

Unity

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Episode Sixteen: The Fear

"Damn these stupid whores! Why are they still doing this?! Can't they think for themselves?!" Miss Ayanda rants and raves.

Pacing before her lieutenants, the others sit in their seats and watch the pine green and crimson Kanorakus, waiting for her to finish so she can issue new orders.

"I'm so sick of these little wenches pulling this shit." Miss Ayanda growls.

"Miss Ayanda..." Drayusa speaks softly.

"If I could go back in time to whoever it was that drafted the mother goddess's foul tome, I'd tear their head from their shoulders."

"Miss Ayanda, if I may." Drayusa speaks louder.

"Yes?"

"I believe I have a suggestion..."

Miss Ayanda narrows her eyes, ever mistrustful, considering Drayusa's past transgressions. Nodding her head after a short pause, the black and purple raptor-like woman begins to speak while Miss Ayanda and the others sit and listen. Brows raise and they glance between each other, some of them nodding in agreement.

“After all, how long would it really take? I believe that this will work.” Drayusa finishes.

“I think this could work.” Fizona agrees.

“An Irakus commando couldn’t do one better.” Sihl’ Ahzen nods.

“So, Miss boss-lady Ayanda?” Stefan turns to her.

“Well... That’s certainly something to try! Good work, Drayusa.”

Miss Ayanda cannot help but grin at her lieutenant. Even struggling with Drayusa’s previous betrayal, it’s clear that she regrets her choices and is making an effort to aid them.

“Thank you, Miss Ayanda.” Drayusa bows her head.

“Alright. We have work to do, people!”

“I’ll call Invar. His team is still there.” August says as he rises from his seat.

Returning to her office, Miss Ayanda places a call. To her surprise, the Unity’s Council wish to speak with her in person. Miss Ayanda exits the security offices and heads for the Unity’s bridge, walking with several Marines flanking her. She approaches a special room just before the bridge. The sealed door is flanked by guards from Fizona’s unit and requires the highest-level security clearance to open. Pressing her hand to the plate, the door slides open and she finds herself entering the Council’s chambers. It’s the first time that she’s ever entered the room or laid eyes on the Council.

In a room with a rich wooden veneer, the red carpeted floor is shaped like a semi-circle, while the room is the shape of a quarter sphere. Lining the back wall, which is reinforced for their protection, the Council consist of two members of each race, one male and one female, with the exception of the Dezonians, who are genderless. The

Solakus, the beings originating from Earth, while technically two races, are considered as one. The Dezonians recognize the two races but they categorize based on planetary origins, and the humans and Voeldahn have shared the same home world since the dawn of time; the Council has one human man and a Voeldahn woman.

“Approach and speak, young Kanorakus female.” A Dezonian with a pastel red body speaks.

Stepping forward, Miss Ayanda clears her throat, unsure of what the Council even wants from her.

“... Well?” The Voeldahn asks.

“Forgive me but I’m unsure of why you even called me here.” Miss Ayanda answers.

“To give us your report.” The human clarifies.

“I did that already when we spoke, before you called me here.” She retorts.

“That’s all?! There’s nothing more to say?!” A surprised Kanorakus gasps.

“No. We have a plan to catch the saboteur, but until then we’re effectively in the dark.” Miss Ayanda calmly explains.

“Perhaps you don’t understand the importance of this project.” An Irakus Councilman interjects.

“It’s not lost on me...” Miss Ayanda grumbles.

“These terrorists could ruin everything.” The human says.

“There is far more at stake than a simple ship...” A Dezonian interjects.

“This project will alter the fate of our collective species.” The other adds.

"Unity must launch. Unity must carry our species deeper into the galaxy, while there is still time." The first continues.

For a race as cold as the Dezonians, its words have a distinct hint of fear. Miss Ayanda's brow raises. Why are they so concerned?

"Please, Miss Ayanda..." The Kanorakus Councilwoman begins. "Please, stop this terrorist before it's too late."

"I will not fail you." Miss Ayanda confidently assures them.

Waving her away, Miss Ayanda leaves the Council chambers and returns to the security offices, her mind picking apart the Dezonian's words. Something doesn't sit right with her, though she can't place her clawed finger on it. The only thing that she can be certain of is that they're hiding something. Nearing her office, Miss Ayanda passes Stefan and Kellan as they leave to carry out their duties. Glancing around the rooms as she walks into the main hall, Miss Ayanda sees Drayusa inside of her office, looking at a holographic computer screen. August steps out of his own office, also preparing to carry out his mission.

"How'd it go?" August asks.

"As horribly as one could expect." Miss Ayanda smirks.

"Figures... We'll catch this son of a bitch." He assures her, resting a hand on her shoulder.

