

The Seventh Realm: Volume Four

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode 48: Endgame

With their camp dismantled and supplies stowed, the Sa'kesh army march down the long, stone ramps and wrap around the Agnis complex. During the previous day, while Cy and the others recovered from their ordeal, Jinaso led his group in destroying the overgrowth that shrouded the complex. With the building cleared and the opening of a path created in the jungle, they make their way toward Kincaid's city. Using Yulan's abandoned bracer computer, they track their progress from the Agnis complex and toward the human city, which is roughly one day away and pinpointed in red upon the green holographic map. Marching and slashing, they cut through and without rest until the evening approaches, soon finding themselves in a clearing where Muzalfur and the Kelanethaka army sit and wait for them.

"It is good to see you, my friends." Muzalfur says to Katero and Cy as the pair approach.

"Likewise! How long have you been here?" Cy asks.

"We arrived a few hours earlier. We expected you to already be here, but were surprised and somewhat worried when we built our camp alone." Muzalfur answers.

"Our apologies. Something came up." Katero grins.

Sitting around the encampment with soldiers guarding the outskirts, the grand tale of the Agnis complex and Monala's dark secrets are spread like wildfire. Sa'kesh soldiers, many of whom had

journeyed up to the second level and witnessed the pillars, and a few who had seen what occurred to the four humans, regale the others with the fanciful sounding tale. Only the seriousness in their faces, the trail leading to the complex and the answers that Cy and the others now have for the Kelanethaka quell their doubts. They are left in awe and many Kelanethaka now look to the humans with a reverence not previously shown, much like the Zelkona and Ketlan of the Sa'kesh.

After struggling to sleep, the discovery fresh in their minds, the dual armies awaken and prepare their forces. Unsurprisingly, watchmen in wooden outpost towers had seen the massive encampment during the night and warned Kincaid, who rallied his troops. Though they did not attempt a night raid, as Cy had expected, they instead prepared their entire force the next morning; the Sa'kesh and Kelanethaka awaken to see an army of no less than 3,500 human males between the ages of fourteen and fifty, lining up before the city. With spears, swords and shields in hand, several groups bear bows and arrows and others primitive slings, like those used during the classical period of Earth.

With daylight illuminating the expanse of the soon-to-be battlefield, the interracial armies now realize why Yulan would have been so fearful of Kincaid's faction. Though larger and with more victims for him to choose from, all of them of his preferred race, many men, women and children line the city, mounted upon crosses and suffering a slow and painful death. A field of nearly one hundred bodies riddles the landscape. Signs written in Ketlanic and mounted above their heads list crimes ranging from murder, rape and assault, down to petty theft or even showing inadequate respect; most of their 'crimes' are the latter. Virtually all look malnourished; they can easily imagine their thefts were a result of their hunger.

A Zelkona woman in Cy and Muzel's group turns her head at the sight of an eight-year-old boy who struggles to breathe after days roped to a little wooden cross, barely half the size of the others. The sign above the boy's head reads 'not obey guardian'. A separate sign,

larger and away from the others seems to point directly at the interracial army of the Sa'kesh and Kelanethaka and reads '[the] learning field'. An ethakona lands on a cross, the massive, red, yellow and orange bird taking nearly an entire arm as it perches atop the horrific device and pecks at a dead man's face.

"This is why we are here..." Cy begins, turning to Muzel. "We must put an end to this and bring peace to Monala, once and for all."

With a raised hand, Cy casually marches onward. Following his lead, the group's commanders and Muzalfur's army follow suit, marching along the open ground and toward the force that's nearly twice their size.

"How long before Jack and his team arrive?" Muzel asks.

"Hopefully they already left. If they did, then any moment now." Cy answers.

"And if they did not?"

"... Fight as hard as you can; our lives depend on it."

Lining up their troops with a one-hundred-yard space between them, the allied forces of the Sa'kesh and Kelanethaka square off against the all human forces led by Kincaid. Sitting atop a kodana and pacing before his troops, the young human tyrant keeps his head facing his adversaries, his gaze fixated upon Cy.

"It seems that I have superior numbers!" Kincaid shouts.

"We both know what the Zelkona can do, and then you have my battle hardened Ketlan and human troops!" Cy shouts back.

"Make it easy on yourself and surrender while you still can!"

"See, I was going to make you the same offer!" Cy smirks.

“Alright! Just out of curiosity... What happens if /surrender?!” Kincaid asks.

