

# Unity

By Mantrid Brizon

## Episode Twelve: Afterparty

“Who’s thirsty?!” August asks, holding up a fancy, green glass bottle.

“Hell yeah!” Stefan holds up an empty glass.

“This has been a long time coming.” Miss Ayanda remarks, a look of satisfaction on her face.

In the main hall of SI9’s headquarters, August pops the cork on a bottle of Champaign with Miss Ayanda quickly opening a second. Stefan, Kellan and Sihl’ Ahzen stand with Drayusa and the other two, having been recalled as soon as word came back of the operation’s success. Though Captain Kraiss had destroyed the base, he considered it a personal failure for his inability to catch the faster Slaver gunboat; none are certain how many terrorist lives were lost, if any, when the station was obliterated by the SM Deliverance. However, the fact remains that there’s no longer a base for the Goddess’s Children to carry out their attacks.

The principal threat to project Unity is now dead; the Con-Tali, a more localized Sol group, were dealt with by Sol Police and Marines before they could become remotely the threat that the Goddess’s Children were. In celebratory fashion, Miss Ayanda and August pour Champaign into glasses. Passing out the drinks, they hear the beeping of an incoming call from the console in the communications

room. Without saying a word, Miss Ayanda excuses herself, sealing the door behind her.

“Who do you think that is?” Stefan asks.

“Maybe it’s a serious question?” Sihl’ Ahzen quips.

“I’m just starting dialogue!” He retorts.

“So, what happens now?” Kellan wonders.

“Now I suppose we do actual work; no more playing games with terrorists.” August replies.

“Damn... I was having fun too.” Stefan says, jokingly snapping a finger in disappointment.

“There’ll be plenty of time for fun.” Drayusa coos, looking to him with considerable favor.

The others pause, even Stefan. Though it isn’t the best kept secret, all are surprised that Drayusa would allow such a slip. Realizing that the others are watching intently, she lowers her head in embarrassment. Before she can speak, the door to the communications room opens and Miss Ayanda returns.

“What’s the news, boss-lady?” Stefan jovially asks.

“That’s *Miss* Ayanda.” She snaps.

“Oh, sorry! Forgive me Miss boss-lady Ayanda!” He quips.

“Smart ass... Well!” Miss Ayanda claps her hands together, rubbing them slowly. “Good news and bad news! What do you want to hear first?”

The group huddle together for a moment, taking a brief vote.

“Good news.” August answers for them.

**“We’ll chase the bad news with alcohol.” Sihl’ Ahzen remarks, holding up her glass.**

**“The good news is that, in their infinite wisdom, the Director’s deem the public launching of modules to be the beginning of phase three. Black mode is officially over.”**

**“Finally!” August exclaims.**

**“Hell yeah!” Stefan cheers.**

**“Now I can finally call my parents.” Sihl’ Ahzen remarks. “What are you going to do?” She asks, turning toward Kellan.**

**Without saying a word, he slips an arm around her, pulling the bird-like Irakus woman against him. In short order, he leans in and kisses her cheek, just beyond her serrated beak.**

**“Ooh!” She coos, lifting a talon from the ground.**

**Not to be outdone, and realizing that they’re now in the clear, Stefan turns to Drayusa. He quickly slips his arms around her voluptuous body and gives her a tight embrace. A millisecond after taking her into his arms, their lips lock as he gives her a passionate kiss, her large breasts pressing against his chest. Drayusa’s black and gold tipped bristles soften, visibly losing rigidity from his touch as she trembles in his arms. To her, Stefan is claiming her in front of the others in a manner that many females of her kind would do to a male that they desire. The switch in rolls is both emotionally and erotically appealing to her, cementing in her mind their compatibility as life-long mates.**

**“Well! ... I didn’t see that coming.” Sihl’ Ahzen comments.**

**“I was sure that would’ve been August and Fizona.” Kellan adds, his hand on her shoulder.**

Frustrated and somewhat jealous, August turns away from the pair to speak with Miss Ayanda, intent on asking for the rest of the news.

"Hey..." Miss Ayanda speaks before he has the chance to open his mouth. "If it'll make you feel better, we can always slip off into a back room." She says with a teasing wink.

"Don't tempt me." He chuckles.

"Heh. Assuming I was even serious, we both know that those morals of yours won't allow such recreational activities."

"You don't know me as well as you think you do." August retorts.

"Don't I? I was aboard the Azilian for some time; I watched you develop from a boy and into a man, literally and figuratively." Miss Ayanda begins.

"That's kind of creepy." Kellan remarks.

"And you're a good man." Miss Ayanda insists, ignoring Kellan.

"Hey, you caught me looking before." August interjects.