"Don't you mean daughter of a bitch?"

Sharing a chuckle, August turns to leave and Miss Ayanda steps into her office, closing the door behind her. Taking a seat at her terminal, she further ponders the words of the Council. Claspng her hands before her face, she activates her terminal and begins to dig. Using her security clearance, she scours her files for anything that could answer the questions that her meeting with the council seeded

in her mind. She searches for some time, though she finds nothing. Growing frustrated, she digs into the personnel files of the Council, curious about the background of the two Dezonians.

To her shock, the files are sealed, and even her level of clearance, level one, is not valid for access. She could understand being locked out if she were a level three or level five agent attempting to access such personal details but she is the chief of security. If this were a military vessel, her title would be 'General'. How can she not have access? With her curiosity peaked, she decides to try a different approach. Looking at the communications logs, she has remote access to textual, audio and visual communications between Unity and the project Director's Earth base.

Perhaps they've written or spoken about something that she isn't aware of. Does Unity have another, clandestine purpose? Accessing the records, she searches only for those messages sent to the Director's headquarters and from Unity's Council members, especially the Dezonians. Soon, she hits pay dirt. A cache of textual and audio messages pass back and forth between the Dezonian Council members and a 'Director Ashford'. Attempting access, she's asked for her clearance code. Typing in her code, the screen flashes red, bold letters reading 'Insufficient Clearance'.

"What the fuck?!" A shocked Miss Ayanda gasps.

August walks away from Miss Ayanda and toward the door, hearing the swooshing as she shuts herself into her office. Pausing for a moment, he glances over his shoulder, looking at her door.

"August?" Drayusa's voice calls to him.

Quickly turning, she motions with her hand, pulling him into her office. No sooner than he steps inside, she uses a control panel on her desk to close the door behind him.

"What's up?" He asks, taking a seat in the chair across from her desk.

"I need to speak with you." She says softly, a hint of fear in her voice.

"Is this about my mission? I'm pretty sure I know what I'll be doing." He assures her.

"It's not about that." She shakes her head.

"Are you alright? Is something wrong?" August leans a little closer, as if worried someone will hear them.

"It's Stefan..." Drayusa murmurs. "We've talked about melding for a while and I really want to but..."

"Oh... You're afraid of what he'll find?" August asks.

Drayusa looks to him with a surprise, her eyes wide and mouth agape.

"We've talked about it too... He's really excited."

"I see... I don't know what to do, August. I love him so much. I just want us to have a life together, I want him to father my children, and I want us to see them grow into adults and raise their own families."

"And you should." August nods.

"... But I also don't want him to look at me like I'm a monster. I've made mistakes, August, and I regret them. I'm not a monster, am I? ... I've tried to make up for what I've done; no one should be beyond redemption." She continues.

Bowing her head in sorrow, Drayusa stares at the top of her desk, her long black bristles with gold tips rigid from nervousness and fear. Drayusa snuffles and a tear escapes her eye. He can see the liquid streaking across her smooth hide as it races toward the tip of her snout, leaving a gleaming streak of charcoal black flesh. His heart aches for her as she sulks. August has always had a high level of empathy for others, a trait he shares with Roku and something his parents lauded throughout their childhood. Rising to his feet, he walks around her desk and attempts to give her a comforting hug.

No sooner than his arms brush against the bristles that run from the top of her head, along her spine and toward the tip of her tail, he feels a sharp pain.

“Ouch!” He pulls his arm back.

Several of her bristles have stabbed him, now as rigid as porcupine quills.

“Sorry. I’m just upset.” She says softly.

“It’s alright.” He says, resting his hands on her shoulders as she sits before him. “You’re not a bad person, Drayusa, and you deserve to be happy... I’ll see what I can do to prepare him for it.”

“Thank you.”

Turning her head toward him, August is taken aback by the gratitude in her eyes. Her love for Stefan must be considerable. Seeing the happy glow in her purple irises, August now feels obliged to try and preserve what he can of his friend’s relationship. Without saying another word, August mere nods his head before walking toward the closed door. Drayusa opens the door and August steps out, turning back to her as he smiles reassuringly.

“What the fuck?!” A muffled Miss Ayanda growls from inside her office.

Though curious, both August and Drayusa decide against bothering their leader. If it’s pertinent to their mission, they’ll hear about it in their next debriefing. Leaving the security offices, August takes a tram toward Engine Pod Four, where Stefan will be. Kellan and his police force have begun to deactivate several cameras heading in that direction under the guise of malfunctioning hardware. They also conveniently leave a gap in their security that leads directly toward the targeted reactor. Reaching his station, August departs the tram only to find Invar and several engineers waiting there.

