

Unity

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode Seven: Imperfect

Metal clanks as his belt buckle falls to the floor, dropping along with his pants. Clawed hands rake his bare back as the pair, safely tucked inside of a locked room, pull each other toward the nearby bed. Stumbling as he pulls his feet through the pant legs, she catches him, dragging him quite forcefully to the mattress. With a quick twist, she shoves him down and pounces upon him.

“Oh damn!” He exclaims, his body flopping onto the bed.

“Mmm, you look good like this.” She coos, straddling his pelvis.

“Look who’s talking.” He says with a grin.

He leans forward for a kiss, feeling her thin lips against his own as he attempts to show her affection in a manner that he’s comfortable with. It’s surprisingly effective, given their dramatic, physical difference as two entirely different species. As Solakus and Kanorakus share biological functionality, thankfully, the rest of their night will be even more fruitful. Feeling the strange display, she recalls her cultural studies of the other races. Looking to him, a smile grows across her face at the realization of his feelings; he is more passionate than a male who merely wants to mate with her.

Stoking the fire that burns within her, she licks his face and neck, nuzzling him afterward. It’s a manner of affection that her

species favors, with a nearly identical meaning. His arms reach around, stroking her back in a surprisingly tender fashion, his fingers wading through the river of softened bristles. Straddling her partner, she gazes down at him. Unable to hold back any longer, she pushes away, sitting upright atop his lap, grinding his flesh against her own. Her claws rake his chest as he pets her.

“I... I’ve...” He pauses, a strange look on his face.

“Yes?” She asks, a lustful glint in her eye.

“I’ve never done something like this.” He softly answers.

“Like this?” She asks in confusion, grinding herself against him.

“I’ve done *this*... I mean, breaking the rules...”

“Oh. Neither have I.”

“You mean a lot to me. You know that, right? I wouldn’t be doing this with anyone else but you.”

She stops, her gaze softening. A sting in her heart takes her by surprise. This is certainly an unexpected turn of events. Without answering, she leans in to show him affection once more. Lifting her pelvis, she carefully takes hold of him, quickly taking their act to the next level. Losing themselves in carnal passion, they forget the conversation he’d attempted to start. Neither can think of anything other than enjoying the other, doing so several times throughout the night, measurable only by a chronograph on the nearby nightstand. Lying beside each other, she turns her head toward her lover.

Sleeping peacefully beside her, she watches him carefully. Though thoroughly exhausted after their time together, as he so obviously is, the only reason for her wakefulness is a racing mind. Reaching out a hand and gently stroking his face, she struggles with her own dichotomy. Guilt creeps into her, forcing her to climb out of bed. Moving slowly and carefully, she finds it strange that she doesn’t wish to disturb him. Taking her clothes from the floor, she quietly

attaches her top and slips on her pants and boots, collecting her V.I. bracelet and linking it to her wrist.

Heading for the door, she tries to remain silent, even attempting to keep her long, tapering tail from swishing through the air. Stopping as she holds her hand over the plate, she turns back and glances over her shoulder. Looking back at the sleeping male Solakus, she feels sick to her stomach. Their budding relationship is drastically changing her perspective, her feelings for him rapidly smothering her desire to continue her previous obligations. She grits her teeth, closing her eyes and wincing in mild fear as she opens his bedroom door, hoping that the subtle swooshing doesn't awaken him.

Waiting for a moment, she glances back, breathing a silent sigh of relief as she sees that he's still out like a light. Stepping softly into the hallway, she closes the door, waiting until it's shut before moving an inch. She takes a step, about to walk through the hallways of the SM Deliverance, promptly stopping at a terrifying sight. Her eyes grow wide as she stands across from another of her team, who looks her dead in the eyes. Roughly ten meters from each other, the Kanorakus females, Fizona and Drayusa, the only two of their species aboard the ship, watch each other.

"... Hello." One of them finally speaks.

"Hi..."

They stand in silence for a moment, each looking past the other and toward the room they'd just exited.

"Is that August's quarters you're leaving?" Drayusa asks.

"Is that Stefan's quarters you're leaving?" Fizona retorts.

Both females stare at the other, struck by the amazing coincidence. Somehow, after spending most of the night with their chosen male, they've entered the hallway at the same time.

"So... How was he?" Drayusa asks, grinning sinisterly.

"What?! ... We... We didn't do that." Fizona answers, turning her head away.

"Good... We didn't either."

"Did we meet in the hallway?" Fizona asks.

"Not that I recall." Drayusa answers.

"Good." Fizona murmurs.