"Walking in on me naked because I did not yet understand the Solakus' issues with nudity is *not* the same thing as looking because you wanted to see my body." She continues.

"I suppose..." August murmurs.

"Don't pretend you're your father or Pratt. You're August Woods, a *good* man."

Miss Ayanda's words confuse him. What's she insinuating about his father? He's only ever known him to be a moral, upstanding person, even downright boring.

"Anyway! The bad news... We'll be that lucky ten percent to first board Unity."

"What?!" Sihl' Ahzen gasps.

**“That wasn’t the plan.” Kellan says.**

**“A change of plans. SI9 always had the best agents with the highest security clearance. As Unity’s chief of security, I’ll be boarding her to establish my office. As my agents, you’ll all be accompanying me to help finish preparing the internal security measures. Besides, you need to know that ship like the backs of your hands, so the more time you’re there the better.” Miss Ayanda explains.**

**“When do we leave?” August asks.**

**“Tomorrow morning!” She chirps.**

**“Oh, come on!” Kellan grumbles.**

**“August, I want you to pick up Fizona from the hospital; she’s being released early to accompany us, though she’s still on medical leave so she won’t be working. Crews will be dispatched to pack up your useable furniture tonight and load it ahead of our departure. In about a week’s time, all of us, along with the other five-hundred and ninety-three people in the first wave, will be walking around that brand new ship. Be ready!”**

**Dismissing her agents, the elation is diminished but not destroyed. The agents share drinks together, finishing both bottles of Champaign in short order before leaving for their homes. Any previous plans of freely enjoying each other’s company have been superseded by packing their belongings. Returning home after collecting his companion Draz from Invar’s apartment, August prepares some food for both of them. With two steaks sizzling on the stovetop, he brings his V.I. bracelet to his face and video calls his sister, Roku.**

**“Hi!” Roku chirps.**

**“Hey there. So, black mode is over.” August begins.**

**“I figured. It’s nice to hear from you!” Roku grins at her brother.**

**“Yeah, I missed you too.” August smiles back.**

"I got a call earlier today from the project office. I hear we'll be leaving tomorrow morning. A crew are scheduled to arrive in an hour to start hauling off my lovely apartment."

"Are you excited?" He asks.

"Eh... Kind of, but also nervous. I'll have a lot on my plate with my promotion. I've never had my own office or been in charge of people before." Roku responds.

"You'll be alright; you were always the smartest, most collected of all the monsters that are the Woods children. You couldn't possibly fuck this up." He assures her.

"Thanks. How are you doing?"

"I'm fine..." He sighs.

Looking at her brother through their holographic connection, she can see a strange look on his face; a mixture of fear and sadness drain the enthusiasm from August's eyes.

"Hey, do you know what would be nice? Why don't you pick me up? We can ride together to the launch site and catch up!" She chirps.

"Sure. That'll be nice."

In that moment, it slips his mind that he also has to collect Fizona from the hospital, a task that he cannot nor does not wish to abdicate; he'll simply have to leave early and drive them both. After a relatively pleasant, if brief conversation, August ends the call and eats his dinner with Draz, who relishes the time they're sharing. The blonde haired, white tiger Voeldahn has been so busy with his work lately that Draz has spent more time with August's half-brother, Invar. After eating, August spends the next few hours packing. Before long, a group of men arrive, collecting every piece of furniture in his apartment, save for his bed; Unity will have a new one waiting for him.

Sitting in his barren apartment with Draz, August is left with only a few bags of clothes on the floor. With nothing else left to do, he crawls into bed, Draz curling up beside him, and closes his eyes. While he has a lot on his mind, he knows that it's best not to dwell on things, and tomorrow is another day. Rolling over, Corova opens her eyes. Her ruby orbs scan the empty space beside her. Draiman is absent. Lifting her body, she rests on a forearm and places a clawed hand over the space where her lover's body was. Turning her head, she scans the bedroom for signs of her human companion.

"I'm sorry. Did I wake you?" Draiman asks.

Looking toward the bathroom, her eight-inch-long, crimson bristles soften, her thin lips curling into a faint grin and she subtly shakes her head. Buttoning up his shirt and tucking it into his dressy slacks, Draiman sits at the edge of the bed and slides close to her. The nearer he becomes, the more her thick, tapering tail sways as it hangs over her side of the bed. The raptor-like Kanorakus woman reaches out an arm, hooking it around his body and pulling at him as if he was her stuffed toy. Lying back, Draiman cuddles with his alien lover, his nose nuzzling her broad snout as he gives her a few tender kisses.

"I made sure my crew took it slow, but we'll be there soon." He says softly, his nose caressing her pointy, elf-like ear.

"Alright."

"As much as I love you like this, you should pick out something to wear." He chuckles.

