

VI: A podcast by the Intergalactic Improv Initiative.

KAYA: *Ride of the Valkyrie*, Minisode Two: *The Eternal Sunshine of the Enkindled Mind*. Featuring the voices of Hans Cummings and creator Kaya Renwick.

There is a thin semantic line separating weird and beautiful, and that line is covered in hanar. *I Should Roll*.

VI: 17th Tide of Strong Storms, Year of the Enkindlers 51,418; June 24th, 2182, Terran Universal Coordinated Calendar. Kahje, Kanala System, Olyn Protectorate. The Encompassing, Temperate Depths of Dim Illumination, Sunward Current. Righteous Enclave Among Coral Gardens.

KAYA: We join Zynamondan on Kahje, and they are in classes at the Righteous Enclave Among Coral Gardens, which is a *very* prestigious seminary. [exposition time!] It's a beautiful, beautiful campus set, as the name would suggest, in a large coral reef in the northern hemisphere of Kahje. It has been meticulously maintained and conserved over the millennia as a divine gift. It does not allow any non-hanar adherents. Its dogma is extremely strict. They have Enkindler artifacts in their archives, and only the most senior students can interact with them. It's a strongly evangelical seminary, but it is also very strict about who is allowed to do the proselytizing. Only the most senior students may do so. They look down upon those 'Enkindler colleges' that send out missionaries across the galaxy. They find that irresponsible.

HANAR #1: The Enkindlers blessed only these ones with direct enlightenment. It is these ones' sacred duty to safeguard and maintain the integrity of the Enkindlers' word.

KAYA: And to finally highlight just how strict these folks are, they have a quote-unquote *dress code*. Now, how does a dress code work for hanar? Well, students are only allowed to use certain subsets of the light spectrum to communicate with their teachers. This is considered *extra respectful*. Probably, once upon a time, these were considered to be, like, the Protheans' favorite colors—

HANS: Right.

KAYA: —or something of that sort. So being as this is an extremely strict and arguably repressed college campus, [amused] naturally, this campus has an absolutely *bumpin'* student life, because as soon as you start repressing peoples' sense of self, it means that there are no inhibitions in other areas.

Now, what would Zyn's favorite class be—if we're thinking, you know, this is somewhere, you know, in his—I think you said ten years, so in their, you know, eighth to ninth year, or something like that, what's their favorite class?

HANS: I am going to say Comparative Galactic Religion is his current favorite, because it gives him authorized access to other cultures.

KAYA: Love that, yeah. Comparative Galactic Religion. It is a sparsely attended class, I would say. The teacher of Comparative Galactic Religion is Kyseivasta, who is one of the few hanar who allow students to use the short form of their face name, Kysei. They are known as a challenging teacher. They frequently challenge the students in their class with—about stereotypes about other species, and they take their—they take their topic quite seriously.

This would essentially be a graduate level course. This is not an *introduction* to Comparative Galactic Religion, this is the nitty gritty, and so we're we're probably getting into comparisons between, you know, the ancestral spirits of the turians versus the ancestor worship of the quarians, and working in, you know, the concepts of—we're, we're probably, we're probably getting into Shintoism in there as well, and conversely, comparing that to the reincarnation cycle of Buddhism and Hinduism, stuff like that.

Why does Zyn like Comparative Galactic Religion? Is it just because it's thumbing their...blob ridges... [HANS chuckles] at their parents? Or is it—what drew them to the class, and why have they taken probably several successive classes in it over the years?

HANS: Well, *officially*, Zyn is taking this class because it will enable them to properly refute the false propoganda of other religions in the galaxy and successfully debate the wisdom of the Enkindlers. That's the official explanation that they give their progenitors. *Unofficially*, they like it because it actually gets them talking and listening and learning about other cultures, even if it is a kind of narrow window into that culture—

KAYA: Sure.

HANS: —there is still a lot of information that can be gleaned from learning about a culture's religious beliefs, or lack thereof.

KAYA: Very true, very true. What do you suppose Zyn's favorite galactic religion is and why?

