

Unity

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode Thirty-One: One Last Speedbump

"I love you." Sihl' Ahzen chirps.

"I love you, too." Kellan replies.

Lying on her belly, Kellan massages her shoulders and back, his fingers gently weaving through the field of her ruffled feathers. The short stalks bear the soft, orange blades, covering her body and glistening in the soft light of the nightstand lamp. Wholly unclothed, she relaxes, her legs pressed together as Kellan kneels over her buttocks. Her long, whip-like tail is curled around his waist, holding him in place like a tentacle as he strokes her damp torso. Reaching up, he eases his finger into the crimson fur that rings the nape of her neck. Her little ears that crown her head, hard to see to an otherwise untrained eye, fold back as she succumbs to his blissful touch.

"You're so good to me." She remarks.

"Of course, babe. Why wouldn't I be?"

"When you've lived a soldier's life, sometimes things like this... They're hard to imagine."

Turning her head, she glances over her shoulder at him, staring with her fiery eyes. Her brow is soft, even sad. Kellan is taken aback by the sight.

"Sometimes I feel like after everything I've done in my past, I... I don't..." She continues, her voice shaking.

"Hey, hey! Where's this coming from?!"

Leaning forward, his already close pelvis presses firmly against her small but plump buttocks. Sihl' Ahzen groans softly, arching her back and closing her eyes. His arms fold, his palms and forearms running alongside her head as he looms over her, nuzzling her face with his thin, human nose.

"You're a wonderful person, babe! Smart, sweet, affectionate, cute and dangerous." He begins.

"Yeah... Dangerous." She murmurs.

Seeing her expression, Kellan's heart stings.

"I shouldn't have said that; I was trying to be funny. You saved August, and the captain. You've saved me before, back on Mars. Remember our second mission together?"

"I do." She softly replies.

"You don't give yourself enough credit... Talking like you're some kind of monster... If you were, I wouldn't love you so damn much! You're the best person I know, Sihl!"

"I don't often feel like it." She murmurs.

"Well you are." He insists, leaning in and kissing her cheek.

"I don't deserve you, babe." She coos, reaching a hand back to stroke his face.

“... This isn’t a divorce, is it?” He teases.

“What?! Hell no!” She swiftly turns her head, looking back at her lover. “I’m keeping you until long after the dust has blown off of your bones.” She explains, stroking his cheek.

“Good. So a few more years.” He quips.

“Shut up.” She giggles.

Kissing the side of her serrated beak, Sihl’ Ahzen’s eyes narrow and she twists her upper body, her pelvis fused into place by Kellan’s. Opening her beak and inner jaw, Kellan leans in and the pair share what is as close to a mutual kiss as their races can. With his lips just beyond her opened beak, they extend their tongues, caressing their flesh over each other for several seconds. Pulling away, a bridge of saliva breaks between the two and Sihl’ Ahzen closes her beak.

“Mmm... I love that.” She coos.

“You always look like you’re struggling with it, though.” He remarks.

“I open wider for the rest of you.” She winks.

“Oh, you dirty bird.” He replies, his face flushing. “I’m not that big.”

“Speak for yourself.” She giggles.

“Aren’t I?”

“No! On my end, it’s like being married to a horse, not that I’m complaining.” She retorts.

“Well, being over a foot shorter, and one hundred times cuter, you just think that.”

Sharing a laugh and a few loving nuzzles, the pair give each other another pseudo-kiss. Chirp, chirp, chirp! The pair pull away and sigh as Sihl’ Ahzen’s V.I. bracelet beeps. Looking at the screen, it

displays the hologram revealing that Miss Ayanda is attempting to initiate a video call.

“Ugh! Figures...” Sihl’ Ahzen grumbles.

Her fingers reach for the “deny” button.

“No, wait! ... Answer it.” Kellan says with a sinister grin.

“Ooh! I didn’t know that about you, babe.” Sihl’ Ahzen winks.

“You learn new things every day.” He says.

Reaching a hand down, he gives her buttocks a little smack, striking the side of a cheek that isn’t covered by his bare pelvis.

“Mmm! Indeed, I do.” She coos.

Cutely swaying her butt and grinding against him, she looks back and the pair share a lustful gaze. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Angling her wrist, Sihl’ Ahzen’s slender, featherlike finger presses the “accept” button, just before the device can drop the call on its own. The holographic screen opens, displaying the colorful couple to Miss Ayanda. Her crimson eyes grow wide with surprise as she sees the naked, red-headed Kellan mounting the nude, little Sihl’ Ahzen, who lay on her belly. The tip of her tail, which is coiled around his waist, flicks quite gleefully.

