

The Seventh Realm: Volume Four

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Chapter 38: Revelations

After camping for the night beside the massacred outpost, the Sa'kesh march through the jungle trail as they make their way back home. Bearing the weapons, valuables and their only fallen soldier, formerly missing and now their first K.I.A., they are in no hurry. Only Kincaid escaped into the jungle, riding his trained kodana and swiftly evading the militia. Zakera stands beside Cy, her arm coiled around his and her hand resting on his bicep, near the band that marks their status as pledged mates. Holding Darius in his arms and stroking his feline ears with a fingertip, Cy is comforted by the presence of his mate and child. It eases the pain of Gabriella's loss, though he is thankful that more did not die during the ambush that facilitated his capture.

Kept close to Cy, who is the only reason he is still alive, Samuel, his former prison guard, marches near the front with a bandaged arm. He admires the unique weapons used by the Sa'kesh militia, visibly fascinated by their uniquely curved blades and the versatility of the cykera alloy, which is unlike anything that he has ever seen before. The human can't keep his eyes off of a sword that hangs below the arm of a Zelkona warrior.

"What are you looking at?" A suspicious Yasmin snarls.

"Her blade. I have never seen a metal like that. It is far superior to the bronze that Kincaid's troops use." Samuel answers honestly.

"Fascinated with metallurgy?" Cy asks Samuel.

"It is something of a hobby." He replies.

"A very useful hobby." Chris adds.

"Yes. I liked working the forge at my old village but I do not think that the blacksmith liked me much at all." Samuel sighs.

"Why not?" Zakera asks him.

"I do not know... I was never unkind to him. He would teach me things about smelting and tempering but would shoo me away whenever his sister came around, which happened often." Samuel replies.

Several of his companions' chuckle and grin, perplexing the man.

"What?"

"He just didn't want you fucking his sister." Yasmin blurts out.

"I do not understand..."

"She means he thought that you might be interested in her." Cy clarifies.

"Oh... Well, he did not need to worry about that." Samuel says with a smile.

"Why? Don't you like girls?" Yasmin asks.

"Of course I do, but not the unattractive ones." Samuel replies.

"At least you are honest." Zakera comments.

"How did you come to be one of Kincaid's soldiers?" Chris asks.

"As all of the others had. Kincaid learned from Roland that fear could control. He came with the sword and the spear and the torch and forced us to submit. Those who fought died immediately, and those who fought and survived would die a slow death; he hangs his detractors by their feet and leaves them for days. If they struggle or cry out too much, he stuffs dirt into their nose and mouth to hasten their suffocation, leaving them on display for weeks." Samuel answers.

“What a charmer.” Yasmin quips.

“Sounds like a man I used to know.” Cy murmurs.

“I have heard stories of his father’s compassion and cunning; a man who truly cared for his people and sought only their prosperity and safety. Kincaid is nothing like him. He has a strange view of suffering, believing it to be some form of enlightening experience and not the squalor that it really is, but his inner circle are devout believers. If not for the might of the warriors who accept his word as truth, Kincaid would have been hung by his own feet a long time ago.” Samuel continues.

“Well, if all goes well, you might find a home with us instead.” Jack remarks.

On the morning of the third day, the army returns to the city. They have been gone from the Sa’kesh for not quite five full days. As they walk through the brick streets of the town, a crowd gathers around, growing ever larger. Eager for both the return of their loved ones who belong to the army, and their idealistic leader, they chant Cyrus’ name as he is paraded through the city center. Mirkon sees them from the balcony of his large and well-built brick home, soon accompanied by Zia. The pair greet Cy and Zakera, embracing them both as they welcome back their chieftain and his family.

“It is good to see you alive and well, my friend” Mirkon begins.

“The Sa’kesh have been expecting your return. We never believed for a moment that you would be killed!” Zia chirps.

“Thank you both. No one and no army can keep the Sa’kesh down.” Cy smiles.

“Hello, Cyrus.” A familiar voice says.

Turning to his right, Cy steps up to Katero. After a brief stare, the pair lean in and embrace for a moment. Cy pats Katero’s

shoulders, torn by a dichotomy within; he is pleased to see his friend, yet heartbroken as Katero must deal with the loss of his pledge.

“It’s good to see you, buddy.” Cy says with a snuffle.

“Indeed, it is.” Katero nods.

“I’m sorry about Gabriella. I tried to stop her. I-”

“It is not your fault, and it is not hers either. Please do not apologize.” Katero interrupts.

“You’re right, but I still wish there was something I could do for you.” Cy remarks.