"On Kanor, it often isn't uncommon for females to go without clothing when indoors and with close companions." She coos, her hand sliding down his chest.

"We're not on Kanor, and I'm not your kind; if you don't cover that stunning body, I'll find it hard to introduce you to my family with you bent over in front of me. I'm fairly certain that would make for awkward introductions." He casually retorts.

**“Is that your argument? It isn’t very effective.” She winks.**

**“Put on some clothes. I’ll take them off later, when I show you our quarters.” He sternly replies, a hand gripping one of her bare breasts.**

**“Mmm... As you wish.”**

**“Good girl.” He says, kissing her lips and squeezing the charcoal hide of her breast. “Something elegant and sexy. Just try not to tease me too much; I only have so much willpower.”**

**The reptilian looking mammalian slides out of bed, the silken sheets pulling at her form. The claws of her three-toed feet click on the metal plates as the six-foot and two-inch tall woman slowly stands and stretches her muscles. His eyes gaze at her voluptuousness, admiring the sides of her large and heavy breasts as her back faces him. They soon glide down and fixate upon her plump buttocks, the view partially blocked by the thick base of her tapering tail. The long and wide stream of bristles that run over her spine shift, catching his attention. Looking up, he stares into Corova’s eyes as she watches him from over her shoulder, her lips curled into a sinister grin.**

**Their attraction for each other is incredible; neither has felt such a powerful force. It’s as if their very DNA was written so that it would meld seamlessly with the other. Turning around, her claws click loudly on the floor as she faces her lover, revealing her nude front to him. With brow raised he gazes downward, looking briefly at her large breasts before setting his eyes upon the gentle curves between her legs, admiring her femininity. The look of the human male actualizes her very being; this is what nature intended, and Corova cannot believe that she spent so much of her life fighting against it. That is a mistake that she will not repeat.**

**Reaching down and between her legs, she teases her mate with her body. Her hands slide down her thighs as she bends over, taking hold of her bag of clothes. Her upper arms squeeze the sides of her**

breasts, pressing them together. An intrigued Draiman clears his throat, rising slowly from the bed as she digs through her bag. She slowly sorts tops, pants and underwear in three distinct piles at the foot of the bed while the human walks slowly around her. Her narrowed eyes follow him, her lips curling further upward as he takes hold of his belt. Draiman's free hand gently grips her body, fondling her as if she were his property.

Unable to resist, she releases a soft moan as he stands behind her. Corova looks back, watching with glee and planting her hands firmly on the footboard of the bed. Peering between her own legs, she watches him drop his pants.

"I think we have time." He remarks.

"Do we?" She asks innocently.

He doesn't answer, beginning the act in silence. Her fingers coil tightly and she grits her teeth, her brow softening and ruby eyes rolling back. A hand grasps her tail near the base and gently pushes the thick appendage aside, which she quickly coils around his waist. The pointy, whip-like tip flicks repeatedly around his opposite side as she pulls him in, grunting and groaning. While she's found great pleasure in her new status as Draiman's woman, his exclusive lover, she's discovered something quite intriguing about their new relationship and perhaps males and females as a whole.

As his subservient female, she still wields great power as his mate, and yet so does he. Despite the outward appearance of his dominance in public and their bedroom, both partners are equally powerful and equally controlled by the other; they're entwined bodies become a single entity, a harmonious link of two spirits otherwise individual. Rolling her over and climbing atop her, Draiman's forceful arms are somehow gentle. He commands and she obeys, and yet he never abuses his authority over her. Often it feels like his demanding hands coach her through their passion rather than insisting upon it.

She knows in the back of her mind that he continues for both of their enjoyment, and that if she weren't so pleased with it, he would *probably* cease. The fact that he has the option not to makes her loins moisten and burn, yet the fact that he would even care to consider her feelings makes her heart burn even more. However, Draiman knows her even better than she knows herself, something he's demonstrated multiple times already; he doesn't need to stop. With tail flailing, she lies back and clings tightly to her lover, kissing and nuzzling him affectionately.

After a period of entertainment, the pair finish. Content to hold each other, Draiman cuddles with his lover. With bodies glistening, coated in a thin layer of sweat, Corova runs her claws along his pale flesh.

"This keeps happening." He says with a smile.

"Is that a complaint?" She turns her eyes toward his.

"Hell no. Just an observation." He replies, kissing her softly and holding her tight. "Alright, sweetheart. We need to get ready."

"Sweet heart?" She raises a brow.

"Translator error?"

Corova shrugs her shoulders.

"It's a Solakus term of endearment. It means that I find you affectionate and adorable." He explains.

"Oh!" She grins, her tail swaying happily and thudding atop the bed.

"Come on. We need to shower and get dressed before we dock. For real, this time." He chuckles.

"As you wish." She coos.

