begins.

“Yes. We saw him coming from the woods here.” Gabriella adds.

She darts ahead, startling the others as she dashes into the woods. Cy and the Zelkona race to catch up to her as she slips into the jungle. Catching her first, Cy grabs her wrist and pulls her back.

“What the hell are you doing running off like that?!” He growls.

“I was jus-”

Blood spatters across Cy’s face as a javelin flies from the forest ahead of them, piercing Gabriella’s chest and killing her mid-sentence. Left in shock, he stands idle for a moment, only to feel a net dropping over him. As many as a dozen men rappel down from the trees, taking hold of the net and dragging it off. Near the very front of the line, Katero, Johnny and a few of the swifter Zelkona reach them. An unarmed Katero charges and tackles a man who holds Cy’s net while the Zelkona leap six feet and land on the backs of several others. As quickly as they fall, nearly twenty more human warriors emerge from the distance, fighting to maintain control of the net.

Cy tries to cut his way out, but has failed to bring his recurve knife; his sword, though rather short when compared to other European style blades, is still too long to draw from the confines of

the net. Realizing what he is doing, his captors club him with truncheons and try to pull the weapons from the holes, still struggling to drag him away. Looking back, Cy can see Johnny shooting several humans with his little .32 caliber Sig pistol before taking an arrow in the shoulder and falling back. Katero claws a man in the face and roars, taking his club and bashing his skull in before several rocks from primitive slings pelt him and knock him unconscious.

The Zelkona fight fiercely as nearly twenty men rush the six. With a vicious spin, one Zelkona breaks a man's back with his tail, then pounces on another and tears his throat out with his teeth. Another swings a falcata sword diagonally, breaking through the human's wooden shield and cleaving his arm off with one swing. A second swing jams the blade from his shoulder and nearly through his body on an angle. The power of the Zelkona terrifies the other humans, who appear ready to scatter at any moment. For some reason they continue to hold their ground. Jack and Yasmin fire at a group who charge in, using only pistols to kill six of his captors without once being touched.

"Get him to the cart! Fight to a man!" A voice bellows.

Cy tries to shift within the net to see who is speaking.

"Kincaid needs him alive..." The voice adds.

A hard thump to his head knocks Cy unconscious.

"No! Please! I surrender!" A human warrior cries out.

Yasmin walks up to him as her Zelkona warriors stand aside. All six are alive, bearing only mild injuries and covered in the blood of

their inferior human foes. Without hesitation or an ounce of mercy, Yasmin aims her pistol at his abdomen and fires, striking his liver with deadly accuracy. He wails in pain, the last of the nearly three dozen warriors who have captured Cy.

“Where are they taking him?” She asks in an eerie monotone.

“Ahh! Please! It hurts!” He exclaims.

“Where are they taking him?” She repeats the question slowly.

Frustrated by his lack of an answer, she places her boot against his stomach and presses hard onto his wound.

“You foul wench! Kincaid will rape you to death if you even come close!” He arrogantly spouts.

“Sounds like fun.” She grins.

Leaning forward, she draws her own knife and places the tip against the side of his neck, pressing it against his jugular.

“I will not ask you again...”

The human spits in her face, only for his eyes to grow wide in shock and horror. It is clear from his expression that he did not believe that Yasmin would so easily kill him. The blade scrapes the spine as she rather slowly pushes it through before ripping it from his neck and allowing a six-foot jet of arterial spray to fly from the wound. He passes out from blood loss within seconds and dies a moment later.

“Should’ve just told me, you stupid fuck.” She sighs.

Katero's cries draw her attention and she looks back. Johnny is helped up by Jack, his hand covering the shaft of the arrow that juts from his body. Crawling on all fours, Katero sobs as he rests his head over Gabriella's, his clawed hands holding her softly, as though she might break. The javelin pierced her chest on an angle, driving through just beneath her right breast, piercing her heart and leaving the tip jutting out from the leftmost side of her back. Johnny forgets his pain and even Yasmin finds her heart aching at the pitiful sight. Gabriella had been with them since the beginning and stuck by them for the nearly year and a half that they have lived on Monala.

"No! Please do not leave me! I need you!" Katero cries.

The Zelkona warriors all lower their heads in reverence and Yasmin drops her gun in the dirt. Johnny walks slowly with the arrow in his shoulder and Jack kneels beside Katero.