HANS: [considers] Zyn finds any polytheistic faiths to be very interesting. Being— having also an engineering background, Zyn likes things that have clear explanations as to how things work and how to combine things in ways that makes things work, and Zyn feels that the polytheistic religions, with their giving different aspects to different gods, is kind of like building a belief system out of Lego bricks. Instead of just like one giant piece that you have to like, shove everything into, it's got all

these little pieces that you can put together and form this belief system and culture that seems to work, at least for the people who adhere to those beliefs.

KAYA: I like that. That's really cool.

So, the classroom for Comparative Galactic Religion—as much as any of the classrooms are classrooms in this coral reef—they're sort of, they're a little bit more like Zen gardens, that sort of idea, and so, the coral has been...it's not *tended*, because that would insinuate that the tenders have agency over the natural order of things as the Enkindlers will it to be. And so, while the students and staff of the seminary do *care* for and *conserve* the coral gardens, they don't at all try to—there's no coral topiary going on here.

HANS: Got it.

KAYA: And so the gardens have grown over the millennia, as, you know, coral is a, is a living being—from the millennia-old... There are some classrooms that are deep in the labyrinthine depths of the coral reef, and mostly those classes, they're either like super graduate level classes that—you know, the PhD classes—

HANS: Right.

KAYA: —or they're the old theaters where you cram all of the freshmen into, and it's the nastiest lecture theater that you've ever been in, and it always stinks like everybody el— like the old lunch and old socks and stuff like that. But Kysei is, Kysei is a, is a little different than most hanar instructors here. Most of the instructors here, they have their classroom and they stick to it, but Kysei is sort of well-known for switching it up. And so, some years they teach in one of the low theaters and some years they teach on like the very tip-top platforms of new coral. And sometimes they're off in the additions, as the seminary has spread, and some coral reefs are taken over by other wildlife, as it were, because we couldn't get in the way of what the environment is telling us, that sort of thing.

So this year, Comparative Galactic Religion 902—or whatever, I don't know—is being held in kind of a cramped little garden of coral that's got some some tubelike protrusions arching over, and there's a little tiny school of fish that has made their home in this particular array of coral, and it sort of forms a sort of a natural umbrella over this little bowl where the hanar are hanging out.

So I imagine that this class has maybe...maybe half a dozen to ten hanar in it, max. The entire student body of the Righteous Enclave Among the Coral Gardens is probably on the order of like a couple thousand sort of deal. It's a—it's big, but it's not huge. It's very, very old, very well-established. And so, you know, we're probably talking like, you know, three hundred to four hundred in freshman year and then they get winnowed out as the years go by.

So where would, where would Zyn sit—*float*—in the circle of the class?

HANS: Zyn, Zyn has a very comfortable spot kind of in the middle. Not, not too close to the front, because they do not wish to appear to be too much of an eager student, although they like the hippie-ness of this particular instructor, who seems like the type like, “Let's go outside. It's a beautiful day!”

KAYA: Oh, yeah.

HANS: But not towards the back because it's hard to see the bioluminescence through the bodies of all the other hanar.

KAYA: Yeah, fair enough. Who would—does Zyn have any friends in this class?

HANS: Sure! Everyone in this class is the type of hanar that seeks a greater level of enlightenment than others, since they are interested in learning about the other galactic religions, so clearly these are all the cream of the crop of this particular establishment.

KAYA: Yes. You are, you are bang on. [HANS chuckles] There are at least five other hanar in here that I have given names, and so I will introduce you to them and you can pick who you want to sit beside.

There's Velisiskali, who's a very serious hanar, and they're actually a TA in another class. They TA for history—and specifically Enkindler history, [HANS hums in understanding] although they also, they also teach, they also help out with like the freshman Hanar History 101 sort of deal. They're—yeah, they're very, very serious. Very studious. If you want notes from somebody, you go talk to Veli.

There's Martotuuni, who is like peas in a pod with Kysei. They're dreamy. Their bioluminescence is always, like, *hazy*. They're the stoner kid.

[HANS chuckles]

KAYA: You wouldn't be surprised if they partake in, like, drell hallucinogenic oils sort of thing.