“There is. We can prepare for the future. It is obvious from what we learned that Kincaid has but a single outpost and one large village. I am judging from how many of our warriors returning that the outpost was small and poorly defended.”

“That’s an understatement.” Yasmin snickers.

“I do not believe it will be so easy next time, and it will help me if I am allowed to assist in planning our strategy.” Katero continues.

“Does this mean that you want to be a part of my council now and not just a captain?” Cy asks.

“Is that a problem?”

“No. I have actually been putting a lot of thought into this on the long hike back and I have a battle strategy... I’ll explain after we return home.” Cy answers.

“Zikata will be expecting you. He and a detachment of Kelanethaka warriors have helped maintain the peace in your absence.” Zia explains.

The militia return home, while the family of the only fallen warrior prepare a traditional Ketlanic funeral. Many of the fortress dwellers have found it peculiar how similar the Ketlan, Zelkona, and the humans who interact with them, treat the dead. In a practice very similar to the ancient Greeks and Romans, they place a carved

wooden tablet over the closed lips of the body. This tablet grants them permission to enter into the hereafter, thought by many to exist among the stars, in the sky above Monala and guarded by the ancients, all those who have fallen before them. With their body wearing their favorite clothing, if any, they are placed upon a stilted pyre reaching two or three meters high before being cremated with oil-soaked wood.

Families are often joined by other mourners, some of whom do not even know the deceased, wailing, flailing and chanting for their safe passage into the afterlife. Watching the funeral from the balcony, Cy feels as though he has stepped into a time machine. Chris and Daniel, as scholarly as they are, cannot help but document the event for later study and comparison. Zikata steps up to Cy, resting a hand on his shoulder and drawing his attention.

“When you inevitably die, the entire tribe will mourn for you.”

“I only want my children to mourn for me, and I would hope that when the time comes, they will be too busy with their own children to spend much time crying.” Cy smirks.

“As many of us do.” Zikata nods.

Heading back into the room, which was once a storage area on the second floor, at the rear of the fortress, Yasmin has since converted it into a conference and war-room. Standing around a central table is Yasmin, Katero, Zikata, Zakera, Cy and also Jack. Though not often a part of these meetings, as Jack is only a captain, leading a squad of militia and training new recruits, he is instrumental in this particular meeting.

“So... Kincaid.” Yasmin begins.

“It is obvious that as boldly as he came for Cyrus the first time, he will most certainly come again.” Zikata says.

"I agree. He is an obvious threat." Jack adds.

"I could take a group of scouts and search for his tribe." Katero eagerly volunteers.

"I will also ask for volunteers from the Kelanethaka. Our senses of hearing and smell would prove useful to track the human man-child." Zikata adds.

They plan back and forth for some time, while Cy and Zakera say nothing throughout the entirety of the meeting. Yasmin clears Katero to lead the scouts, but it isn't until she clears Jack to do the same that Cy finally speaks up.

"You don't want me to go?! I am a very capable hunter and tracker and you know this, Cyrus." Jack argues his case.

"Yes, but you can also read, write and speak German, and in World War One, you were a tank commander. A female Mark IV and male Mark V, if I remember correctly?" Cy retorts.

"... How did you know that?" Jack looks stunned.

"You forget that I'm from eighty-eight years into your future. I read about you in history books, and conventional military records are not classified." Cy answers.

"So, what would you rather I do?" Jack asks.

"No matter how ruthless Kincaid is, he is still leading an army of humans, weaker than the Zelkona and stuck in the iron age, as far as we know. Unless he has ten thousand soldiers under his command, which I doubt, we would probably defeat him in open combat, but there's something we might want to consider..." Cy answers.

"Such as?" Jack raises a brow.

"We need a true edge, an advantage so overwhelmingly powerful that it simply cannot be overlooked or overcome."

"Well, out with it." Yasmin growls.

"How would you like to drive the Panzer?" Cy smirks.

Everyone in the room looks perplexed. It takes a second before Cy realizes that they have simply forgotten. Granted, it has been some time and none have laid eyes on the Panzer IV since Mirkon and his small, initial tribe joined the fortress dwellers. Remembering the vehicle, Yasmin's lips curl into a sinister grin. Jack's brow jumps up at the mere image of the metal beast facing Kincaid's foes. Even the battle-weary Jack, who is often the first in the room to try a diplomatic approach, can't help but smile at the thought of bringing a tank to a sword fight. In many ways, it might be the ultimate peacekeeper; why even fight an enemy who can obliterate you in a moment's notice?

"Is that an 'I would like that very much'?" Cy chuckles.