Taking her by the hand, he leads her into the bathroom. Draiman walks her into the relatively small, stand-up shower stall, quickly turning on the hot water, and though they are briefly distracted again, they eventually wash up and emerge to put on their clothes. No sooner does Corova buckle her boots and Draiman ties his laces, a knock at the door catches their attention. Corova places her hand to the plate, the second of two people with access to Draiman's private quarters. The privilege of her station continues to give her pleasure, her lips curled up as the door opens. Before them stands a masked and uniformed Slaver, Sashuna and Korazhu standing beside him.

"We're here, sir. We've hailed the Lomboko and have already initiated docking procedures." The Slaver says.

"Alright. We'll be there." Draiman replies.

Walking out of their quarters, Corova closes and locks the door behind her, following Draiman, who walks with his minion a few feet in front of her. Turning her eyes toward Sashuna, the girl immediately averts her own, having been staring at her leader for some time. Looking away, Corova can feel the girl's gaze. Again, she turns her eyes only for them to briefly lock before Sashuna shies away, showing her subservience to Corova in a manner that was once quite flattering. Now, however, with Corova's altered perspective, it becomes tiresome.

"Is something on your mind, girl?" Corova asks with a sigh.

"Miss Corova, I-"

"I am not in charge of a base any longer, nor do I serve the Goddess's Children. Do not call me 'Miss'." Corova sternly interjects.

"Apologies Mih-... Corova... Are you certain that this is the best course of action? Should we not find our people and continue to serve the mother goddess?" Sashuna poses.

"You can do what you like. You're free to make your own choices now." Corova replies.

Sashuna turns to Korazhu in shock. He dares not speak an opinion to her; bound in the invisible chains of their culture and religion, he is lesser to Sashuna. However, both share a similarly flabbergasted expression.

"What will we do?" Sashuna asks Corova.

"I don't care."

"How is that possible?!" Sashuna demands, a hint of anger in her voice.

"I've spent my entire life in the service of the mother goddess, doing many things that others would consider questionable. I've always believed it to be for a cause... I don't anymore." Corova begins.

Listening to their conversation, Draiman can't help but glance back at his lover, looking over his shoulder. Their eyes lock and a smile quickly forms upon Corova's lips. He smiles back, as much from her warm gaze as from hearing her words. Clearly, Corova's taken what he's said to heart. Erasing one's cultural and religious ties aren't easy, and she's done it for him; this is not lost on the human.

"I find it hard to believe that you would change your beliefs so readily." Sashuna retorts.

"Believe whatever you like; it doesn't affect how I feel or how I think."

"And what do you think?" Sasuha presses.

"I think that Korazhu *isn't* property. I think that you are *not* superior because you were born with breasts and the ability to bear young. I think that perhaps we've had it wrong this entire time, and I think that I simply don't want to live such a terrible lie any longer.

While medical technology has extended our lifespans to nearly two hundred years, that's still too short to spend in service to such a myopic cause."

"... So, what changed?" Sashuna asks.

"Pardon?" Corova turns her head toward Sashuna.

"What's pulled you away from the mother goddess?"

Looking back at Draiman, the couple share another warm smile.

"I came face to face with the truth, and I've embraced him." Corova answers. "Now, if you don't mind..."

Stepping a little faster, Corova leaves the stunned Sashuna and Korazhu behind and joins Draiman. Walking side by side, he reaches out and takes her hand. Their fingers interlock. Reaching their destination, they stand by the airlock as Draiman's gunboat touches down in the hangar bay of the Lomboko. Looking through the open doors of the bridge, he can see through the windows, viewing the interior of the archaic vessel.

"Ready?" He asks Corova.

"Of course." She says with a nod.

Though her voice is confident, her hand squeezes his a little tighter. Perhaps it's subconscious or perhaps it's a signal but regardless of which, he knows the meaning. Squeezing her hand in kind, he leads her through the airlock and onto a wheeled ramp that other Slaver's have placed there. Stepping out together, they are soon followed by Draiman's crew, which he promptly dismisses for a period of rest. The Kanorakus refugees, however, follow as a colorful and somewhat frightened entourage. Walking through the hangar of the Lomboko, Corova's eyes widen at the sight of an even larger ship.

