

# Unity

By Mantrid Brizon

## Episode Twenty-One: Good Behavior

“Trying to seduce me already? Aren’t I a little old for you, young captain?” Miss Ayanda asks, standing before captain Basile’s apartment door.

“You’re not much older than me, and we’ll live a looong time.” He says, presenting his apartment to her.

“Flirting, captain Basile?” She steps inside.

“Maybe, and please, call me Madrid.” He says with a smile.

“Madrid... How did you come across that name?” She asks as she sits on his living room couch.

“I was serving a freshly promoted captain Krais, training as a pilot. My fighter malfunctioned and I nearly burned up in the atmosphere but I salvaged her in time and crashed in an ancient town called Madrid. It was a joke at first but it stuck and I like how it sounds.” He explains from his nearby kitchen.

Exiting his kitchen, he presents a tray with an assortment of small snacks and a few drinks. Miss Ayanda is rather surprised by his etiquette; he’s exceedingly polite and accommodating.

“May I ask why you called me here, or is this how it looks?”

“Perhaps, depending on how filthy your mind is.” He replies, taking a small glass of green liquid.

“Well in that case it’s pretty bad.” She smirks.

“I wanted to speak to you where I knew we wouldn’t be overheard. The Dezonians funded most of this project and virtually everything passes by them at some point. However, they are culturally bound to protect the sanctity of a domicile. They consider it in bad taste.”

“So, no sex then?” She asks.

“I didn’t say *that*.” He teases, taking a sip of his drink. “But on a serious note, this is about our new friends...”

“Ahh... Them.”

“Yes. Three thousand, two hundred and fifty-five. Of those, just over two thousand and six hundred are women between eighteen and twenty-five years old. Originally, Unity was designed with a slightly skewed but almost even gender ratio, with most of the soldiers and civil servants being male. Now, with all of our new guests, that’s changed... And the Dezonians like it that way.” Madrid begins.

“To what purpose?” Miss Ayanda raises a brow.

“Look, let’s be honest here. I’m the captain. I was elected by the council and I started at clearance level zero. I already know everything that you know, and I know that you know it too. You and I both understand what Unity is...”

“I just enjoy confirmation.” She smirks.

“You and every other woman.” He grins. “The fact of the matter is, we are on a ship that formerly had a nearly one to one, female to male ratio. Now it’s something like one-and-a-half to one, and this isn’t a short flight... The Council and the Directors both insisted that I keep going, and so I had to but I can’t do this alone. I need you to help me smooth this over. While I don’t expect much resistance from the women, the six hundred and thirty-two new men might be a problem. We want them to fit in with the rest of us, and when we get to where we’re going, we’re going to need them anyway. We both know this.”

Miss Ayanda takes a glass of green liquid, drinking the rather strong concoction. Madrid raises his brow as he watches her swallow the contents in one big gulp.

“What about the three Slavers?” She asks.

“They’re a part of this. The Council wants them released.”

“When I signed up for this project, this isn’t what I was expecting...” She murmurs.

“Neither was I, though it is quite interesting.” He comments.

“What do you need me to do, Madrid?”

“They probably think we’re in hyperspace, headed for Sol. We’re headed for our first set of coordinates. I want you to prep your people for a riot, just in case. Make sure everyone is aware that we need them to be on their guard, and focus your people’s attention on the residential sphere. I already have a team trying to convert the former slaves; they’re lauding the mission, offering work, pay and homes... Hopefully they’ll allow themselves to be enslaved by us instead.”

Taking another glass, he downs his drink rather swiftly, trying to match Miss Ayanda. Resting her arm on the backrest, she watches the pale human. He sighs, staring at the tray. Madrid seems to be deep in thought. He’s clearly pained by their situation, as is she.

“This bothers you, doesn’t it?” She asks, leaning closer.

“We all have a conscience, Miss Ayanda. For some people it’s a little louder than they’d like.”

“Sensitivity is unbecoming in your species. I was hoping you’d pin me against a wall and show me that Solakus dominance I hear seduces all of my kind from the old ways.” She smirks.

“This is a business meeting, and that’s pleasure... Pleasure comes later.” He winks.