"Quite a strategy, but how far will one of those things go?" Jack asks.

"Well... With full fuel and on level ground, about one hundred and twenty miles. If Kincaid's group is somehow farther than that, we can simply bring it here and use it for defense." Cy replies.

"Now *that* is a plan I can ride." Yasmin winks, cracking her knuckles.

Taking out a map of the area that's regularly updated by Mirkon and Zia, who are both well informed of the Sa'kesh's activities, Cy points out the general area of the tank. He instructs them to find Mirkon at his home to confirm the location, which may be rather overgrown after so long without attendance. Though Jack is prepared to leave immediately to gather his squad and find the tank, Cy has one last thing to do. Briefly leaving the room, he heads for a storage area and collects several parts that he had extracted from the tank in an attempt to deactivate it. Placing them into a pack alongside a slip of paper, he quickly returns to the others.

"You'll need these. I wrote down a little instruction manual when I first took them apart." Cy says as he hands the pack to Jack.

"I appreciate that. I'll gather my squad and leave right away. When it's ready, I'll send word."

"And I will put together two other scouting parties to aid Katero in his search, as Jack will not be leading. I will also send any warriors you may need when the time comes." Zikata interjects.

"Thank you, father. We appreciate all that you do for us." Zakera bows her head.

"No need, my daughter. I am simply protecting my family. One day, Darius will rule both of these tribes, and I will do all that I can to see that he has something left for him."

With their meeting completed, the group adjourns and returns to their lives. Zikata and his entourage leave for the Kelanethaka village to collect their scouts, Katero sits alone by the goshan tree in the courtyard and watches them leave, Yasmin pulls Rico into their room before slamming the door, and Jack visits Samantha before heading for the barracks to collect his crew. Sitting in the library, a solitary Cy stands near a makeshift power outlet and looks through his old phone. Trickle charged via the crystalline power source fashioned by Chris, the library is one of the few rooms with direct access to power from the electrical shed outside. Soft footfalls and the clicking of claws draw his attention.

"Hi." Zakera says softly as she steps into the room.

"Hey, babe."

"Do you wish to be left alone?" She asks sheepishly.

"No. I just wanted to see something." He says with a sigh.

His finger swipes the screen as the feline Ketlan woman steps up to him from across the room. Her tail swishes as she tilts her head, looking curiously at what her mate is doing. Holding a thin device in his hand that looks like a tiny window, he views an old photo of Belize. Yasmin holds an AK-47 rifle, wearing all olive drab clothing and

Vietnam style jungle boots, though her tank top is exceptionally form fitting. Beside her, Cy sits on the fender of a large military truck, unarmed and wearing his usual civilian clothes before their arrival; black jeans and hiking shoes with an orange t-shirt. Standing on either side of the two assassins are Johnny and Gabriella, dressed like many teenagers of the mid-2010s.

"Amazing!" Zakera exclaims, her eyes wide.

"I just wanted to see Gabby for a minute."

"That artifact can store images? Why have I never seen them before?"

**"I never showed you this when I showed you my music player?"
He raises a brow.**

"No. I would have remembered that."

With the phone charged, Cy takes out the charging cable and sits down on a chair near a glassless window. Patting his leg, Zakera jumps up to him and eagerly sits atop his lap, her legs hanging over the side as she slips an arm around his neck. With the phone turned to face her, he flips through many images, showing her photos of his old world. The wonder upon her face helps ease the pain of his loss; Gabriella was like a sister to him, ever since the first day when he saved both her and Johnny's life. Swiping further back toward more recent pictures, Cy reveals an image and his face flushes. Zakera looks at a candid image of herself that he had clandestinely taken on the day that they left for the fortress.

"Oh!" She coos.

"I couldn't help myself." He chokes out.

"I have seen myself in the water, but I did not realize how beautiful I was."

"I tell you every day. Don't you believe me?" His arm pulls tighter around her waist as he speaks.

"I do, but it is different to see yourself."

"I suppose."

"How often did you look at me while you tried to sleep?" She asks, her eyes narrowing as she gazes lustfully at him.

"I can't count that high." Cy smirks.

She leans in, kissing her mate upon his lips, her hand resting on the side of his face. Cy sets the phone down on a small end table beside the chair, placing his newly freed hand on Zakera's slender side. Pulling her head back, she ends the kiss. Her eyes scan her husband for a moment.

"I would have done the same. I am grateful that we do not need images; I am thankful every day that you are my pledged mate." She says softly.

"So am I."