Walking past each other, the two female's eyes remain locked until they are nearly side by side. Each turns a corner as they head toward their own rooms, swiftly entering before any of the Deliverance's crew has seen them. Heading for her bed, she turns around, curling her tail to one side as she sits down at the edge. Looking at her boots, she leans forward to undo the buckles, stopping as she feels the cool metal on her fingers. Eyes stare intently at her V.I. bracelet, wondering if she can even continue the charade. She reminds herself how far she's come already, giving herself the strength to continue.

Rising to her feet, she heads for her nightstand and takes a small bag from inside the drawer. Digging through the pouch, she finds a little card. Removing her V.I. bracelet, she flips it over and extracts the back panel. Swapping the card with the spare that she has, effectively changing her bracelet's number and internal data, she places a call on a secured channel. Though she's taking a risk by using the Deliverance's own system to place such a call, she simply cannot help herself. After several rings, a voice answers.

"Hello, Sway."

"Miss Corova, I... I-I can't do this anymore..." The Kanorakus woman softly speaks.

"... I understand." Miss Corova replies.

"You... You do?" Sway asks.

"You must do what you feel is best, of course. This is a lot to ask of someone; you've spent so much time with them already." Miss Corova continues.

Sway is stunned. How could Miss Corova ever possibly understand? It's not as if she's struggling with a growing love for a Solakus man, a being that's not only supposed to be inferior as a male, but a creation of the unholy beast. Why is she so calm?

"Are you alright?" Sway asks.

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm only fighting for our beloved mother goddess, and struggling against the unholy beast's universe. I've only had to suffer failure after failure, witness my own people undermining my authority, and endure a Solakus man raping me, but I'm fine."

Sway is flabbergasted, staring at her V.I. bracelet as she listens to Miss Corova's voice speaking so casually.

"But none of that's of great concern to you. I know that you've been struggling too, fighting the good fight by feeding us information. If, however, you feel that you've been compromised, physically or emotionally, then perhaps you should step aside. We'll manage as we have, without your help." Miss Corova continues.

"... You were *raped*, Miss Corova?!"

"Yes, I was. A Slaver, the men who've supplied us with our newest weapon in the war to vindicate the mother goddess, were not content with mere payment. One male in particular decided that my body was a necessary extra in the continuation of our business

relationship... He did not like being told 'no'. A true product of the unholy beast..."

"I'm so sorry!" Sway chokes out, her heart aching for her leader.

"It's fine. I wore the muzzle with rage, and I continuously fought my bindings; the mother goddess knows the truth of my struggle, so I have not been defiled. You enjoy your life away from our grand struggle." Miss Corova rather warmly replies.

Sway knows what she's doing, but unfortunately, it's working. The worst crime a Kanorakus female can ever experience is rape. On Kanor, it's a worse crime than murder; it undermines the superiority of the female gender, the goddess's preferred, and dishonors the victim of the assault. A male who rapes is punished accordingly, first with unanesthetized castration, and then with execution. Appalled by her leader's plight, which she all but waves before her face in an attempt to guilt her, Sway's heart still aches. How can she walk away now? How can she entertain a Solakus male and live her life with him knowing that others suffer such fates?

It's all too much for her to take. Sway sniffles as she fights back tears. Hounded by guilt and a confliction to love her chosen partner yet also serve the cause she's upheld for her entire life, she's left with two choices, neither of which are satisfying.

"I'm sorry..." Sway tearfully begins. "I'll help you make this right."

"Will you?" Miss Corova asks, her tone expressing skepticism.

"Yes, I will! I'll send you all that you need! Blueprints, schedules, everything! Please forgive me!"

"There's nothing to forgive. As a woman, you have a right to control your destiny." Miss Corova replies. "Take care, Sway."

Terminating the call, she chuckles, holding the device in her hand as she lay back in her bed.

“Wow... That was pretty good!” A voice remarks.

“Some people are so easy.” Miss Corova chuckles, turning her eyes to the young Woods’ hologram on her wall. “Now, where were we, Draiman?”

“Right here.” The young Woods says, sitting naked atop his bed. “I’ve got these, which you might like; they’re for ankles.” He winks, holding up a set of shackles.

“Oooh! When will you be around again?!”

“We’re heading for a place we can repair our ship. Just some Scrapper base. We’ll be there in twelve hours, and the Lomboko will be moored there for a few days; it’s not far from yours. I’ll come and visit you.” Draiman Woods answers.

“Perhaps you could make a delivery and use that as an excuse to bring me aboard your ship?” Miss Corova suggests.

“... I’ll come and visit...” He sternly replies. “You’re going to entertain your business partner in your room, just like before; fuck your weakling subordinates and their worthless opinions.”

“Mmm, as you wish, Draiman.” She coos. “Tell me about those ankle restraints, and how you wish to use them on me...” Her hand caresses her own body as she reaches downward.

“Heh... I’d love too.” He replies.