**“What’s that?!” She asks, pointing a clawed finger.**

**“That’s the Animus. It’s an old MK-IX ‘Indolence’ yacht; it’s my sister’s ship.”**

**“It’s very pretty.” Corova remarks.**

**“Yeah, they don’t make them like that anymore. Wait until you see the inside! The family spends a lot of time there when she’s docked. Dad kept it as an heirloom. I guess he was close to the previous owner or something.” Draiman explains.**

**Walking through the hanger bay of the Lomboko, she can see several others ships. Two are smaller transport vessels, used for short-range cargo hauling, while several bombers and fighter craft line the walls. Heading for a set of massive double-doors that seal the hangar from the interior of the ship, Draiman’s V.I. bracelet chirps. He stops and lifts his arm, still clutching to Corova’s hand, their fingers intertwined. With furled brow, he sees the name and presses a button, accepting the call from Vivian Woods, his sister.**

**“Hhyellow!” He answers.**

**“Sonny-boy! Nice to see you!” James jovially exclaims.**

**“Dad?” Draiman turns his head, looking around the hangar.**

**“We’re up here, in the Animus.” James explains.**

**“Hi, bitch!” Vivian chirps.**

**“Well, we’re back, just like you wanted.” Draiman continues.**

**“I can see that! And you brought the rainbow coalition with you!” James chuckles.**

**“They’re skin is so pretty...” Vivian says in a sinister tone.**

**“They’re refugees, so don’t get any sick ideas!” Draiman snaps.**

**“Aww...” Vivian whines.**

**"We'll see about that... Get your ass up here! Bring that girl of yours too! I'd like to see what all the fuss is about!" James says.**

**"I fully intend too." Draiman replies before terminating the call.**

**Turning to Corova, he pulls her in for a hug. Embracing her lover, she tilts her head downward, resting her chin atop his shoulder.**

**"It's time, sweet heart. Whatever happens up there and whatever they say, remember that I'm on your side and I always will be. You'll be safe with me." He whispers into her elf-like ear, his fingers stroking her soft, crimson bristles.**

**"I know." She whispers back, holding him tighter.**

**"I'll do everything I can, *for you*, but I don't know what I can do for the rest of your people." He continues.**

**"Thank you, Draiman. I know you will." She coos, nuzzling his face.**

**"Please don't be mad if I can't save them..."**

**"I don't care on a personal level, but I was their leader and I don't wish them all to die for my choices; it isn't fair to them. I'll help you negotiate for their lives. We will face them as a team." She says.**

**"You're new here and I honestly don't know if my father will be keen on hearing from you right now, all things considered." He warns.**

**"Do you care for me?"**

**"You know I do!" He insists, his arms squeezing her tighter.**

**"Then trust me." She whispers into his ear before kissing his cheek.**

**"Alright... Let's go."**

**Ending their long embrace and turning back to the Kanorakus refugees, Corova waves Sashuna over to her. Pushing through the others, she leaves Korazhu behind; Corova didn't wave to him.**

**“Yes Mih-... Corova?” Sashuna asks.**

**“Follow us.” Corova instructs.**

**Holding out their hands as a signal for the others to wait, the trio leave them behind and walk back toward Draiman’s gunboat, passing the craft and approaching the Animus. The keel-side doors open and the small cargo lift lowers. Aboard the lift stand a half dozen heavily armed guards, glad in the Slaver’s Union’s black and dark purple armor and wearing respirated helmets that conceal the entirety of their heads.**

**“I need a witness when we speak to Admiral Woods. Draiman and I will do what we can to save the refugees, but we cannot guarantee everything. You need to trust us and remain silent.”**

**“Yes M-... Corova.”**

**“It’s the last act I will do as your leader. After this, I wash my hands of all responsibility. We’ll all live our own lives. Understood?”**

**“Understood.” Sashuna nods.**

**Boarding the cargo lift, they ride the platform slowly into the cargo bay of the expensive craft. Sashuna and Corova’s eyes grow wide in surprise as they gaze upon the interior. The decorative carvings on the walls are astounding; such care taken to improve the look of a simple cargo hold. Following Draiman, who is flanked by two rifle wielding guards, they walk through a hall lined with cherry wood panels and carpeted with red velvet. Wall sconces are made of gold and designed to look like Voeldahn hands, their clawed fingers grasping a crystal flame where a warm, amber light bulb sits within.**

**They turn a corner, and then another. Entering a room, it appears to be a lounge or study. Ancient Solakus music plays, the volume low but quite audible as background noise. The two**

Kanorakus women have never heard such sounds before, both of them overcome by the tranquility of the tune. Draiman stops, closing his eyes and tilting his head back for a moment.

“Vivaldi. Winter. Such a lovely song; I believe it the best of the Four Seasons.” He suddenly says.

“You always had exquisite taste.” James remarks.

Opening his eyes, he turns his head toward his father’s voice. In a corner of the lounge sits a series of six chairs, arranged in a crescent around an expensive and ornate wooden table. A series of crystal decanters on a silver tray are surrounded by matching crystal glasses, one half-filled with scotch. Leaning forward in his red leather and brass buttoned wingback chair, identical to the others, James’ reaches out for the glass. With rings of gold and silver, studded with precious gems of every color, the older, black haired and pale-skinned human wears a white button-up shirt and leather vest of red and black, decorated with a swirly, floral pattern.