With his hand upon her cheek, his thumb gently strokes her snout. Leaning in, Cy plants another kiss upon his wife.

"Wait... Darius?"

"Lara wanted to examine him after returning from our little trip. I believe she wishes to document his race, though she claimed to be concerned about his health." Zakera answers.

"Probably both."

"We have time." She coos.

"Good." He grins.

Simultaneously leaning back in, they kiss each other passionately, their hands exploring the other's clothed body. Their

tongues entwined, they are soon unable to wait. Standing to his feet, Cy scoops Zakera into his arms, carrying her from the library, through the hall and up the stairs to their own bedroom. She sways her feet cutely, her arms wrapped around the back of his neck. Entering their bedroom, Zakera grabs the edge of the door and slams it shut, growling softly as she nuzzles her mate's face. Kneeling down atop their bed, Cy gently plops her down atop the mattress. He rests over her on his elbows and knees, necking her softly and hiking up her hide skirt while her hands tear at his belt and pants.

"I think someone is ready." He teases between his kisses.

"We have abstained for some time when it became too difficult. I imagine you are as eager to release as I am." Zakera murmurs.

"Oh yeah." He groans, feeling her taking hold of his flesh.

"And we still need two more." She growls seductively.

The couple are unable to wait long enough to even disrobe, having gone nearly two months without sex. With his gear belt dropped to the floor and his traditional vishkachay trousers pushed down past his knees, Zakera holds his engorged flesh and pulls him gently toward her. With her skirt flipped up but attached, and her hide breastplate unmoved, she runs the warm head of his member against her moist flesh. Without hesitating, Cy pushes into Zakera's eager loins, stretching them to fit his considerable endowment. She squeals and groans as Cy's fingers coil over her shoulders, holding her writhing form and preventing her escape, wriggling as he enters her taut body.

She had almost forgotten the size of her mate, her lips curling around her snout in a wide grin of ecstasy. Though less than a week earlier she had borne him a son, she somehow feels as tight on Cy as the very day he took her virginity. Perhaps that is the result of such a long time without? In what feels like a nanosecond he sheaths himself completely into his mate, his scrotum and full, heavy testicles pressing firmly against her buttocks and sitting just over the base of

her tail. She moans and groans, her claws raking the clothing that covers his torso. With frantic movements, she tears at his tunic and cloak, desperate to remove the clothing. Just to feel his flesh against the fur of her slender belly would increase their connection exponentially.

Cy doesn't disappoint. Pushing himself up, he kneels between her legs and removes the articles as she struggles to remove the cordage that holds her miniscule breastplate to her body. Pulling away the hide covering, she tosses it aside and atop his own bundled clothing as he leans back over. His hand glides over her body as they kiss so passionately. Her heart burns even more than her loins as she feels the tongue of her mate tasting her own, his hand caressing her engorged breast. With careful but firm strokes, Cy moves back and forth, working her to the best of his ability. Though neither keeps track of time, it doesn't feel like much has passed before Zakera grips him tightly, her claws raking the flesh of his back as she orgasms.

White cream smears over the flesh of his member, though he never stops working. Their bodies grow even warmer and their breathing becomes heavier. Sweat beads on his flesh, causing it to glisten like polished metal while her fur becomes matted and damp. Soon, and without warning, Cy pulls back from his lover. Taking a leg, he lifts it high before crossing it over his chest. With a hand on her side, he directs Zakera to roll over. Remaining on her belly, she gazes over her shoulder at her mate as her tail pulls to the side. Cy lies down over her back, her arms clutching a pillow stuffed with ethakona feathers and bearing a grass sheave core.

Her white claws scratch the dense hide case of the pillow as she feels her husband driving his large phallus back into her body, her tight hole still struggling to fit him, her legs between his. The sensations amaze her; she had assumed that childbirth would have made this much less entertaining. Her pink hair sways back and forth as he drives himself into and out of her, her cyan eyes closed and her mouth slightly ajar. Groaning, moaning and panting for air, she shivers

as he brings her ever closer to yet another climax. The flesh of his scrotum, which is itself considerable, softly plops against her clitoris as he rocks his hips.

Zakera's tail hooks around Cy's side; it is more for show than for an actual purpose, as he continues to work her like an alpha. With his eyes closed tightly, he leans forward and slows his pace. Zakera knows what is just over the horizon. With an arm around her body and holding himself up, his other hand holds one of her breasts. She bucks her hips against him as he grunts louder and with more force. Cy suddenly sheaths his member completely within her body, pushing himself hard against her loins as if to create a perfect seal. With Cy's subtle roar of pleasure, Zakera bites her pillow to conceal her scream as she reaches her second peak.