**"Promises, promises." She giggles. "Alright. While I don't agree with them, we both have our orders and this is certainly an unprecedented mission. It deserves our effort. Besides... I like challenges!" She chirps.**

**"Good."**

**"Call me if you need anything, Madrid." She says, rising from the couch.**

**"Of course."**

**Walking past him she heads for the door.**

**"Ooh!" She jumps.**

**Looking back at her captain, who just smacked her butt, her tail sways and her eyes narrow.**

**"Seduced yet?" He teases.**

**"I'm getting there."**

**Finally returning to her office, Miss Ayanda passes a few of her Lieutenants, greeting them with a warm smile and a head nod. Passing by August, Miss Ayanda disappears into her office. After a short pause, August knocks on her door. Swiftly invited inside by the pine green and crimson Kanorakus, he takes a seat in a chair before her desk.**

**"Did you need something, August?"**

**"Have a good meeting with the captain?" He begins.**

**"Very. What's bothering you?"**

"Have you read my report detailing the incident with the Lomboko?"

"Of course." She nods "It was very detailed."

"There was something that was bothering me. Something James said."

"Oh?"

"He seemed to know you, and he made it pretty clear that my mom and dad had a past with the Slaver's Union." He continues.

Miss Ayanda falls silent. Sighing, she looks down at her hands which rest atop her desk. Softly clicking the claws of her three fingers and thumb against the wood, she prepares herself.

"It's really affected me, Miss Ayanda. I could hardly sleep last night. I... I need to know. If you have any answers. Please."

She turns her ruby eyes up to him, her gaze locking with his jade green orbs. His brow is as soft as his voice as the young man begs her for an explanation. She'd hoped that this would never come to pass, however, unfortunately, he now knows too much for her to steer him away. The truth can't stay buried forever.

"... What did you want to know?"

"Were my parents *just* explorers?"

"... No... Your father founded the Slaver's Union."

August is flabbergasted. He stares with eyes as wide as saucers, so Miss Ayanda pauses, giving him a moment to absorb this new knowledge.

“George did a lot of things, years before you were born. Most of the original crew were a part of it. Prat, Donovan, Ein, Whitley, Gretsche, Fiona, Rakshasa, Kira, and your parents. Everyone who served on his old ship, the Bannockburn. Even Prat and Donovan’s wives, Marisa and Catalina, used to be slaves before.” She continues.

“The Bannockburn... That ship in the picture on the Azilian’s bridge?”

“Mhm. They left the Union and went legit after something exceptionally awful happened. George gave the business to James, married your mother, bought the Azilian and the rest is history.”

“... But how do you know? We didn’t even know about your race until I was just barely a teenager.” He asks.

“I was on a battlefield as a humble tank commander when I met your father. He interrupted the civil war and the Azilian destroyed a chunk of my battalion, because we shot at it. I’m lucky I wasn’t killed myself. He was very compassionate, and stayed to make sure that the hostilities were over and even offered to aid any injured, even though they knew nothing about or physiology at the time. He was there for me, to help me through a difficult revelation, and so when I had the chance, I joined his crew without hesitation. We became close, and over time he and your mother both confided in me. I even spoken to James in video calls when he would still check on your father. They kept those a secret, and stopped catching up *years* before we left the Azilian.” Miss Ayanda explains.

August slumps back in the chair, a hand covering his gaping maw. How were they able to keep such a secret? Prat is perhaps the most surprising, as he’d honestly felt that he was always somewhat dimwitted. It’s hard for him to imagine his father as anything other than an enthusiastic, if somewhat uninteresting explorer.

“Why did they quit? What happened?” He finally asks.

“A lot of people died, and they simply wanted out. Your parents wanted a better life and they wanted a family. They knew they couldn’t have that doing what they were doing... They’ve changed,

August. They changed for you, Roku, Kesa, Tammi, and even your jerkass younger brother, Mars. Anyone can change.”

“But not for Invar?” He remarks.

“Well, as your dad would say, that’s a whole other can of worms... If I were you, I wouldn’t dwell on it. It didn’t affect your life before today, and it doesn’t have anything to do with who you are.”

“Doesn’t it? I mean, maybe I’m genetically predisposed to being a bastard, and I just didn’t realize the reason for my tendencies until now.” He suggests.

“You aren’t a bad man, August. In fact, you’re anything but. Who’s the guy who takes offense to alcohol and drug abuse? Who’s the guy who somehow beat down Prat after he told an inappropriate joke that made Kesa cry? Who’s the man who doesn’t like to have sex with women that he isn’t already in a committed relationship with? That last one is laughable to most people of either gender but that doesn’t bother you in the slightest.” She retorts.