HANS: [admonishing] Marto, stop licking the drell!

KAYA: Exactly. Exactly. Kysei is—you're absolutely right—hippie, sort of granola belt, but like, serious about it. Marto is just, just, just a *little* kooky, but has this knack for, for—well, they're, they're particularly good with languages. They're very good at understanding other species' languages and translating the particulars into hanar bioluminescence, and just every once in a while they come up with this pearl of wisdom...and that's when you understand why they're still here after however

many years.

There is Imearusken: who is the epitome of a brown-nosing sucking-up teacher's pet. Imea is probably on a quest to get like a 4.6 out of 4.5 GPA in every class. They are an eternal student. They know their shit, but there's a reason that you go to Veli for notes and not Imea.

There's Uskovaiskas, who probably reminds Zyn of their progenitors in that Usko believes everything about the Enkindlers whole...bodily. Their goal in life is to spread the gospel of the Enkindlers to the world. Usko could be the preaching jellyfish in ME1, honestly. [HANS chuckles] That's, uh, that's the level of devotion here.

And finally we have Epakunaura, who is— Zyn's honestly probably not quite sure how Epa is still a student here because they are the most irreverent, shit-disturbing hanar Zyn has probably ever met who's *at* seminary. Like there might be somebody out in the galaxy who is more irreverent, more—more *sacrilegious*, heretical, and blasphemous than Epa, but certainly not in Zyn's social circles.

So these hanar are all in this class. Who is—who's Zyn hanging out with?

HANS: Zyn will be sitting next to [embellishes Italian-style] *Martotuuni*.

KAYA: Nice. Okay, so today's lecture Kysei is discussing the finer points of siari, which is the asari philosophy of “all is one”—

HANS: [overlapping] Okay.

KAYA: —is literally what siari means. Siari came into existence after worship of Athame and the other goddesses fell out of favour. It is now practiced by most asari. It *has* sort of a religious aspect to it, but also has a significant cultural aspect to it. So today, Kysei is talking about the connection of biotics to the philosophy of siari, and how dark energy permeating all things informs the asari understanding of all beings, and all creatures, and all objects, and all matter, and all energy being connected.

KYSEI: These ones would do well to learn from the understanding of the asari in the connectedness of all things.

KAYA: Marto is probab—like I'm, I'm imagining it's the hanar equivalent of, like, leaning on—with the—like staring into space, leaning on your hand and staring into space, but for a hanar it's just kind of like this gentle swaying side to side, like they're letting themselves be taken by the current of both Kysei's *wise words* and the gentle movement of the water. What is Zyn thinking about right now?

HANS: Zyn has gotten themselves distracted and is thinking about how the asari's head tentacles perhaps mean that they are somehow related to hanar in a different evolutionary path that may not necessarily be *better* but is certainly *intriguing*...and the blue skin colour is also rather intriguing since it kind of complements the pink hue of most hanar.

KAYA: [curious] Has Zyn ever met a non-hanar?

HANS: At this point, I would say not in person. Zyn has, of course, *seen* them [KAYA: "okay!"] on various holovids and on the news and through just, you know, being a member of society, but has never actually encountered [KAYA softly chuckles] anyone who is not hanar.

KAYA: Does Zyn *want* to?

HANS: Of course! Zyn never wanted to go to the seminary in the first place. This is only to please Zyn's progenitors; because Zyn doesn't know how to otherwise live. I mean this is all Zyn has known was what his p—their progenitors have had them do so the thought of—

KAYA: [overlapping] Right.

HANS: —striking out on one's own to seek their fortune in the greater galaxy with no support whatsoever is *slightly* terrifying.

KAYA: [contemplates] How... how practiced do you think Zyn is at keeping their thoughts non-visible?

HANS: Uh, I—oh, hm... [unsure noises] Oh, well, Deception is zero. [KAYA amused] Probably not very well. Zyn tends to focus very strongly on what they are doing while in the presence of their progenitors to keep from getting into trouble, but when away from them, [KAYA 'I see' noise] thoughts tend to stray. A lot. [chuckles]

KAYA: Sure. Okay. Then I'm just, I'm gonna, I'm gonna do a quick little roll for Kysei here, and see how much attention Kysei is paying. [rolls low] Uh, not really! [amused] Kysei is thoroughly interested in their expounding upon siari, and does not notice Zyn's flashes of colour. However, Marto nudges you with a little—with a tentacle. Do you—do you pay attention, or do you ignore them?