Finally releasing his seed, Cy holds her tightly as he injects his thick and burning hot cum inside of her. The fertile ooze washes her insides, racing for her eggs and cooling the fire within her body. She trembles in pleasure, pushed over the edge by the very sensation of being filled by her mate. Her own creamy aftereffects coat his girthy member as he gasps for breath, leaving himself buried within her. She releases the pillow from her maw, turning her head and panting, eyes still closed and mouth agape as drool runs from her lower jaw. Resting his face beside hers as he finishes his release, Cy kisses her cheek and snout several times.

"Nadamu, Zakera."

"Nadamu, Cy. You are my one true love; every second with you is a wonderful dream come true."

"Why do you always have to outdo me, or have the last word?" He chuckles.

"Because I am your mate, and the mother of your children." She grins.

"True." He says, kissing her snout again.

Several days pass since the three scout teams and the Panzer team, led by Jack, have departed. Sitting in the library with Zakera and Darius, the couple relax and simply enjoy each other's company. Cy flips through one of his old books on ancient civilizations from Earth, while his wife sits in the chair beside him. Cradling their son in her arms, she breastfeeds Darius while the two share idle chatter for amusement. An excited looking Chris suddenly enters, his eyes wide in amazement.

"Cyrus. Something has happened!" He exclaims.

"What's wrong?" Cy asks.

"A runner has arrived."

"Delivering a message from Jack and his team?" Cy hypothesizes.

"No. He is from one of the scouting parties."

"What? Is Kincaid's village so close?!"

"Oh, no! Nothing of the sort! It's just..."

Chris pauses for a moment before entering the room with the runner. Rising from his chair, Cy closes the book over a finger as the runner speaks with him. The young Ketlan scout describes a structure in the jungles of Monala, a day away from the outpost, yet not along Kincaid's trail. As the youthful warrior speaks, he describes a place without any sentient life, even Kaladez or Zajak. Overgrown and clearly unused, the structure is a mystery to the scouts, even more-so because it is made out of massive stones, each the size of several men and bearing faded, decorative carvings.

"Fascinating!" Chris exclaims.

"What did it look like? How was it shaped?" Cy asks.

"It was as if several tables were stacked atop each other, but the tables were solid. A large stairway led to one table, and more stairways lined the sides as the stone mountain rose into the clouds." The scout answers.

Zakera and Chris struggle to comprehend what he is speaking of. Cy scratches his chin. Feeling the book in his hand, he looks down and has an epiphany.

"Did it look anything like this?!" He asks.

Opening the book, he flips a few pages before presenting it to the scout. His clawed finger rests atop the image, his head nodding.

"Yes. Exactly the same."

"Wow. That is incredible." Cy remarks.

Chris and Zakera look to the image, now more curious about why Cy is acting so interested.

"What is the significance?" Zakera finally asks.

"This is called a ziggurat; the picture in this book is a recreation of the 'Ziggurat of Ur'. It's an ancient form of temple from Earth..." He answers his wife.

"An Earth temple on Monala? And no humans there?" She turns to the scout.

"No. That is what is even more amazing... The decorative carvings on the stones are of Ketlan and Zelkona, not humans. It shows them laying large bricks with strange devices." The scout answers.

"What?!" Cy exclaims.

Little Darius stirs, startled by the noise. Immediately quieting himself, Cy continues.

“We need to explore that ziggurat right away. I want you to stay here and lead us to that ziggurat. We’ll head out tomorrow.” Cy whispers.

“As you wish.” The scout bows.

He quickly turns and darts away. Cy hands Chris the book and takes Darius into his arms, cradling his son as Zakera lowers and ties her hide breastplate. She watches her mate as he looks down at his son, running a hand gently over the black fur of his head and feline ear, a little smile on his face.

“What are you thinking, my love?” She quietly asks him.

“Just what kind of wonderous world our son will inherit.” He turns his eyes to her.

“I am very eager to uncover the secrets of that temple.” Chris gingerly remarks.

“Let the others know.” Cy softly orders.

“And if you can, find Lara and ask if she would mind sending Nendath with us again.” Zakera gently adds.

Cy turns to her and leans in, giving her a kiss. He didn’t bother to ask her if she wanted to come with him. With Darius born and her currently not pregnant, he has no reason to stop her, aside from a desire to keep her safe. However, she has told him many times that she would rather die with him than watch him leave and stay safe within the fortress.

“Ready for another adventure?” He asks in a hushed voice.

“Of course!” She whispers excitedly.