“Hey, bro!” Invar chirps.

“Hey. Done already?!” August asks in surprise.

“Nothing to it, man. Just be ready on your end.”

Boarding the tram, Invar and his crew return to the residential sphere, leaving August standing on the station’s platform. Walking the halls, he sees only human and Voeldahn guards; Fizona’s team have been pulled. Entering the reactor control room, a technician runs a quick check of the systems, which have been updated in preparation. Stefan stands beside the technician, looking over a datapad.

“All done!” The technician chirps.

“Good. Let’s get out of here.” Stefan sighs.

Turning back, Stefan is startled to see August in the room. He hadn’t been expecting him, and assumed it was one of his team who’d entered.

“August?! What’re you doing here?!” Stefan asks.

"Just came to see how everything was coming along. The engines *are* on the way to the hangar, after all."

"Oh. Well, it's fine now. I'm just ready for this to be done." Stefan says as he ushers everyone out of the reactor control room.

"This is quite a plan Drayusa came up with." August remarks.

"Yeah, she's smart as hell." Stefan grins.

"... Why do you think they do it? The terrorists I mean."

"Who cares. They're all the same; worthless scum. They're either brainwashed idiots or cruel zealots." Stefan replies.

"That's a little harsh, isn't it?" A worried August remarks.

"I can't stand betrayals like this. It makes me physically sick."

"Now who's being extreme?" August quips.

"Don't you feel the same?!" A surprised Stefan raises a brow.

"You need to realize something, Stefan... These people grew up with this. They've had these religious convictions for millennia. Imagine believing something for so long, only to have aliens randomly show up and tell you that you're wrong and everything actually works another way. It's a lot to swallow."

"You sound like a sympathizer." Stefan snickers.

"I have sympathy for people who are misled, and for people who are struggling with change. You don't know what's really in their heart; you can't judge them for it." August quips.

"True... I can, however, dislike what they do and try to stop them. If that breeds a personal dislike then so be it." Stefan retorts.

"I'm just saying, don't be so harsh on people when you don't really know why they do what they do. Maybe this person is stuck between wanting to change and wanting to do right by their faith?"

"Okay..." A shocked Stefan blinks. "Since when did you become a philosopher?"

"Since the sun and the sky were made out of pixels." August smirks.

Boarding two trams, Stefan and his team return to the residential sphere, while August rides alone to the hangar, where many of his team await him to perform a final security sweep. With the fighters and bombers ready for action and the small destroyer only recently delivered, Unity is nearly ready to launch. Fizona's team guards Engine Pod Five, the last one to be brought online. At this moment, engineers install the necessary drivers and run systems checks. Any day now, Unity will begin her journey, and a nervous August prepares himself.

"What the hell..." The young, female Kanorakus grumbles.

Noting the lack of guards, she uses that opportunity to check Engine Pod Four's reactor control panel. Slipping into the room she lies down on her side and slides beneath the panel, quickly finding the device that she placed there. Taking it in her hand, she pulls it away from the wires, which haven't even been singed let alone melted. Examining the device, it doesn't appear to have activated. Did she do something wrong? Has it broken? Taking the device, she retrieves a second, setting its timer for one hour. According to her research, it will take Unity's reactors roughly six to ten hours to overheat without intervention by the computer, more than enough time to cover her tracks.

"This one better not be a dud..." She grumbles, placing the device over the wires.

Sliding out from beneath the control panel, the saboteur quickly escapes the room and darts down the hall. She passes dozens of deactivated security cameras, many of them held up with reusable, clear synthetic rubber strips so as not to put undo strain on the wiring. Returning to the tram, she boards the car and rides toward the hangar, only to take an express tram returning to the residential sphere at the opposite end. She looks up at the ceiling, noting that the

screens are dark and a moon and countless stars gleam above her. Unity's chronograph reads two in the morning, and many of her crew are asleep.

Traversing the void walkways and passing only one unsuspecting police patrol, the Kanorakus woman returns to her apartment. When this other device activates, she hopes to be evacuated with everyone else in the ensuing emergency, at which point she can paint Unity's location for an attack and go back home to Kanor. The saboteur enters her bedroom, quickly stripping off her clothing and sitting naked atop her bed. Yawning and stretching her muscles, she lies back and relaxes.

"I can't wait to get out of this hell." She sighs.

Yawning and stretching her arms, Fizona steps into the office. Her shift should've ended hours ago but Miss Ayanda asked her to stay, along with a group of volunteers from her unit.

"Anything?" Fizona asks.

"Oh yes..." Miss Ayanda grins sinisterly. "Fetch Invar and head to Engine Pod Four. He has work to do."