“I’m sorry, I! ... I need to start making audio calls...”

“Yeah, you do.” Sihl’ Ahzen casually agrees.

“Or did you want to watch?” Kellan teases, giving her butt another little smack.

“Babe!” Sihl’ Ahzen giggles.

Miss Ayanda’s pine green and crimson hide appears to flush as she turns her head away. Is she actually embarrassed for once?

“He’s teasing you, Miss Ayanda. We finished a while ago. He was giving me a little after-sex massage because he’s a sweetheart.” The Irakus coos, glancing back at her lover.

“Oh... Well, I hate to interrupt your massage, but...”

“But what?” Kellan asks with a frustrated sigh.

“Unity’s Council has called us into a meeting.” Miss Ayanda replies.

“... Us?!” Sihl’ Ahzen raises a brow.

“Yes. Myself and all of my Lieutenants. Wash up, get dressed and meet me at the office. They didn’t give me a deadline, but I’d like to get this over with quickly.”

“Understood.” Sihl’ Ahzen nods.

Ending the call, she looks back at Kellan, her arm resting against her pillow.

“Alright, babe. We have to get up.”

“Already? This position kind of has me going, and we don’t have a deadline...” He winks.

“I’ll take you as soon as we get home tonight. Promise.” She coos. “Up.” She says, pushing her butt against him.

“Oh fine.” He whines.

After taking a shower together to clean his body and her feathers, the couple dress themselves, collect their weapons and

equipment and leave their apartment. At almost the same time, Drayusa and Stefan leave theirs, further down the hall from the human and Irakus couple.

"Late start?" Kellan asks.

"She called us in the middle of something." Stefan winks.

"We opted to finish first." Drayusa remarks.

"Likewise." Kellan slips an arm around his dainty, bird-like wife.

"What do you think the Council want?" Sihl' Ahzen asks, resting her hand over Kellan's forearm.

"Your guess is as good as ours." Stefan shrugs his shoulders.

"I've never seen them in the flesh. I didn't ever expect too. Only the captain and Miss Ayanda even have the clearance to open their chamber door." Drayusa comments.

"Whatever happens... I'm standing by Miss Ayanda." Sihl' Ahzen remarks, an iciness in her voice.

"Agreed." Drayusa nods.

"I guess we know where we stand." Stefan smirks, reaching out and stroking his wife's softened bristles.

Reaching the security offices, the two couples find Miss Ayanda standing at the head of the table. On either side of her stand Fizona and August, their words halting and mouths closing as the quartet enter the main hall.

"Good. You're armed." Miss Ayanda says as they step toward the table. "Let's go."

Walking swiftly around the table, Miss Ayanda's heavy footfalls echo in the silence of the main hall. August and Fizona follow on either side like bodyguards. The two couples are quick to turn around,

joining them as they emerge from the security offices and enter the corridor. They walk in silence, the Kanorakus women's feet thudding loudly, the Solakus men's feet thumping softly, and Sihl' Ahzen's boot-clad talons clicking rather faintly. Looking toward their leader, who takes point, all can see her temperament shifting. Her confident stride morphs into a slow, anxious walk. Her bristles grow rigid, rising like the quills of a porcupine all along her head and spine.

"Whatever happens..." Miss Ayanda begins, glancing over her shoulder at her Lieutenants. "I hope that you'll follow my lead."

Startled by her frightened appearance, they're left in silence. Each of them manages at least a single head nod in response. Approaching the guarded door to the Council chambers, Miss Ayanda waves the guards closer before pressing her palm to the plate and opening the door. Guards waiting on the interior seem to startle Miss Ayanda. Did she not place them there? She waves them over as well.

"Stop!" A Solakus Councilwoman barks.

"Leave them and step forward!" An Irakus Councilman begins.

With a hand held up and pointed behind her, Miss Ayanda silently instructs her people to remain in place. She takes a few steps forward and stops.

"Closer! Approach the table!" A Kanorakus Councilwoman instructs.