“Says who? ... I’m not quite the angel you seem to think I am. Yeah, I’m moral, and there’s right and wrong, but I’m not an angel.”

“Hah! Could’ve fooled me. Do you ever wear your wings, or do they just collect dust in your closet?” She teases.

“You remember that day when I walked in on you naked. I looked. Thoroughly. Honestly, after seeing you in the flesh, pardon the pun, I actively tried to see you like that again, and you were probably my first real fantasy.”

Miss Ayanda’s brow raises in surprise. Her lips curl up around her long and broad snout in a subdued grin. It’s clear at a glance that she had absolutely no idea.

“Some of my best wet dreams involved you. The truth is, if I thought I could’ve done it, I’d have had sex with you without a second thought. I have to *strive* to control those kinds of urges.” He explains.

“Oh? So... You like exotic women?” She asks in a soft tone.

“Who doesn’t? Truthfully, Fizona is definitely one of my favorite former lovers.” He admits with a smug grin.

“Well, had I known that then, I might’ve visited you in the night. You could’ve been my first Solakus.” She says with a little wink.

“If only we had time travel, right? ... Thanks for being honest with me. I appreciate it.”

Rising from the chair, he heads for the door.

“August!”

He stops and glances over his shoulder at her.

“You’re not all that different from George. You’re both decent men. Flawed, but decent. Stay that way.”

With a little nod, he leaves her office. Sitting at her desk, Miss Ayanda taps on the wooden top, leaning back in her chair.

“Damn... The things I’d have done to him had I known that.” She sighs.

Taking up her V.I. bracelet, Miss Ayanda promptly calls Sihl’ Ahzen. It’s time to bring back her team and debrief them.

“Well now... How’re my little Slavers doing?!” Sihl’ Ahzen asks, walking through the hallway of the cell block.

“Just enjoying pleasant conversation.” Draiman coolly replies.

“I didn’t hear anything!” She retorts.

Draiman, who lies on his back atop an unusually comfortable bunk, turns his head down. He looks at the tiny, four-foot-six, bird-like Irakus. Her fiery eyes glare at him as she stands before his force shield, her whip-like tail swishing and her orange feathers and red neck fur shining in the artificial light. She cocks her head, as if waiting for him to speak.

“Damnit if you aren’t cute as a button!” He exclaims, shooting up on the bunk.

“Pardon?!” Sihl’ Ahzen asks.

“Doesn’t she look like a stuffed doll?” He asks the two Kanorakus in the cell across from him.

“She’s certainly the right size.” Corova replies.

“What’s going on, little bird? Came to hang out with your betters?” Draiman taunts Sihl’ Ahzen.

“Perhaps it’s feeding time?” Corova growls, approaching the force shield.

“You aren’t taking me seriously, but you will...” Sihl’ Ahzen sternly warns.

With a wave of her dainty hand, she brings guards closer before taking hold of a strangely shaped blaster with her long, featherlike fingers. With men now standing guard, they deactivate the force shield and Sihl’ Ahzen promptly shoots Draiman with a blue orb, stunning him. It’s a common non-lethal weapon often employed by security and prison guards. Falling to the ground with a thud, Corova presses her clawed hands against the force shield, smacking it once and causing it to hum, a wave of light blue trickling away from the point of impact.

“If you hurt him...” She snarls.

“You’ll what? Threaten me from your prison cell?” Sihl’ Ahzen giggles.

**"I'll pick my teeth with your little bones."**

**"Just for that, I'll interrogate you last, and we practice enhanced Irakus techniques here." Sihl' Ahzen narrows her fiery eyes.**

**Corova is well aware that the Irakus are quite fond of torture. Her heart jumps into her throat at the thought of her beloved Draiman in pain. Looking to the Solakus guards, however, one human and one Voeldahn, she hesitates to believe her. Still, Corova falls silent. Why tempt fate? Dragging Draiman off by his arms, his feet slide on the ground. Sihl' Ahzen leads the way, taking him to an interrogation room. Locking him in, she prepares an injection, wishing that the Solakus hadn't insisted upon the humane treatment of prisoners. Unity has no torture devices aboard, though the experienced Irakus commando could easily fashion some if need be.**

**She grips the unconscious and handcuffed human's chin, bringing the needle toward his throat. Before she can penetrate his flesh and inject the serum, her V.I. bracelet chirps. Sighing in frustration as she sees Miss Ayanda's name, she walks away from her target and answers the call.**