“Your entire army goes home to their families and toiling, you keep your relatively worthless life, and your childish reign of terror ends! It’s a win-win for everyone!”

Kincaid glares at Cy, his fingers coiling over the reins as he turns the hungry looking kodana back and forth.

“I have murdered people for lesser insults!!!” Kincaid screams in anger.

“So I’ve noticed! Look, this has gone on long enough! I don’t want to fight you for stupid bullshit like this! Our lives are worth more, don’t you agree?! Let’s finish this!” Cy offers.

“Oh, we *will* finish this!” Kincaid yells with a sinister grin.

“God damnit...” Cy grumbles, drawing his pistol.

Unsheathing a European style longsword made of what appears to be iron, Kincaid twirls it over his head like a cavalry saber. Following his lead, the men yell loudly and charge, rushing toward the allied forces and moving around his kodana like water around a river rock. Taking aim, the front-line troops all bear pistols from their armory. Behind are strategically placed troops with a combination of bows and arrows, and javelins. Each thrower bears no less than ten javelins, while the archers will shoot ten volleys, beginning when the gunfire commences. As Kincaid’s forces reach seventy yards, the front-line troops raise their pistols, their fingers caressing the triggers.

“Fire!” Cy commands.

Firing aimed shots at a moderate speed, roughly two rounds per second, the archers release their volley. A wave like a dark cloud or a

swarm of insects flies over their shoulders and arches above the battlefield, the sharpened wooden tips burying into arms, legs, shoulders, necks and faces. Scores of men drop from gunfire as they continue their charge. Some of Kincaid's warrior shoot back with their own bows and arrows, but as soon as they fire, the Sa'kesh and Kelanethaka break off. Spreading out and around what was the front lines, they charge the human forces, meeting them in the middle. As previously instructed, the Zelkona use their strength and leaping ability to knock back the first wave of humans.

Only minutes into the battle and already as many as two hundred humans lie wounded or dead on the battlefield, their blood staining the purple blades of grass beneath them. Now forced with many hundreds of powerful and dangerous Zelkona and highly trained Ketlan and human warriors, the human army fights for their very lives. Taking more careful aim, to avoid friendly fire, the archers and javelin throwers encircle the melee in the center of the field. An arrow here and a javelin there strike easily targeted human combatants. Joining the fray, Cy weaves between his warriors. Finding a human about to impale a female Zelkona as she holds two humans up by their throats, Cy quickly aims and fires a round into his temple, dropping him like a rock.

Two humans pin a Ketlan man while a third raises a primitive brass axe with a crescent shaped blade. Cy fires twice at the axe man, then a final round into another who holds down his soldier. With the slide of his pistol locking back, Cy rushes the warrior with a cykera recurved knife drawn. Taking up his sword, Cy skips the fight altogether by throwing the knife into his opponent's chest. Performing a quick tactical reload, he rushes the man, puts a nine-millimeter round into his skull and retrieves his knife. Muzalfur struggles with an exceptionally strong human, only to be shoved backward and nearly impaled with his sword. He is saved by Muzel leaping upon the man and tearing his throat out with her teeth.

Katero tries to regroup with Yasmin, Rico and Johnny, who he sees fighting a swath of humans by themselves. If not for their still loaded firearms, they would already have been cornered and killed. With several warriors and Jinaso joining him, they encircle the squad of Kincaid's warriors and attack them from behind as they focus on the three human Sa'kesh. Kincaid rides around his troops before charging into the battle. Swinging his sword, he cleaves the head of a Ketlan man from his body, his Kodana biting another Ketlan and crushing his chest before shaking its head like a dog with a plush toy.

His sword clanks against the cykera metal of another Ketlan, only for another blade to slash his opposite leg. Reeling from pain, he screams and yanks the reins. The tail of his kodana slams into the body of the Ketlan to his right before the beast faces a human Sa'kesh, his armor bearing a black painting of the three tree trunks below a single canopy. He swings his sword and cuts the beast's neck, but only superficially. It leaps upon him, nearly throwing Kincaid off as it viciously assaults the man who screams in agony. Partially protected by his armor, the teeth puncture his stomach and tear an opening; his intestines spill from his body as the kodana drops him to the ground.