Miss Ayanda approaches the table, speaking quietly with Unity's diverse Council for a moment. August looks around the room, taking a second look when he notices Fizona staring at him. The taller female's head tilts slightly downward as she watches him, gazing with eyes like vivid citrine gemstones. It's somewhat unnerving. Thinking fast, he

crosses his arms before his chest and leans closer. Now it's Fizona who appears surprised.

"How's Zeran doing?" He whispers to her.

"You don't know that it's a male." She retorts.

"Of course I do. Father's always know." He winks.

Fizona's thin lips curl around her raptor-like snout as her eyes shift down and toward her toned belly. She doesn't reply in words, but her little grin speaks volumes.

"Good. That's what I was hoping you'd say." He quips.

Fizona softly giggles. Standing at attention, the Council look toward the others as Miss Ayanda steps backward and away from their table. A Dezonian holds out its large, pincer-like hand, waving at them with the teal appendage. Horrific, solid-black eyes stare without feeling as the two Dezonians watch the Lieutenants and the few guards who happened to be there. Are they angry for what they've done? Are they frustrated at the hastened timeframe that will prevent the crew from breeding an army? Or do they feel anything at all?

"Stop!" A Dezonian Councilmember orders.

The Lieutenants and guards freeze in place, about five meters behind Miss Ayanda.

"Where you aware of the blatant violations that Miss Ayanda perpetrated?" An Irakus Councilwoman asks.

"Yes." The Lieutenants reply at various intervals.

“Then we have little choice...” A Solakus Councilman sighs, pressing his hands together before his face. “You’re all hereby stripped of your ranks!”

“You cannot do that!” Miss Ayanda growls, her bristles rising with her anger.

“We can do what we like!” A Kanorakus Councilwoman snickers.

Their arrogance is as visible as their faces, sitting behind their extravagant table and in throne-like chairs.

“No, you cannot! Captain Basile has veto powers over your decisions in regards to crewmembers standing! He may be merely a figurehead sitting in as captain, but you cannot promote, demote or relieve anyone of their duties without his approval!” Miss Ayanda barks.

“Did you think that we’d allow him that much power? He maintains order and that is all. The flight path was predetermined, the mission was thoroughly planned, and there are backdoors everywhere.” An Irakus Councilman explains with devious glee.

“We are *very* thorough, female Kanorakus.” A Dezonian Councilmember interjects.

“Yes, you thoroughly planned a decades long mission into the middle of nowhere so that we’d breed your army and reclaim your home world with it.” Miss Ayanda angrily retorts.

“I don’t understand that part... Why not just shorten the mission and pump pheromones into the air?” Sihl’ Ahzen asks.

“Naïve female Irakus. There couldn’t be one pheromone for all species; that was our first thought.” A Dezonian Councilmember begins.

“But they exist. The Irakus produce a pheromone spray that’s marketed to make us less frightening to the Solakus, and even appealing to the opposite gender.” Sihl’ Ahzen chirps.

Kellan's attention shifts, focusing on his Irakus wife as she speaks to the group.

"Yes, but we would've needed to target each crewmember with a liquified or aerosol pheromone for their specific gender and race, and in their specific dwelling to prevent cross contamination, and not all species would react in the manner we desired to the target's pheromones. It would've been a logistical nightmare, and without a significant benefit for the trouble." An Irakus Councilwoman explains.

"Besides, Dezonian studies have shown that Solakus, both human and Voeldahn, have evolved to share a pheromone trend. The genders of each race have a predisposition to the opposite; a human woman tends to find Voeldahn men more appealing because of a natural pheromone, while Voeldahn women are often more attracted to human men for the same reason." A Solakus Councilman replies.

"Of course, personal preference is still predominant, but the trends are visible. Approximately one third of all Solakus relationships when we left Sol were human and Voeldahn mixes, and it's believed that there isn't a pure human or pure Voeldahn bloodline in existence." A Solakus Councilwoman adds.

"Fascinating, how your two species developed. Your differing bodies share such harmony. This is very rare in our studies." A Dezonian chirps in an uncharacteristically cheerful tone.

"And the trend has only grown more noticeable with the introduction of the Kanorakus, whose females seem to be fond of interbreeding with Solakus men, and in direct competition with Solakus women." The Solakus Councilwoman continues.

"That's why there are so many more humans and Voeldahn on Unity..." August thinks aloud.

"Correct. We hoped that you'd simply reproduce with each other based on these natural trends that have been stable throughout our history. The addition of the Irakus and Kanorakus were to maintain the diversity of the gene pool and give the illusion of choice. You can imagine how happy we were when the mostly female freed slaves arrived." A Solakus Councilman chuckles.