"I want to kill them... Kill them all for you..." Katero says softly.

Jack and Yasmin carry Gabriella's body as the Zelkona collect the weapons and salvageable equipment from the dead, returning to the Sa'kesh to prepare. Many villagers recognize the human female. As they carry her through the streets, all are left speechless. They notice Cy's absence, but do not question it. Militia meet them half-way through the city, guided by Minoma. Her red eyes grow wide in horror at Johnny's condition and the sight of his older sister's body. Now under heavy guard, they move through the town for Lara's clinic. Rico sees them turning the corner and stands to his feet.

"What the fuck happened?! Is that Gabby?!" He exclaims.

"Go to the fortress and tell Zikata that Cy was captured by enemies. I also want you to go to Mirkon and Zia and tell them to prepare. I need all of the militia ready as soon as possible." Yasmin orders.

“Alright.” Rico nods.

“I’m not waiting.” Jack growls.

“Excuse me?” Yasmin turns to him.

“We need to warn the Kelanethaka, in case these people show up there too. While Rico warns Zikata, I’ll tell Muzalfur so that they can be ready.” Jack explains.

“Good idea. Get moving.” Yasmin demands.

Using the brief walk back to the city to rest, Jack reloads his pistol and dashes off to warn the Kelanethaka, while a rattled Rico heads for the nearby homes of the human and Zelkona leaders before returning to the fortress. Yasmin and Katero lie Gabriella’s body on a second table inside of Lara’s office while she tends to Johnny’s shoulder, Minoma by his side and comforting her mate. Yasmin walks over to the man who lies unconscious on the main table.

“Can he speak yet?” She asks Lara.

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, let me know as soon as he recovers enough. I need every answer I can squeeze out of him.”

Opening her eyes, Zakera is surprised to see that Cy is not by her side. She looks to Zikata, who talks to Darius and waves a finger before his face, playing with his grandson. Nendath rushes to her side to tend to the woman. Her ears prick as she hears loud footfalls rushing through the fortress.

“Where is Cy?” She asks Nendath.

“Please rest. You need to regain your strength.” Nendath replies.

“Where is Cy?” Zakera reiterates her question.

The door suddenly opens and a sweaty, out of breath Rico waves Zikata over to him. Exiting the room, they leave to fortress expressly for the purpose of preventing Zakera from hearing what they are saying. Her heart sinks and she begins to panic. Looking to her son who lies in a wooden basinet atop a counter, she worries for Darius' father and the love of her life. The commotion from outside bothers her and her breathing quickens. The door suddenly opens and a tearful Isabella pokes her head in.

"What is going on?!" Zakera asks.

"Lara won't be back for a while. She... She needs you to stay here." Isabella instructs Nendath.

"Understood." The teal raptor nods.

"Wait!" Zakera exclaims before Isabella can leave.

The teenaged girl looks into the doorway at the Ketlan, sniffing softly.

"Where is Cy? What is going on?" She asks.

"Cyrus is gone... A man came from the forest after being attacked. They went to investigate; Gabriella is dead and Cyrus was captured." Isabella answers.

Nendath glares at Isabella, enraged that she would stress the weakened mother with such knowledge, though in her heart she knows that not knowing and panicking would have been almost as bad. Zakera begins to cry, covering her face with her hands. Her snout sticks between the blades of each hand as her clawed fingers covers her watery eyes. Nendath does what she can to comfort the woman, but to her shock and horror, Zakera tries to climb up from the table.

"Stop! You must rest!" She exclaims.

"I cannot!" Zakera yells.

Darius begins to cry in the background, startled by their volume. Nendath rushes to the child, trying to calm him as Zakera leans against the table, trying to gain her bearings.

"You need to regain your strength." Nendath adds.

"I have all that I need. I must find out what happened to my mate."

"But what of your child? You mustn't leave him alone. Do you want him to become ketlan'ezav?" Nendath argues.

Zakera stops, her eyes closing and lips pulling up, revealing her sharp canines as she lowers her head. Her hair sways back and forth as she struggles with her tears, finally releasing her pent-up emotions. She slumps against the table and sits upon the floor, crying in a manner almost as childlike as Darius.