Stretching out on her bed, Sway stares up at her ceiling, unsure of what to do next. Not one to go back on her word, she’s trapped between a rock and a hard place. With her V.I. bracelet still set-up for espionage, she collects the data she’d promised, downloading it from her project computer. Sending Miss Corova a complete list of records, Sway’s stomach churns and she feels herself becoming nauseas. Now feeling guilty for betraying her team, and worse yet, her new lover, she cannot stand it anymore. This must stop, one way or the other.

"You look well rested." August remarks.

"Oh yeah." Stefan smirks.

Only moments earlier, both men stepped into the hallway. Each having slept in, neither speaks much to the other as they walk down the hall and toward the ship's galley. Stefan turns his head as they round a corner, looking in the general direction of Drayusa's room.

"I'll catch you later." He suddenly says to August.

"Sure."

Now walking alone as Stefan stops at Drayusa's door, August enters the galley. To his delight, it's void of all life, save for Fizona. As the SM Deliverance is still flying back to Mars, most of the crew are on a tight schedule; as guests, the SI9 team are left with none. Fizona stares at a plate of partially eaten food, looking at it rather intently. Her expression bothers August.

"Hi." He says as he approaches her.

"Hello."

"Are you alright?" He asks, taking a seat across from her.

"I'm fine. I just have a lot on my mind." She softly answers, never once looking up.

"Is it about last night?"

Turning her orange eyes toward him, her expression is all the answer that he needs.

"It's okay." He says softly, leaning closer, over the table.

“What is?”

“You didn’t cross the line, and I don’t regret anything.” He answers, trying to cover his bases.

“Thank you, but that isn’t what I’m thinking about.”

“Oh...” He sits back, now feeling a little embarrassed. “Then what’s wrong? Do you want to talk about it?”

“It wouldn’t help.” She sighs.

“Are you so sure? It might help relieve the tension, and maybe I can fix it.” He suggests.

“Can you fix our drastically different cultures? Can you alter the fact that I’ve spent the first fifteen years of my life living one way, only to have to adapt to another?” She begins, snapping at him. “Your courtship methods are far slower than my own and it’s frustrating. I often feel that you aren’t comfortable with my forwardness. As a Solakus, you’re used to an entirely different behavior in females, and that’s made this even harder. I often feel as though I’m going against my own nature for your sake.”

Looking down at the table, August is at a loss for words.

“On top of that, we’re technically forbidden from having a relationship at all, until Unity is unveiled... I pledged loyalty to this project. I swore on my honor and cut myself with an Olzhak blade. I don’t enjoy keeping secrets... Last night only showed me how difficult this will actually be.”

“And last night wasn’t moving fast?” August asks, chuckling out of frustration.

“The point is that you aren’t ready for *that* to be routine, and we both know it; you’ve said as much yourself. The Solakus custom of ‘dating’ tries my patience.” She continues.

“Hey, this isn’t easy for me either. You think you’re the only one struggling with this?” August snaps back.

“Perhaps...”

“Well, you’re not! I *do* care about you; your feelings matter. If they didn’t, I wouldn’t be speaking to you right now, we wouldn’t have spent so much time getting to know each other, and last night never would’ve happened... I’ll admit, I don’t know how to fix this, but I like you enough to keep trying. I actually want us work out...”

With his frustrated retort completed, he slumps back, resting his forearms on the table. Looking up at him, Fizona can see the pain she’s caused with her words, written all over his face. He’s obviously sincere, and her second guessing of their relationship is damaging him.

“But I get it... If you don’t want to...” He sighs.

Fizona sits in silence, thinking of what to say. While she does wish to continue growing their relationship, she fears that their cultural differences, which she struggles with considerably, will make that impossible. She opens her mouth and takes a breath, pausing for a moment as she prepares herself.

“I think we should-”

“Good morning, campers! Sleep well?! I did!” Stefan chirps, inadvertently interrupting her.

“Hello. Only you two in here?” Drayusa asks.

“Yeah. Haven’t seen Ayanda, Kellan or Sihl anywhere.” August answers.

“I’m sure they’re around somewhere... You two look a little tired! Not used to sleeping aboard a ship anymore?” Drayusa asks, sitting down beside Fizona.

“Yeah...”

“I never was.” Fizona remarks.

“Fair enough.”

"You could use something to make you tired. Maybe a shot of whiskey or... Alternate activities?" Stefan suggests, sitting beside August.

Seconds later, Ayanda enters the galley, followed by Kellan and Sihl' Ahzen.

"Oh good! You're all together!" Ayanda happily exclaims.

"Hey, boss! What's up?!" Stefan asks exuberantly.

"Well, someone's energetic today... We're almost back to Earth. In a few hours, we'll be back at headquarters, and after I present my report to the directors, it'll be time to start our other assigned tasks." Ayanda explains.

"Already?!" Drayusa asks with surprise.