A sudden, thunderous boom startles everyone. Kincaid turns his head to see a bizarre, metallic looking monster with a nose like a giant blowgun facing him. Bellowing fire, the Panzer IV fires a round that strikes Kincaid's keep and causes his kodana to rear up. Huge chunks of stone fall from the hole blasted into his once beloved fortress, filling the youth's heart with dread. An ear-splitting sound like many axes striking wood but amplified one thousand times causes him to cringe. Pulling the tank forward, Jack's crew fire round after round at the keep and surrounding buildings while the bow gunner opens fire on scores of Kincaid's men. Joining them, the Sa'kesh sharpshooters kneel beside the tank, picking off warrior after human warrior, targeting any human not bearing the three-trees logo painted on their armor.

As Kincaid regains his balance, he is suddenly pushed off by a violent force; Chekona leaps upon him and slams him to the ground, quickly using him like a stepping stone and continuing into the battle. Now dismounted, Kincaid begins to panic. He scrambles for his kodana, only for several javelins and a half dozen arrows to pierce its skin from all sides. Flailing in pain, the beast falls to the ground before it is stabbed through the base of the skull by a Zelkona warrior who quickly turns his emerald green eyes to Kincaid. Grinning sinisterly, the short but potent warrior bears his bloody, razor-sharp teeth. Turning to run, Kincaid stops and stares as he looks directly at Cy.

Holding his steel falcata sword by the brass, eagle's head handle, he narrows his eyes at the teenage boy. Without saying a word, he swings his sword. Kincaid barely has the time to block him with the width of his iron blade, which chips slightly from the force. Cy pushes toward him with both hands, shoving Kincaid back. He stumbles over the blood-soaked arm of a fallen human who once served him but quickly regains his balance.

"You should have surrendered when I gave you the chance, you stupid little shit!" Cy growls.

Hopping over the dead human, Cy quickly gains ground. Swinging his sword, Kincaid attempts to slash the left-handed human's primary arm; Cy easily parries him. Kincaid had long ago heard from his father and trainers that fighting a left-handed opponent was difficult, and in his current state of fear, the youth forgets all of the tricks that his father had taught him. Trying for a swing on Cy's right arm, Cy blocks the attack, grips his wrist and spins around. Vaulting the boy away from him, Kincaid falls face first onto the ground, landing over the split open skull of a Ketlan warrior, the man's lifeless gaze meeting his own. Screaming in fear, Cy grabs Kincaid's armor and pulls him up.

“Look at what you’ve done! This is all your fucking fault! Now I’m going to tear your soul apart!”

Terrified of the skillful and older human, Kincaid’s wide eyes leak tears. With a sudden burst of adrenaline, he pushes Cy back and thrusts his sword, but he jumps back and receives only a superficial stab wound to his abdomen. Cy parries the next thrust and slashes Kincaid’s forearm, even though his blade is several inches shorter than the tyrant’s. Dropping the blade, Kincaid draws a dagger, but with another swing, Cy cleaves off his pinky and ring finger. Dropping the blade and grabbing his hand, Cy also drops his sword and rushes the youth. Pushing him to the ground, he falls beside a pool of blood that has collected in a small but natural divot in the ground.

Leaping upon the boy and forcefully rolling him over, Kincaid screams and kicks his feet, flailing as Cy sits upon his back and shoves his face into the pool to drown him.

“Is this enough suffering for you?! Do you feel enlightened yet?!” Cy screams in an insane rage.

Bubbles pop on the surface as Kincaid inhales a breath of still warm blood. Hands grip Cy’s shoulders and pull him away. To his horror, a man with a knife tries to puncture his chest, but he reaches out to grab the blade. Forcing him back, Cy wriggles free from the two human warriors who rush to Kincaid’s rescue. A third pulls the boy king from the ground. Cy turns and rolls on the ground, slipping his fingers with great finesse into the small handle of his falcata. Landing on a knee, he swings the sword and cleaves the unprotected lower leg of a man before blocking a strike made by his comrade. Taking up his chipped sword, Kincaid pushes his men aside.

Angry and eager to prove himself, the youth is desperate to kill his arch rival. Standing to his feet, the blood-stained Kincaid attacks

Cy with a vigor he could not have imagined. Each attack is faster than the last, and for a moment, Cy genuinely worries that he will make a mistake and fall to the boy. As this thought flashes through his mind, his heel catches on the hip of a slain soldier. Tumbling backward, Cy prepares to defend a strike from Kincaid. Raising his sword, Kincaid prepares to slash for Cy's leg, knowing he might strike an artery and kill him from blood loss within minutes. His fingers coil and he swings his arm.