With a full but carefully trimmed beard, wearing black and grey pinstriped pants and shiny black shoes, he has a cultured appearance. After quickly drinking down the scotch, he sighs and sets the glass atop the silver tray. In the chairs beside him are two human women, one older than the other. With a very oriental appearance, like the humans from Tongylí, she is distinct, wearing a flowing dress of purple and gold. The other woman is visibly mixed between the two, wearing more conventional but expensive clothing of black pants and boots, a purple silk blouse and a gold studded belt.

Both women’s hair is long, straight and black, cascading over their shoulders and caressing the tops of their breasts. Approaching the three, James turns in his chair, an elbow perched upon the armrest. He sets his chin atop his palm, a strange little smile on his face as his eyes scan the two Kanorakus females who approach just behind and beside Draiman.

**“Hey there, shithead.” The younger female waves.**

**“Hey, Viv. How’s it going mom?” Draiman asks the older woman.**

**“Exquisite, as always.” Erica replies.**

**“Not going to say hi to your old man?” James asks.**

**“Wouldn’t that be redundant?”**

**“I suppose, but redundancy is sometimes a good thing. It kept my lovely ship going long enough to make it to this hell hole.” James retorts.**

**Walking closer to the table, Draiman stands by a chair, the one opposite his father’s. It’s as though he’s waiting for his father to instruct him on what to do next. James’ eyes scan the two women. One has a black hide with red swirls, crimson bristles and ruby red eyes that chill him to the bone. Her voluptuous body is the essence of femininity, her chest bearing large breasts at least DD in cup size, if not a bit larger. A shiny black top traditional to the Kanorakus covers her front and sides like a plate, held with red leather buckles and bearing the black flesh of her midriff. Broad hips bear her red leather waist-belt which holds up her glossy black pants, and her large, three-toed feet wear sturdy and shiny black boots.**

**Opposite this somewhat frightening alien woman is a slightly shorter female; he would estimate her height at six-feet, still taller than himself and his son. Her hide is a medium purple, not too dark but not vibrant either. Faint swirls of gold run through her arms and tail, and ostensibly the rest of her extremities. She looks to him with golden eyes, her golden bristles gently rising, growing rigid from her apprehension. A shiny purple Kanorakus shirt with black straps covers her chest with slightly smaller but still substantial breasts, at least D cup in size.**

**Also bearing her midriff, James can see that her belly is also gold, giving her two distinct patterns. Black pants like her**

companion's covers her legs, held on with a black waist-belt with a gold buckle just above her equally broad hips, while identical black boots cover her feet.

"Well?! Are you fucking them both or will you introduce us to your new woman?!" James laughs.

"This one is Corova." Draiman says, taking the black and red Kanorakus's hand.

"Hello, Admiral Woods. It's nice to meet you in the flesh." Corova says, waving to James with her fingers tipped with sharp black claws.

The Woods family seem surprised by Draiman's choice. Erica and Vivian look to each other, then back at the odd couple. James' enlarged eyes turn between the black and red Kanorakus and his son several times.

"And this one is Sashuna. She's here as a liaison for the refugees, and a witness to our negotiations; formerly Corova's personal assistant." Draiman points to the purple and gold Kanorakus.

"Hello, sir." Sashuna waves, her purple fingers bearing golden claws.

"I don't remember asking you to bring anyone else." James says in a low and eerie voice.

"And I don't remember caring about what you wanted." Draiman gleefully retorts.

"As insolent as ever... I'd expect nothing less." Erica comments, her lips curled into a sinister grin.

"You only have yourselves to blame." Draiman smirks.

"True." Erica giggles.

James rises to his feet and approaches the trio, walking around the table. With his hands on his hips, he looks over Corova from head to toe.

“Well, she’s certainly appealing. Excellent body!” James exclaims.

“What can I say? I have great taste.” Draiman quips.

“Though she has a very... Evil appearance. Now that I can see her face to face and not through a discolored hologram, I admit to being rather intimidated! Luckily, I have all of these armed guards to ease my mind. The purple and gold one, Sashuna, seems more elegant; I’d have picked her.” James continues.

“I like Corova the way that she is. It makes her more fun to tame.” Draiman grins.

A mildly embarrassed Corova squeezes his hand and steps closer, her head tilting in his direction.

“I can imagine.” James smirks. “So, now that you’re back, I’d like to have a little talk.” He says, returning to his chair. “First, I forgive you for running off in your ship when we clearly needed you here.”