HANS: Oh, I will. I will, I will respond like, "Ooh!"

[KAYA laughs]

ZYN: What do you desire of this one?

KAYA: So I'm imagining that you're kind of—you're doing like this little... the subtle flashing of communication? Yeah—

HANS: Hanar whispering.

KAYA: It's like the dimmer switch, right? Marto has turned slightly to you, flashes back,

MARTO: [slyly] This one got a new comic in yesterday. Would that one be interested?

ZYN: [gasps] This one would most certainly be interested.

MARTO: It has asari in it. [wink]

ZYN: [ooh] Is it one of those *romance* comics about asari and other asari where they create the Ardat-Yakshi, and they go on a *murderous spree of vampiric death*?

KAYA: [super amused] Marto's tentacles kind of shiver. I think Marto likes those ones. [HANS & KAYA laughing] But they say,

MARTO: No. That one comes in *next week*. [ZYN anticipatory noise] But this one believes that that one will enjoy this serial greatly. It is *new*. It is by a *hanar*.

ZYN: Fascinating!

KAYA: And that's exciting because that's pretty rare. So, as Kysei drones on for a bit: so in the—in this strong trade of cross-cultural, counter-cultural stuff—

HANS: [overlapping] Right.

KAYA: —what these are, are they're essentially bootleg translations of comics. And so they're all on datapads because to translate to hanar—

HANS: [overlapping] Right.

KAYA: —you need the video of the luminescence. So we're basically talking like translated manga, essentially. Some of the comic series that I think Zyn will have encountered by this point are things such as the initial run of *Superman*. As well as the gritty *Hastatim 2012*, which is an alternate history account of a turian colony war that digs into the heartbreaking, impossible decisions that hastatim members must make when faced with the impossible on these far-flung colony worlds.

ZYN: This one read that one. The main lesson was: shoot the hostage.

KAYA: Pretty much. [HANS laughs] Another one that Zyn has encountered is *Ocean Girl Solipsistic Moonlight*, which is [HANS and KAYA chuckle] a magical girl manga,

featuring a young drell blessed with *gills* by the Enkindlers who fights sea monsters in the deepest depths of the Encompassing.

ZYN: She is most fortunate.

KAYA: Zyn has also encountered *Embracing my Bosh'tet*, a long form space opera romance following a quarian and an asari that has more serials than anyone can count and *constantly* contradicts itself.

[HANS laughs]

KAYA: Hanar don't typically feature in many of these, possibly because hanar culture is fairly insular and very few non-hanar come to visit Kahje because it's all ocean except for the cities where the drell live and the couple of places that the hanar have built to accommodate non-hanar...and most hanar are fine with that! Up until this proclamation from Marto, the last offering that you have seen that includes hanar is *This One's Little Hanar: Biotics Are Unexplained Aetheric Phenomenon*, which is *clearly* written by somebody who knows absolutely nothing about hanar!

HANS: Clearly!

KAYA: [laughs] But it's sort of, it's charming in its own way. And it has a—it has a *huge* following in the rest of the galaxy. It's gone through several generations and, you know, you—there are extranet sites devoted to all of the little 'light marks' that all these different hanar apparently just keep on their bodies at all times. Which, you know, is silly. Hanar don't do that.

HANS: Right. Regardless, Zyn would consider themselves as a *harony*.

KAYA: [almost noiseless laughter; well amused] I'm so glad you have a name for it, that's great. [HANS laughs] Oh, okay. What's Zyn's favourite so far? Doesn't have to be one of the ones that we've named, it could be something else. What is Zyn's favourite of the counter-cultural—what some of your classmates would undoubtedly call *propaganda*?