"Time flies when you're hunting terrorists. Also, the Dezonians, fearful that we couldn't contain the situation, tripled the number of construction droids building the Unity's hull. They borrowed them from an important housing project on Mars. Unity will be mostly finished in only a few weeks." Ayanda answers.

"Somehow, I'm not surprised." Sihl' Ahzen remarks.

"Have some breakfast and pack your things. I'll brief you all properly when we've returned to headquarters."

Ayanda suddenly turns around and heads toward the hallway.

"Aren't you joining us?" Kellan asks.

"No. I need to speak with Captain Kraiss. I'll catch up with you all later, when we land." She answers.

"Well then... How's everyone else doing?" Kellan asks, taking a seat beside Stefan.

Both Fizona and August, as well as Drayusa and Stefan glance toward each other, each hesitating to answer before the other speaks. Glancing between their fellow agents, Sihl' Ahzen and Kellan raise their collective brows.

“... Hello?”

Walking through the hall of her base, Miss Corova passes by several of her subordinates on her way to the central control room. Having sworn Sashuna to secrecy, who agreed, so long as Miss Corova swore to never mistreat or have sex with Korazhu again, none know of her assault; in their eyes, she's as powerful as she ever was. Stepping into the central control room, she passes her minions who work diligently at various consoles. Stepping through another door, she enters a small room attached to the control room, locking herself in and activating a small, central console.

She takes a breath as she prepares herself, called to a meeting with the rest of the high congregation, the council who rule the Goddess's Children. Pressing her hand to a plate, she authorizes and initiates an encrypted transmission. A beam of sky-blue light strikes her, glowing with a faint blue-green hue as her image is scanned. A holographic image of the others in the high congregation appear on the flat surface of the console, while her own appears on theirs.

“Ah, Miss Corova. It's good to see you've made it today.” Miss Ojunda begins, the elder of the high congregation.

“And why wouldn't I?”

“You're just so busy. We find it hard to reach you at times to issue new orders.” Miss Ojunda replies.

“I'm a member of this congregation, not your puppet.” Miss Corova growls.

“And I'm the elder...”

“... Why did you call this meeting?” Miss Corova asks, already eager to end the call.

“You understand why Unity is a threat, don’t you?” Miss Ojunda begins.

“I believe I do.”

“Well, let me remind you. Unity undermines the mother goddess. She, who created us in her likeness and chose women as her voice, gave us power over men and control of our planet, needs us to fight for her. While the males of our race are a necessity which she’s bestowed for our pleasure and procreation, all other races are the creation of the unholy beast. It desires to destroy all that our mother goddess has done for us; by allowing each race to live together harmoniously, aboard a single vessel, the bastard of racial mixing, it defiles her children and mocks her will.”

“I understand this...” Miss Corova grumbles in frustration.

“Then why haven’t you done something about it?!” Miss Ojunda angrily yells.

“I have been! *It’s all I’ve been doing! I’m* on the front lines, while you’re still on Kanor, enjoying your males and forgetting about all of *my* work! I’m twice the woman any of you are!” Miss Corova snarls.

“Mind your tongue when you speak to an elder... Remember that your record of success is all that keeps you in our good graces and on the high congregation; I grow tired of your attitude...”

Miss Corova merely rolls her eyes, frustrated by the elderly female who speaks for the others.

“We’ve decided that you need to act swiftly. We need a show of force. Having reviewed the data-”

“I only sent it a few hours ago!” Miss Corova interrupts.

“That’s sufficient!” A congregation member remarks, actually speaking for herself.

"Having reviewed the data! ... We want you to plan an attack as soon as possible, and by that, we mean within the next few days. No later than that..." Miss Ojunda continues.

"Fine... It will be done." Miss Corova murmurs, respectfully bowing her head.

"Good girl! Carry on." Miss Ojunda derisively chirps, waving her hand dismissively.

Ending the transmission, Miss Corova rests her hands against the console, fuming with anger. The high congregation consistently send her orders to carry out their dirty work, never even gathering their own intel. As far as Miss Corova can tell, she's the entirety of the Goddess's Children; why does she even continue to report to them when they do nothing?

"Old bitch..." She grumbles. "All of those worthless whores stress me out... Draiman needs to hurry up; I've never been so relaxed!"

Stepping out of the transmission room, she approaches one of her minions who types at a console.

"When you're done with that, program a Marionette and have the men arm it with a type nine explosive device. Pick a location and time within the next few days; make sure Sway's on the schedule."

"Sway?"

"That won't be the name on her schedule, of course." Miss Corova continues.

"I understand. Is Sway going to grant the Marionette access?" The minion asks.

"No. She's outlived her usefulness; her resolve is growing weak." Miss Corova casually answers.

“... Understood.” The minion murmurs.

“Good girl... Carry on.”