**"Yes, Miss Ayanda? I'm a little busy."**

**"Well, drop whatever you're doing and come back to the office. I need to debrief all of you and I'd like to do it in person."**

**"Can't you simply tell me? I'd like to finish my work. I'm having a good day." Sihl' Ahzen replies.**

**"I'm giving you an order. Are you disobeying it?" Miss Ayanda calmly asks.**

**"No, ma'am... I'll be right there." Sihl' Ahzen replies.**

**Ending the call, she returns the syringe to a protective case for later use, glaring at the still unconscious Draiman Woods.**

**"You're very lucky..." She grumbles.**

**Sitting and concentrating, Corova is heartbroken by Draiman's silence. Not only does he not speak to her telepathically, when she focuses her thoughts to look through his eyes, she only sees black; he's still unconscious. Rising to her feet as a door slides open, the two Solakus guards and the little Irakus woman return, dragging Draiman back to his cell. They hadn't even been gone for five minutes.**

**"Done so soon?" Corova asks.**

**"Something came up. I'll play with him later." Sihl' Ahzen replies.**

**"I was about to say... Normally I don't last half that long with him." Corova grins.**

**"Hmph... Don't worry. You'll get your turn."**

**Leaving the three Slavers locked in their cells, Sihl' Ahzen returns to the offices. On the way there, she spots Kellan, following her lover and debating what the meeting could be about. Reaching the security offices, they find every Lieutenant already waiting in the main hall. Miss Ayanda stands at attention, watching the Irakus and the human as they take their places.**

**"We're not taking the freed slaves to Sol." Miss Ayanda begins, cutting to the chase.**

**"What?!" Several voices gasp.**

**"Unity is continuing her trip, and they're coming with us. I know, and I protested, as did Madrid, er... Captain Basile."**

**"How can they do that?!" August asks in shock.**

**"They aren't our crew." Fizona adds.**

**"They can do that because the Council voted to carry on, the Directors agreed, and the Directors have the backing of every government in the Solar Council... Captain Basile has a crew actively**

trying to convince them to stay on their own but if that fails, we'll simply have to tell them that they're stuck here with us. As you know, most of them are young women, but there are six hundred and thirty-two able-bodied men. I need you all to be ready for a riot, should one occur." Miss Ayanda continues.

Her Lieutenants are stunned into silence. This isn't what they were expecting. All of them question the morality of these orders.

"Also, those three Slavers you have in the jail... You have to let them go."

"WHAT?!" Sihl' Ahzen shrieks.

"The Council wants them integrated." Miss Ayanda answers.

"I'm sorry but that's a mistake." Sihl' Ahzen protests.

"I'm inclined to agree. We don't know who these people are or what they're capable of but their background is telling." Fizona adds.

"That's all true, and that doesn't matter. Orders are orders. Open the cells and let them out. They'll be seen by someone who will vet them for useable skills, under guard if you'd like." Miss Ayanda says.

"Pardon my bluntness, but why are the Council giving such fucked up orders?" Stefan asks.

"Yeah! This doesn't make sense!" Kellan adds.

"Exceptional orders for exceptional circumstances..." Miss Ayanda murmurs.

"I don't recall signing up for kidnapping civilians or freeing criminals." Drayusa interjects.

"Neither did I." Sihl' Ahzen grumbles.

"Why are we even doing this? What do we get out of this bullshit?" August asks.

Looking to her team, Miss Ayanda can see their confusion and rage. A rift forms between her and the others, and she knows that she must do something to salvage their trust and faith in the mission. Reaching into a pocket, she removes a data drive. Holding up the drive, she bows her head and sighs.

“This... This will answer your questions.”

Setting the drive on the table, in the main hall, she takes a step back, slowly turning toward her office.

“I’m forbidden to reveal classified information to my Lieutenants, but if you somehow found out while I left the room... Who’s to say how you came about the information?” She says with her back turned.

Walking away, she enters her office, her long, tapering tail disappearing into the room before the door closes behind her. Alone with the data drive, her Lieutenants look at the device. Fizona, the closest to the data drive, takes it from the table and heads for a nearby terminal. Crowding around the terminal as she plugs it in, they see the files, left unencrypted and in a folder with no password protection. Fizona pokes the holographic screen, opening the first of many files.