"I cannot live without knowing. I know that I should think of my son, but his father is still my world. Without his strength, I do not believe that I can make it, even with Darius. What would *you* do if your mate was taken from you in such a manner? I just want to learn what happened to him, and have him back." She pleads with Nendath.

Looking to her with glossy eyes, the distressed Nendath turns to Darius. Reaching into the bassinet, she swaddles the baby in his blanket, careful not to touch him with her sharp, purple claws. Walking over to the fretful Ketlan, she takes her by the arm and pulls her from the ground with incredible strength. She slips her arm around Zakera and holds her up, while Zakera reaches up to hold onto Nendath's shoulder. With Darius cradled in one arm and her mother supported by the other, Nendath leads her to the door. Stepping out into the hallway, the fortress is nearly deserted. On high alert, the

guards immediately stop them as the exit into the courtyard. As Zakera is their chieftain's wife, she merely orders them to aid her.

The last of the fortress guards abandon the structure so that they can take the young mother to Lara's clinic. Yasmin rises to her feet, her mouth dropping open as Nendath leads Zakera inside.

"What the hell is she doing out?! She needs to be resting!" Yasmin growls.

"Take her back right now!" Lara demands.

"I have come for information, and I will not leave until I get it." Zakera snaps back.

She turns to Gabriella's body, a tear running down her cheek for the woman as Katero, Minoma and a bandaged Johnny sit by her corpse. As Nendath holds Darius in her arms, Yasmin leads Zakera toward the table where the unconscious man lies.

"Wait, you can't just wake him up and talk to him!" Lara growls.

"Get out." Zakera orders in a dry monotone.

"That's my patient!"

"Not anymore. Take her outside." Zakera orders.

The militia grab Lara and pull her from the office as she tries to snatch away, detaining her by force. Yasmin smirks as she watches the Ketlan taking charge, impressed by the sudden show of force. Taking smelling salts from Lara's shelf, something she had seen her use once before to wake Richard after passing out from heat stroke, she waves it beneath the man's nose. He comes to, his pain numbed by herbal remedies made by Nendath. He turns to Zakera and his expression changes, as though he recognizes her. This is not lost on either Yasmin or Zakera.

“Who are you, and where is Cy?” Zakera asks.

“I-I don’t know.” He nervously replies.

“You know me from somewhere... Do not lie to me. You will not enjoy the consequences.”

Denying all knowledge, Zakera nods to Yasmin. Taking medical tools from Lara’s bag, she waves them before the man’s face. His breathing hastens and he begins to sweat nervously, but he continues to deny knowing anything. Disbelieving him, Zakera instructs Yasmin to ‘persuade’ him. With a pair of medical pliers, she pulls out his fingernails, one by one. Lara struggles with the militia outside as the man screams in agony. Nendath stands outside with her, carefully trying to shield Darius’ ears, as though he might somehow remember this moment. The man begs for mercy, still denying all knowledge, but the women persist and none of the others inside care to stop them.

Distraught over Gabriella’s death, Katero joins in. Before Yasmin can extract every nail, he simply takes his knife and stabs it through the man’s hand, pinning it to the table above his head.

“This will not stop until you tell me *everything*.”

“Alright! I just want to live!” He pleads.

“Then speak and we shall see...”

“I... I’m a soldier for Kincaid...” He whimpers as he speaks.

“... What?” Yasmin’s eyes grow wide.

“I volunteered to pretend to be a victim of bandits to lure Cyrus out into the forest, but Kincaid did not think it would look genuine. They tortured and cut me for days until I begged for death, then sent me free only to hunt me down. I tried so hard to escape to safety. They used me to frighten him into searching for Kincaid; many know

that Cyrus leads in the front. He even killed Roland himself. Kincaid saw this as a means to attain him.” The man explains.

“Who is Kincaid?” Zakera asks.

“He was the last of King Roland’s lieutenants, and next in line to become a general. He was the only one not killed when you destroyed Roland’s castle. He has taken many months to gather humans and build a large town deep in the jungles. They use domesticated genashin to travel the distance.” He answers.

“Is that where they’re taking him?” Yasmin interjects.

“No. There is an outpost about two-days walk from here. Just beyond the forest where you were attacked is a cleared trail that leads straight to it. It is where he will go for trial. Kincaid wants to execute Cy and ship his pieces back to his village, the Kelanethaka and the Sa’kesh.”