“This is all beside the point!” A Kanorakus Councilwoman snarls, slamming her palm into the table and rising to her feet. “Miss Ayanda violated our rules, and you’re all complacent!”

“Your leadership is over effective immediately, and we’ll initiate Protocol Nine-Four-One.” A Kanorakus Councilman begins.

“Protocol Nine-Four-One?” Fizona cocks her head and raises a brow.

“We have the authority to commandeer Unity’s central computer under Protocol Nine-Four-One, thereby eliminating captain Basile’s or even Miss Ayanda’s authority if we so desire!” He continues.

“Your privileges are hereby erased and we will now take full command.” The Kanorakus Councilwoman says with a sinister grin.

“The hell you will!” Miss Ayanda snarls.

In an instant, she draws her blaster and fires, her round striking the Kanorakus Councilwoman in the shoulder. She screams and falls back in pain. All of Unity’s Council are civilians, with the exception of the Kanorakus, who lived in constant war only a few decades ago; they fly into a panic. Miss Ayanda’s Lieutenants and former SI9 agents draw their weapons. Sihl’ Ahzen, Kellan and Fizona rush to the right, while Drayusa and Stefan rush to the left. Miss Ayanda, August, and even the guards in the room charge toward the center of the table. The Council are horrified as they bark orders to their guards, who theoretically should now obey them without question.

Unfortunately for Unity’s Council, the Solar Council and the Dezonians, they could not account for one thing. Captain Basile and Miss Ayanda have *earned loyalty* through their actions and transparency. Madrid clearly cares for the wellbeing of his crew, while Miss Ayanda has done everything in her power to keep the peace for the benefit of all. Being theoretically powerless doesn’t change the fact that the soldiers will only obey their commands; just because the computer says it, doesn’t mean it will be so. Before the Council know what’s happened, they’re all in Miss Ayanda’s custody.

“You can’t do this!” A Solakus Councilman squeals.

“We’re in charge!” An Irakus Councilwoman yells.

Guards hold down her scrawny legs, shackling her talons at the ankles to keep her from kicking. The agents arrest everyone, handcuffing all but the Dezonains, who characteristically surrender at the sight of the business end of their blasters.

“Please! You don’t know what you’re doing!” The wounded Kanorakus Councilwoman pleads.

“We’re protecting Unity... From you.” A guard suddenly replies.

The Council are floored. They’d assumed that the soldiers would blindly obey, following the lead of the highest in command. Sihl’ Ahzen and Fizona call for reinforcements. Irakus commandos and Kanorakus warriors swiftly descend upon the Council chambers. Though the Councilmembers continue to plea for aid, the soldiers only take orders from their Lieutenants and Miss Ayanda. At Miss Ayanda’s instruction, they march the entirety of Unity’s Council through the streets and into the tram. Crew and refugees stop and stare, watching as the elusive men and women behind the devious mission are marched off to jail.

A few joyous shouts turn into loud and constant cheering, and several people throw trash at the Council. A plastic bottle thunks against a Dezonian’s head. Only now do the Council see just how out of control their situation has become. Even if the soldiers had backed their play, Unity likely would’ve descended into chaos under their secretive and draconian leadership, a result of an even more violent rebellion of the crew and refugees. Walking beside his wife, Kellan watches her continuously, a little smile on his face. Taking notice of his gaze, she looks over several times, her embarrassment growing with each glance.

Reaching Unity's prison, the Council are processed by several surprised but pleased looking police officers under Kellan's command. They're swiftly led the prisoners away to be stripped, clothed in prison coveralls, and taken to isolated cells. Only the wounded Kanorakus Councilwoman escapes a cell, and only for so long as she must recover, under heavy guard by Fizona's loyal soldiers.

"Now what?" Kellan turns to Miss Ayanda.

"Now? ... Now I guess we go home. Madrid should be healed soon enough, and we'll figure out the rest later." She explains.

"Sounds like a plan!" August chirps.

"Would anyone like to volunteer to help me draft and publish this report?" Miss Ayanda asks.

"I will." Fizona steps forward.

"Let's go, then."