“Dad, I-”

“Ah!” James interrupts his son, holding up a hand. “No talking... You and I both know that if anything happened, we needed your gunboat here. It’s been heavily modified, and your destroyer cannon is the best defense when the Lomboko is down. I didn’t tell you earlier, because you didn’t need to know, but we lost more than hyperdrive. A generator blew and had another ship approached, we’d have been forced to choose between shields or cannons.”

“... I’m sorry, I... I didn’t know that.” Draiman hangs his head in shame.

“I know... In retrospect, I should’ve told you, but you should know better. When I say things, it’s because I’ve thought them through,

having considered all of the knowledge that I possess. Thankfully, no one came and it was alright! Next time, however, when I say 'everyone should stay here', please accept the fact that I'm not just talking out of my ass." James continues.

"Alright. I'm sorry, dad."

"It's alright. Lesson learned, and no one even had to die this time!" James chuckles. "This brings me to the second point. I'm sorry, Corova, for calling you a whore."

"I forgive you." She replies.

"Understand that we are a very... Unique family. As you can see by the behavior of myself, my lovely wife Erica and my stunning daughter Vivian, we're an abrasive bunch but we mean well."

"Oh, of course! Slaver's always mean well." Corova grins.

"Hah! I do believe you'll fit in rather well here. Which reminds me, and forgive my curiosity, but how serious is this thing you two seem to have?"

"Pardon?" Draiman raises a brow.

"I mean, are you just fucking her because it feels great, or is there something more to it?" James growls impatiently.

"Is someone jealous?" Corova grins.

"Perhaps... Please answer the question." James persists.

"It's serious." Draiman admits.

"The word 'meld' has been brought up." Corova adds.

"... Excuse me?" James blinks.

Everyone stops what they're doing, the room falling silent except for the classical music playing in the background. All occupants stare with wide eyes, especially Sashuna. Though she's heard of such a thing, she's never personally known a female Kanorakus who's melded with anyone outside of their race. It wasn't all that long ago that Sashuna walked in on Corova molesting her favorite male, Korazhu, and yet now she seems completely entwined in

her relationship with the human Solakus, Draiman. Considering the drastic change and how readily she follows the man, Sashuna wonders if perhaps there is such a thing as love at first sight.

"I love her, dad." Draiman insists.

"And I love your son." Corova adds.

"Well, that was fast!" James chuckles.

"So, what is this 'meld'?" Erica curiously inquires.

"It's an emotional and spiritual bonding ritual that will blend us together as one." Corova answers.

"Sounds like marriage." Erica comments.

"Or slavery." Vivian remarks.

"Same thing." James teases, looking to his wife.

"Dick." She giggles, gently backhanding his bicep.

"It's more than that." Draiman says, looking to his lover.

"Well, I suppose that makes you my future daughter-in-law, in which case, welcome to the family!" James exclaims.

"Corova Woods has an interesting ring to it." Erica remarks.

"As if we weren't weird enough." Vivian giggles.

Rising from their chairs, all three of Draiman's family approach to hug and congratulate the couple. Corova is surprised by how readily they accept her; James immediately offers her familial privileges, including access to all levels of the ship, authority over Slaver guards as his wife and children have and voting rights amongst the family. After a short and inconsequential conversation, James allows his son, fiancé and Sashuna to leave, never once bringing up the refugees who still stand around in the hangar, waiting for word of their fate.

"Wait, dad... We need to talk about the others." Draiman says

**“Hm? Oh! I’d forgotten!” James laughs. “So, what about them?”**

**“How many did you bring with you?” Erica interjects.**

**“Sixty-six, including my Corova.” Draiman answers.**

**“They need a place to stay.” Corova adds.**

**“That’s a nice number! Hm...” James scratches his beard.**

**“That’s quite a few more mouths to feed, hun.” Erica turns to her husband.**

**“It is...”**

**“They could prove useful.” Draiman says.**

**“Yes. The Kanorakus do not shy from work, however arduous and bloody. They’d make excellent crew, especially those outside.” Corova begins.**

**“Go on...” James murmurs.**

**“Formerly Goddess’s Children, I have ordered my crew to do many things to further the cause, things that most would look down upon. I doubt any truly value the lives of your typical cargo, and most have killed before they even found us, either in the Kanor civil war that your brother so rudely interrupted, or as criminals on other worlds.” She speaks rather proudly.**

**“And they are an imposing bunch. Most are not as innocent looking as Sashuna here; most are more in line with Corova. You’d find that quite useful if you employed their skills as guards.” Draiman interjects.**

**“And as workers, they can handle long hours and strict discipline.” Corova continues.**

**“Interesting...” James nods.**

**“And what do we get out of caring for them?” Vivian asks.**

**“Besides a warm, fuzzy feeling?” Draiman smirks. “Increased productivity, for one.”**

**“And more soldiers to protect you.” Corova adds.**

**“All valid points.” James nods.**

"And if that isn't an option, you could always let us go, dropping us off at the nearest friendly planet or base." Sashuna suddenly interjects.