HANS: Oh yes, of course... There was one called the—y'know, it was a—it was a bootleg ancient Earth comic about these giant alien robots that came to Earth and there were two factions that fought. I think they called them trans-go-mer bots or something like that—

[KAYA descends into giggles]

HANS: [as Zyn] —yes! Yes! That was it! Transgomer bots!

KAYA: Oh my God, that's—that's beautiful.

HANS: [as Zyn] Reminds me of the geth, but friendlier and less mysterious.

KAYA: Yes. Yes. As Zyn is reminiscing about all of this wonderful literature that they have read over the years, Kysei finishes the class! Presumably there was homework; you'll ask Veli later. It's fine.

HANS: [overlapping] Yeah.

KAYA: You've been here long enough. You can do this shit in your sleep.

As everyone's sort of floating away, Marto motions for you to come with them.

HANS: I will follow Marto.

KAYA: Marto leads you down into the *catcombs*, as it were, of the coral reef, and you guys find your secret little place—which is essentially, you know, it's the comics club—

HANS: Right.

KAYA: —where the handful of hanar that are into this particular aspect of non-approved student life gather.

HANS: Like the AV room, where all the nerds go.

KAYA: Exactly. Exactly. You go in and Marto reaches with a tentacle behind an outcropping of coral and rummages around and comes out with a data pad, which they then hand to you.

As you take it, the screen lights up, and there is a hanar on the cover, but it's holding *guns* in its tentacles. [HANS chuckles in recognition] In *two* tentacles it has guns; in *two other* tentacles it is holding an asari that is *swooning* and *fawning* over the hanar. There are explosions in the background—you know, some sort of, like, refinery or something, who knows what—but there are huge explosions in the background and the hanar is *not looking at them*. [like a boss]

In the shimmering luminescence of the explosion is an obviously native bioluminescent text—quote-unquote 'text'—that reads *Element Zero Remains Viable Beyond All Sapients' Lifespans, And May Therefore Functionally Be Termed Eternal*. In smaller type, in the alphabet that was gifted to the hanar by the Enkindlers to record their supplications in the manner desired by the Enkindlers, otherwise known as the hanar alphabet, it says *Blasto #1*.

ZYN: [mind blown] Marto, this one must admit this cover art is one of the greatest things this one has ever seen!

MARTO: This one agrees. This one has never seen anything of this *artistic quality* and *excitement* in *any* of the texts that we have found.

ZYN: Does this Blasto use miniature mass effect fields to lift those *very heavy* handguns?

MARTO: Yes! [ZYN gasps] Blasto can even use biotics [whispers excitedly] like an asari.

ZYN: [further gasping] That—I—I must read this imme—this one must—[audibly freaks out] This one [KAYA wheezing; loving this] has forgotten how to speak properly! This one must read this immediately! But pardon, pardon this one for using forbidden language and... and familiar terms.

KAYA: Marto, in a very non-hanar gesture, kind of pats the tentacle that is holding the data pad in this gesture of understanding that you guys probably picked up from the comics, honestly—

HANS: [overlapping; sputters agreeing] Yeah!

KAYA: —and says,

MARTO: This one understands. Reading Blasto, this one experienced yet another [mysteriously] epiphany.

KAYA: And with this, they float away into the darkness and leave you to consume your first Blasto comic.

ZYN: This one's jelly is a-quiver with excitement.

KAYA: The contents of the comic show Blasto, the first hanar Spectre, risen to prominence from obscurity in the oceans of Kahje to become a *hero* of the *galaxy*, a *saviour* of the *innocent*, *fighting* for those for whom *no one would fight*, bucking stereotypes *left* and *right* with every tentacle—a *lover* in every port and a *gun* in every tentacle...

Blasto travels to Bekenstein, where they are tasked by the Council to infiltrate an element zero smuggling ring by befriending Tiffany [HANS laughs]—the asari on the cover—who is the receptionist, but also a gang member who has fallen out of favor with the eezo smugglers. And of course, Tiffany falls in love with Blasto—

HANS: [overlapping] Naturally.