While Miss Ayanda and Fizona return to the security offices, the rest of her Lieutenants are effectively placed on leave. Who knows just how many days before captain Basile returns, but until then, there's little for them to do. Crime has plummeted with the cessation of hostilities between the refugees and soldiers, helped along by Draiman and Corova's efforts. Even the active duty soldiers and police often find themselves running errands or merely loitering around when they should be working, simply because there's nothing to occupy them. Reaching out and taking Sihl'Ahzen by the hand, Kellan leads them back to the tram station and toward their apartment.

"Well, that was interesting!" Sihl'Ahzen chirps as they enter their home.

"It was, but I believe we were interrupted..." Kellan coos, standing behind and wrapping his arms around her.

"Were we?" She giggles.

Pulling back, he leans over and sweeps her off of her feet, scooping her up from the ground as one of her wing-like arms curls behind his neck. Entering their bedroom, he carefully sets her down before stepping back and slipping off his boots. Watching him with narrowed eyes, Sihl' Ahzen does the same, removing each article of clothing to match her lover. Soon, he stands nude before her, quickly sitting beside her at the end of the bed. Sihl' Ahzen exuberantly lunges for him, resting her dainty arms on his shoulders and behind his neck as she throws a leg over him, straddling his pelvis. Their genitals rest against each other as she sits on his lap, gazing lustfully up and into his eyes.

"Have you ever used pheromones on me?" He asks.

"Maybe." She answers, cutely batting her eyelashes.

Sihl' Ahzen leans in and nuzzles his face with her beak before giving his cheek a little lick. His arms wrap around her, and he pulls her in. He strokes her back so softly, burying his nose in the crimson fur that rings her neck. To her surprise, he seems more content to hold her than to start another sexual encounter. This, however, is something that she's grown to love about him; Kellan's warm heart and constant affection often melts her to her core. He breathes in her scent before kissing her cheek so tenderly. Sometimes, when she reflects on how often he shows his love for her, she feels so grateful and simultaneously undeserving.

"Don't lie, Sihl. I won't be mad." He speaks softly.

"You won't?"

"I recall the first time I noticed you." He begins, softly stroking her back with his fingertips. "And I mean *really* noticed you; when you were more than just the scary looking Irakus with razor feet and shark jaws hidden behind a beak like saw blades."

"I'm still just that." She quietly retorts.

"No, you're not." He snaps, his tone becoming more assertive. "You sat by me during a morning meeting, when we were still just agents of SI9. We hardly even spoke, but I remembered there was something about you that I just couldn't place. You intrigued me in a way that you didn't those first few weeks. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I was... Drawn to you."

"I remember that day a little differently."

Sihl' Ahzen rocks her hips slowly, grinding her loins against Kellan's soft flesh, teasing him with her body. Rubbing her beak against his cheek, she gives him another little lick.

"I remember sitting by you because your hair almost matched my feathers, and I felt more comfortable because of that; it gave us something in common, which I didn't have with anyone else in SI9. I remember catching you staring at me... And your attention felt nice. I hadn't had it before, especially not from a Solakus."

"Please, just tell me the truth. I don't keep anything from you."

"Pheromones aren't mind control, and it didn't effect Stefan or August." She begins, leaning back and looking him in the eyes.

"You used them..."

"I liked you from the start. Your hair is so pretty, and you seemed so nice; I thought you might see me like a monster, just like many other Solakus, so I tried the spray. Since August and Stefan didn't notice, I assumed you had an interest already, and it only made it easier for you to speak to me." She explains.

"I can't believe you did that." He says with a little chuckle, still petting her back with his fingertips.

"You asked, and I'd never lie to you, baby. I love you more than anything." She says, nuzzling his face and squeezing him tightly. "And besides, I only used it until our first date, after black mode began, and even with the pheromone spray, we didn't have sex that night."

"I *really* liked you, and I didn't want you to think that sex with a cute alien was all I was after, because it wasn't... Besides, it was

already against SI9's rules at that time, and if we were going to be fired, I wanted to make sure that we were right for each other first." He replies.

"See? Was it really so wrong of me?" She sweetly asks, grinding her flesh against his yet again.

"No. I'd have done the same thing." He smirks, giving her buttocks a little smack.

"Ooh!" She jumps, her tail whipping gleefully from side to side. "You'd take advantage of a tiny little thing like me?" She teases, grinding against and nuzzling him even harder.

"I love you, Sihl." He says, kissing her cheek and neck.

"I love you, too." She coos.

Falling back in bed, the couple enjoy their time together.