"Understood." Fizona nods.

Swiftly departing with her team, Miss Ayanda is left alone in her office. Looking at the screen of a hidden camera installed beneath the control panel in Engine Pod Four's reactor room, Miss Ayanda looks at the crystal clear, color image of their saboteur. Using facial recognition software, she compares the terrorist's image to those of the crew. The search quickly ends as a match is found, a crewmember's file popping up on her holographic screen.

"Let's see who you are..." She speaks to herself.

Waking up the next morning, Roku stretches and arches her back. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, the female Voeldahn sets her digitigrade feet on the carpeted floor. The nude woman walks across the room and toward her bathroom, missing the subtle click of her claws against hardwood. After taking a shower and brushing her teeth, she slips on her panties and bra and dresses in comfortable, business casual attire. Taking a heated breakfast pastry, she has her light snack on her way to the office, as is her new routine. Entering the logistics offices, which she controls, she finds many of her crew already there.

“Wow! Are you girls trying to get overtime?” Roku chuckles.

“We could use the points.” An Irakus quips.

“Actually, we all received an automated message on our V.I. bracelets calling us in early. We thought you wanted us here.” A Kanorakus explains.

“Huh. I didn’t get the memo. Nobody tells me anything.” Roku remarks.

The girls are all surprised, glancing between each other. Most, however, don’t think much of it. After all, there are people with a higher pay grade than their boss. Beginning their work, Roku heads for her office, greeting each of her staff by name. She greets the human and the two bird-like Irakus, whose desks sit closest to the hallway door. Turning her jade green eyes toward the first of three Kanorakus, she looks upon the rose red woman with off-white swirls, her eyes pale and her bristles matching the swirls.

“Hello, Zheniza.” She nods to her.

“Hello, Miss Roku.” Zheniza nods back.

Roku then greets the two Voeldahn, one a mare and the other a mouse. She looks toward the last two of her staff, both Kanorakus. One is cobalt blue with thick red stripes, ruby eyes and silver bristles, while the other is snow-white with thin golden stripes, golden eyes and golden bristles.

“Hi, Katala.” Roku nods to the blue and red female. “Hey there, Zephana.” She nods to the other.

Nearly at her office door, it slides open in unison with the hallway door behind her.

“Police! Everybody freeze!” Officers bark orders.

A stunned Roku spins around, seeing three Voeldahn and two humans. While four of the police officers wear typical uniforms and body armor, one does not. The fair skinned, red headed human wears a rather formal outfit with a long coat, similar to August’s outfit when he was on Earth and working for SI9. He glances around at the full office, a strange look upon his face. The man focuses his gaze on one woman in particular.

“May we speak with you, Katala?” Kellan asks.

Katala bolts from her chair, leaping upon Roku who screams as she falls to the ground. The police rush in and Kellan draws his blaster, taking aim with a solid, two-handed stance. However, Katala is swift. She drags Roku to her feet and spins around, using the shocked and terrified tigress as a living shield, a clawed hand gripping her throat tightly. Silver claws dig into the white and black stripped fur of Roku’s neck as Katala drags her hostage back and toward the opened door to Roku’s office.

"Let her go. You're not getting out of here." Kellan calmly instructs.

"Fuck you! Get me a ship out of this tub and let me go, or I'll tear her head off!" Katala growls.

"What's going on?!" Roku asks.

"Shut up." Katala squeezes her throat.

"You know that's going to happen... This is your last chance to come out of this alive." Kellan warns, focusing his aim at Katala's head.

Katala ducks behind Roku, which is a challenge as she's nearly a foot taller than her.

"Don't even try it, you demon spawn! I won't fall for your tricks!"

"No tricks. Let her go and come with us and we won't hurt you."

"I don't trust men, let alone the child of the unholy beast." Katala retorts.

Kellan rolls his eyes as she spews the mother goddess's rhetoric. His finger caresses the trigger of his blaster and his officers move in, spreading out and forming a semi-circle around the terrorist and her hostage.

"Please..." Roku gasps.

"I'm sorry about this. Truly. I don't enjoy hurting women. The mother goddess loves our femininity. I'd have taken a male hostage if there were any here. Though, as one of the unholy beast's spawn, you *are* still inferior. I'll kill you without a second thought." Katala speaks in a cold, matter-of-fact tone.

"Last chance... Let her go... Now!" Kellan barks.

Clutching even tighter to Roku's throat and squeezing an arm around her slender waist, the Voeldahn can feel her lungs starting to burn and blood trickles from small punctures on her neck, staining Katala's silver claws.

"Make me!" Katala defiantly growls, peeking out from behind Roku.

Blood splatters across Roku's face.