Scrambling back, blood sprays across Cy's face and he stares in shock. Kincaid coughs and drops his chipped sword, looking down at a javelin that pierces through his body from the left side of his back, through both lungs and protruding beneath his right pectoral muscle.

"I missed his heart! ... Good." Katero growls happily.

"Kincaid!" A soldier screams.

"What have you done?!" Another yells.

"I did this world a favor." Katero replies, watching the show.

Dropping to his knees, Cy scrambles to his feet as Kincaid struggles to take hold of the head of the javelin in some confused and desperate attempt to pull the wooden shaft clean through his body. With two punctured lungs, he wheezes as he struggles to breathe, quickly choking on the blood that fills his collapsed lungs. Falling forward and over a dead Zelkona warrior, his hand twitches as he reaches for the chipped sword. The battle rages on; many are simply unable to hear the call to cease over the noise. Taking Kincaid by his hair, Cy steals his sword and forces him to watch. Pushing him onto his back with a foot, Kincaid's last conscious image is of Cy cleaving his head from his shoulders with his own sword.

Only when they see the severed head of the notorious teenage king rolling past them do many of his warriors cease. Within moments

there is a mass surrender as humans drop their blades, shields and spears.

“It is finished.” Katero says softly.

“Not yet...” Cy remarks.

Turning to the surrendering humans, Cy points a sword. Taking this opportunity, the combined Sa’kesh and Kelanethaka forces regroup, surrounding the humans.

“Here is your one chance... Kincaid is dead and so is his reign of terror and grotesque ideology. You are no better than the Ketlan or Zelkona, and if you agree to live with us in peace... You will all keep your lives and families.” Cy says loudly to the forces.

“And if we refuse?” A young captain asks.

“Then we kill you, before killing your wives and your children, burning your village to the ground, and building our new world without you.” Cy answers.

“Kincaid said that the Zelkona and Ketlan are naught but beasts.” A soldier meekly remarks.

“Kincaid lied to you.” Muzel retorts.

“Life or death... Choose, right now.” Cy demands.

Looking back at the terrifying metal beast, Kincaid’s headless, twitching body and the firearm wielding raptors who stand beyond the field of their fallen comrades, the young captain steps forward. Turning his sword over, he sticks the tip into the ground and drops to a knee.

“Kincaid was a tyrant. One of my brothers is dead upon a cross. If you are true to your word and will spare our lives and those of our families, as next in command, I will surrender.” The captain says.

Approaching the captain, Cy takes his sword from the ground and looks the blade over. Holding the blade just before the hilt, he returns the weapon to its owner, both as a sign of trust and to allow him to keep his dignity.

“Take the day to collect the dead and pack your things. We’re raising this city at dawn and you will all be joining us instead.” Cy calmly orders.

“You would allow us such dignity?!” The captain asks in shock.

“Even enemies may show respect... Besides, you have surrendered; you are not enemies anymore.” Cy answers.

With the sharpshooters, Panzer IV, and still bearing a rather large force, the Kelanethaka and Sa’kesh redeploy just beyond the carnage of the field to watch over the village and the remaining soldiers. With Kincaid’s head jammed onto a tall stick and facing the small city that was once his kingdom, his human soldiers quietly return to their homes, obeying Cy’s orders and packing their things. Sa’kesh and Ketlan wade through the dead, retrieving and marking each fallen, many of whom had painted their names onto the insides of their armor as a precaution. Crying men, women and children do the same for the humans of the conquered city, separating the dead and piling them for mass cremation.

Though many visibly harbor resentment to their conquerors, all have seen the terrible power that they wield; it would be futile to continue opposing the interspecies army that stands beyond their town. Sifting through their own dead, Cy notices that Yasmin and Johnny are missing. Suddenly struck by panic, he finds Muzel and asks her to begin a search of the bodies. After searching for some time,

Muzel sees Cy stumbling through the field of corpses in a frantic search and calls his name. Racing up to her, he sees both Yasmin and Johnny sitting on the ground and being treated by one of the many volunteer nurses trained in basic first-aid by Lara Blond. To his shock, Yasmin cries openly and visibly, while a gash on Johnny's left arm is stitched.