"Well that's *not* an option. I can't take the risk of taxiing people out of the goodness of my heart."

"What heart?" Draiman snickers.

"Exactly. The choices are as follows: They stay and join the Slaver's Union, or we kill them all, except for my new daughter-in-law, and you, Sashuna. I like you." James casually speaks.

"That would be a grave mistake. You'd be missing out on a wonderful opportunity to command a very dangerous, very determined, and very colorful group... If the rest of the Lomboko is as hideous as the hangar, then you desperately need that last one." Corova says.

"Hah! I like her, son." James pats Draiman's shoulder. "Do you think I should bring them all into the fold?"

"Of course, dad! That's a really stupid question!" Draiman exclaims.

"Alright... But, before I make a decision, tell me something. How did your escape go?"

"What does that matter?" Draiman raises a brow.

"Because I want to fucking know! Answer the question." James growls, squeezing Draiman's shoulder tightly.

"Well, the SM Deliverance showed up with two marine gunboats. I'd waited too long before leaving the base; I didn't want to upset Corova by leaving any of her people behind. I was forced to deal with the gunboats before I made my escape." Draiman begins.

"I see. Blew them up, did you?"

"Yeah."

"Just like that?! Nothing else interesting to report?" James raises a brow.

"Well, I couldn't help but toy with them before I destroyed them both with my cannon. I even made sure to make a badass boast before we left the Deliverance in the dust." Draiman smirks.

**“Yes. Something about how the Deliverance was the sole survivor three times, but it wouldn’t last a fourth.” Corova remarks.**

**“Hah! That’s my boy! A real showman, just like his old man!” James lauds his son. “Alright! They can stay! If they’re willing to join the Slaver’s Union, they’ll have a home here.”**

**While Corova is pleased, no longer feeling guilt, a fearful Sashuna is overjoyed. The purple and gold Kanorakus takes hold of James, hugging him and thanking him profusely.**

**“Well now!” James exclaims,**

**“Sincerely! You don’t know how much this means to us!” Sashuna exclaims.**

**“My hands aren’t touching anything! See, babe? Not a thing!” He says to Erica.**

**“Good boy, but you still can’t have her.” His wife replies.**

**“Aww...” James playfully grumbles.**

**Pulling Sashuna away, Corova and Draiman return to the hallway without guards. Heading back to the cargo hold, they quickly depart the Animus, returning to the anxious Kanorakus who wait in the hangar. Finding Korazhu and embracing him, Sashuna reveals the news, which Corova and Draiman explain to the rest in kind. Left with only two choices, life as Slaver’s or death, it’s obvious which they prefer. Then and there, the entire band declares loyalty to the Slaver’s Union. In short order, a large group of soldiers lead them away to update the Lomboko’s roster, receive clearance codes and vet their individual skills before being given quarters.**

**Now left alone, Draiman and Corova return to his gunboat to collect her things, walking together throughout the dark and dreary ship. For its size, there aren’t many crew aboard; James Woods runs the Slaver’s Union’s entire operation from his vessel, adopting a**

minimalist philosophy. Finding his private quarters, Draiman opens the door for his lover, presenting the opening to her. Stepping inside, she recognizes the room from their many video calls, her lips curling into a wide grin. Approaching his large bed and sitting atop the silken sheets, she runs her hand over it.

Draiman calls out to her, bringing her toward a terminal along his wall and beneath where the hologram appears. Joining her lover, he accesses a secured line, directly to the Lomboko's main database.

"Ready?"

"Ready for what?" She asks.

"I'm going to scan your palm, give you clearance and add you to the roster." He answers.

Nodding, she allows Draiman to do as he said. Her heart races with delight as she watches him type, giving her every privilege that he himself enjoys. To her surprise, there's a checkbox that lists 'voting rights'.

"What's that mean?" She asks him.

"My dad is the Admiral, but he's not a dictator. He owns and captains the Lomboko, but business is a family matter; we vote on what we want to do with the Slaver's Union and where we want to go next. The majority wins. As family, you get to vote with us." He replies, slipping an arm around her slender waist.

Typing with one hand, he enters her name in the system as 'Corova Woods' before pressing a button and updating the ship's database. She tilts her head, resting it against his. She'd spent her entire life serving the mother goddess, trying to find fulfillment. Somehow, with Draiman's love and companionship, she no longer needs her old and highly confused faith; he gives her the fulfillment

that she's long desired and more. He gives her stability. She kisses his cheek, wrapping her arms around him and giving him a squeeze.

"I love you." She coos.

"I love you too, sweet heart."