KAYA: —because how could she not? Blasto, of course, saves the day and blows up the eezo refinery and bids a fond prosaic farewell to the heartbroken Tiffany, who cannot follow in Blasto's footsteps for they must continue on the next assignment from the Citadel. But *they will always have Bekenstein*.

ZYN: And now this one shall *also* have Bekenstein. And this one has *an idea*.

HANS: [suavely] I want to make a copy of this bootleg copy—

KAYA: [overlapping] Okay, sure.

HANS: —so that I can always have it with me.

KAYA: Yeah, you can do that. I'm sure you and Marto have made dozens of bootleg copies of your comics over the years. Yeah, for sure.

HANS: No doubt. We probably have a whole circle of friends we—

KAYA: [overlapping] Oh yeah!

HANS: —copy things—

KAYA: [overlapping] Oh yeah.

HANS: —around, like a bunch of kids in the 80s with Commodore 64 games. [KAYA chuckling] [quickly] Not that I know anything about that.

KAYA: Oh, no, of course not. 'Course not.

HANS: After making my copy, I will seek out Marto to return this.

KAYA: Okay, you find Marto in one of you guys' common spots. It's this little promontory overlooking a big— a deep cliff. And so it's quite lovely, and you can often see various wildlife, various creatures swimming by, and Marto is 'sitting' on the promontory, kind of dangling their tentacles off the edge.

ZYN: Marto, this one has had, as you say, an epiphany, as well as an idea. This one may have found a new purpose to existence! The purpose to seek out those in need and help them by *blasting the enemies into oblivion*. And if this one happens to wrap tentacles around comely asari lasses, this one certainly does not think that would be a terrible thing...certainly more interesting than serving this one's progenitors in yet another generation of tedium.

KAYA: Marto flashes with excitement and approval... but a little *slowly*? You think maybe they got some more hallucinogenics in the meantime. They're having a little bit of a trip [HANS chuckles] and they respond,

MARTO: [slow motion speech] Wow, far out, dude!

KAYA: And they nudge you again and they say,

MARTO: [mischievously] There's a convention on Illium. This one is thinking about ditching classes...[ZYN gasps his biggest gasp yet] and *going*.

ZYN: That would be...scandalous...however, if this one were to join you, then we could converse in the *forbidden colours*.

KAYA: Marto waves his tentacles and does like the very solemn, serious, way-too-stoned nod.

HANS: Yep. Right.

KAYA: And then puts a tentacle on either side of Zyn's...blob. And does, like, the equivalent of, like, looking into Zyn's eyes—even though hanar don't have eyes—and says, *utterly* deadpan,

MARTO: Zyn, *what would Blasto do?*

ZYN: Blasto would go to Illium! Blasto would go to Illium and find the most attractive asari there and destroy her enemies, [working it out as he goes along] because surely someone has enemies for Blasto to destroy, otherwise why would Blasto go to Illium? Therefore, *we* must go to Illium and *be like Blasto*. And go to this convention also.

MARTO: [prophetic] It is as the Enkindlers will.

ZYN: Yes. It *is*. If the Enkindlers do not wish us to do this they will make their wishes known. [projects to open ocean] Oh great Enkindlers, give this one a sign that you do not wish this one to strike out into the galaxy and follow Blasto's footsteps. [does not wait for an answer] I see no such sign! This is what we must do.

KAYA: The ocean is perfectly chill. [laughs] *So chill* that after you say this, Marto does, like, a full look around and then turns back to you and says,

MARTO: [super elongated] *Yeah*.

ZYN: But you must promise this one *one thing*, Marto.

MARTO: Anything.

ZYN: Please, please, do not lick random drell.

MARTO: This will be...*difficult*. But this one will restrain themselves.

ZYN: T-T-To be honest, this one suspects the rumors of drell hallucinogens on their skin to be apocryphal.

MARTO: [tempting] Would that one like to try?

ZYN: [hesitantly being open-minded] This one could perhaps be persuaded to...live a little.

VI: You have been listening to *I Should Roll, Ride of the Valkyrie: Minisode Two: The Eternal Sunshine of the Enkindled Mind*. Featuring the voices of Hans Cummings as Zynamondan and Kaya Renwick as everyone and everything else.

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