Enraged, Zakera grabs the man’s throat.

“That will not happen while I still draw breath!” She growls.

In front of everyone, she strangles the man until his face turns dark blue, holding until her fingers become weak. Taking hold of Katero’s knife, she rips it from his hand and jabs it through his neck, severing his throat and spine. Turning back to the others, her cyan eyes are like a terrible blizzard of rage and hate.

“If they desire war, then that is what we will give them.” She says.

His head thumps against a floor board as Cy feels his body shift. Looking around, he sits upright to find that his arms are tied behind his back as he sits on the floor of a carriage.

"I see someone is finally awake..." A male's voice says.

Turning to the voice that comes from behind him, he witnesses a teenaged boy, probably only sixteen years old, holding his Falcata and chain whip in his hands. The tip of his sword is buried into a wooden floorboard of the covered wagon. Beside him on a bench seat is Cy's gear belt and loaded pistol, though the boy does not seem to know what it is. The wagon moves quickly enough, and Cy can hear the sounds of a domesticated Genashin as it pulls them along. They maintain a steady pace of roughly ten miles per hour along a jungle trail as they head toward Kincaid's outpost. Cy moves his wrists; the ropes around them have a thick cord leading away and tied to a ring along the inner wall of the wagon.

"Excuse me..." The boy says in a stern tone.

"And who might you be?" Cy looks to him.

"I am Kincaid. I am the last lieutenant of the great King Roland the First; your captor, judge, and soon your executioner." He spins Cy's sword slowly into the wooden floor.

"Are you serious?" Cy laughs.

"What is so amusing?" Kincaid asks in a frustrated tone.

"Boy... You have no idea who you are fucking with..." Cy begins, looking down at his sword. "If you were smart, you'd let me go right now, before the Sa'kesh free me and I jam my sword up your ass and turn you into a scarecrow."

"Such big talk for a hostage. That is why I wanted to be the one to take you down. Everyone knows who you are... 'Cyrus the Great'... You are a menace to the entire human race; the Sa'kesh are the abomination that you spawned from your sick and twisted affair with a lesser being, just as Roland said." Kincaid smiles as he gloats.

"This again? What is it with you people? If you aren't sacrificing children you're hating other races and calling them inferior."

"We are not savages, like those animals who kill their children. I am surprised that you would even allow yourself to become attached to a beast woman." Kincaid snickers.

"Watch what you say about my wife..." Cy looks up at him, his icy blue eyes burning.

"Wife!" Kincaid laughs. "Those pets are not fit to be anything more than a slave to till fields or a place for a man to plant his seed for his own pleasure. I would bed one, just to relieve some stress, but that is all."

"You have some serious problems, kid." Cy scoffs.

"No, I think you do. You are going to be put on trial for crimes against human kind, and then I will behead you with your own sword."

"You might want to use an axe instead." Cy remarks.

"Why?"

"An axe is heavier. That blade might hang up in my neck if you don't use enough force..." Cy looks at Kincaid's arms. "And you don't look like you have it in you, kid."

"Insulting me already?! Are you not afraid to die?!" Kincaid raises an eyebrow.

"If you were capable of doing it, I might be." Cy answers.

"You underestimate me..." Kincaid grumbles.

"Your soldiers killed one of my friends, shot another, and who knows what else. I've been taken from my wife *and* half-breed child, and now I'm sitting on this splintery wooden floor listening to some teenager gloat about how tough he is. I've got you all figured you little bitch, and I'm not scared of you at all. I've murdered children younger than you for far less."

Kincaid backhands Cy across the face, shaking his hand out before balling it into a fist,

“As soon as you are executed, I will have the reputation and authority to build the glorious human kingdom that you so quickly eliminated in its infancy. You really ought to be proud, you know... You are going to save the human race.” Kincaid says, pointing a finger in his face.

“I never really liked that race...” Cy looks at the scenery outside.

Kincaid stares at the older warrior who outright ignores him. He cannot fathom why he behaves in such a manner. These tactics have worked on the tribal humans he has conquered in the many months since Roland’s death; Kincaid has been slowly building his own nation in Roland’s image.

“I do not understand you. What will it take for you to take me seriously?” Kincaid demands.

“Your entire village...” Cy replies, still staring out of the carriage window.