Racing up to them, he notes the striking sorrow in their eyes. Turning, he sees what bothers them so. Just beside Yasmin lies Rico's corpse, impaled through the chest by several arrows. Off to the side is Richard, who had spent his time teaching English to the Zelkona and Ketlan, and nearby lay Muzalfur, the Kelanethaka's war-guide.

"I'm so sorry, Rico..." A sniffing Yasmin apologizes. "I love you, and I'm sorry that I never said it. I should have been better to you."

Sobbing like a little girl, Cy is at a loss for words; Yasmin is utterly inconsolable. He sits beside her, only for her to smack him almost immediately. After striking him several times, she then latches onto him like a barnacle, clinging tightly to him as she cries. Katero approaches, heartbroken at the scene and torn apart by Muzalfur's death. He immediately blames himself for not doing more to protect him; he spent much of the battle seeking out Kincaid and killing the soldiers who stood in his way. As a green and yellow furred Ketlan woman wraps a bandage around Johnny's freshly sewn wound, he turns his eyes to Cy.

"Consider this my official resignation, man."

"Alright." Cy nods, stroking Yasmin's back to comfort her.

The cleanup takes many hours, though the conquered humans have much more work than the Kelanethaka or Sa'kesh. At the end of the day, 2,176 of Kincaid's 3,500 soldiers lie dead, while the Sa'kesh and Kelanethaka lost 351 out of roughly 1,800. As he had hoped, a

strong battle plan, thorough training, properly assigning his soldiers to the tasks best suited to their race, and the careful use of advanced weaponry greatly attributed to their victory. A grand funeral pyre is built for both armies of the fallen in the field where they died; it would be impractical to spend a week returning the deceased to the Sa'kesh and Kelanethaka, cultural preferences aside.

Sitting on a track guard of the Panzer as the darkness approaches, Cy looks at the stained red grass, the putrid odor of blood and gore infesting his nostrils. Claws click on the metal behind him, causing him to turn. Muzel stands just behind him, looking him over.

"Hello, Cyrus." She says, standing beside him.

"Hi, Muzel."

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fine. Just mourning the dead." He answers with melancholy.

"Some of them were your friends." She remarks.

"Yeah..." He murmurs.

"Some of them were mine as well... But it is over now, and soon we will return home." She says, resting a hand on his shoulder.

"Are you worried?" Cy chuckles.

"Yes. You are important to our people, and to me. If my idol dies, who else will I worship?" She asks with a smirk.

"Katero or Yasmin are good choices." He retorts.

"I suppose." She shrugs.

"Don't worry about me, alright? I'll be fine. I just want to get home and get on with my life." He says with a sullen sigh.

"As do I... Goodnight Cyrus."

"Goodnight... By the way, we fought together; we're friends. Friends can call my 'Cy'." He grins.

“Alright. Goodnight, Cy.” Muzel grins back.

Before retiring to his tent, Cy joins the first watch, somewhat worried about a nighttime attack by potentially vengeful humans. However, that attack never comes. Just after dawn, they are surprised to see a disarmed horde approaching. Genashin bearing carts of weapons, supplies and sacks of personal possessions follow behind undefended women and children, with unarmed human men leading them. Meeting them just before the tank, the young captain from the previous day presents Cy with a strange scepter made of what appears to be silver inlaid with black onyx stones. With the shape of a dark age mace, the captain waits for Cy to take the artifact.

“What’s that for?” Cy asks.

“Kincaid had it made. When the first man asked to create it failed to present an object ‘beautiful enough’, Kincaid had him roped to a cross... It is a symbol of your rule over our people.” The young captain answers.

“It’s... Pretty?” Cy subdues an amused grin.

“Kincaid has... *Had* interesting taste.”

Taking the scepter, Cy slips it into his pack.

“Come on. We have a long walk home.” Cy says to the captain.

Marching along the trail, Jack and the others are easily first to pass the Agnis complex. Johnny sits atop the Panzer IV, watching the jungle. With the driver’s hatch open and his head peeking out, Jack returns the tank swiftly to the Sa’kesh. Using the cart to carry the most critically wounded and leaving the sharpshooters behind with the marching horde as a precaution, they pass by the ancient building which houses the supercomputer.

“What is that thing? Another temple?” Jack asks.

Johnny turns his head, looking at the black, stone structure as they drive by. He takes a deep breath and slowly exhales, turning his eyes to Jack, who awaits his response.

“Something like that... We have a lot to talk about when we get home.” Johnny finally answers.