

KAYA: This episode contains scenes of parental illness and loss. Listener discretion is advised.

VI: A podcast by the Intergalactic Improv Initiative.

KAYA: *Ride of the Valkyrie*, Minisode Three: *The Wretched Refuse of These Ones' Teeming Shores*, featuring the voices of Ché Grove and creator Kaya Renwick.

Life is pain. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something. *I Should Roll*.

VI: 14th Day of Aravar, 189 Compact Era; December 11, 2175, Terran Universal Coordinated Calendar. Kahje, Kanala System, Olyn Protectorate. The Encompassing, Equatorial Ridge. Calm Waters Over Benthic Basin, Cnidaria City.

KAYA: Cnidaria City.

Cnidaria City is the primary living space for almost all drell on Kahje. It is an underwater bubble city that houses over four hundred thousand drell, and it's *probably* big enough for maybe two hundred thousand, let's be real here.

The terribly overcrowded city was very obviously tossed together in the 1980s (Terran Calendar), when the hanar discovered Rakhana and proceeded to rescue about three hundred and seventy-five thousand drell from their dying planet, leaving the remaining eleven billion to perish in the ecosystem that had been declining for six centuries already.

Despite the humanitarian effort taking over a decade, it remained somewhat of a slapdash effort. But when you are faced with extinction or a refugee camp... you pick the refugee camp.

When you arrive to visit Cnidaria City, as the rare tourist does, you arrive at the spaceport on one of the few land masses that peeks above The Encompassing; the ocean that covers ninety percent of Kahje's surface.

From there, you take an ocean elevator through the first few hundred meters of the ocean, descending from the constantly windy and overcast surface, through the epipelagic zone and the mesopelagic zone into the bathypelagic zone, where Cnidaria City hangs in a sheltered area of the benthic zone, a single shining light in the darkness of the calm ocean.

To the tourist's eye, Cnidaria City is a *marvel* of submersible engineering. The shell of the city is transparent, so you can see the bubbles rising from the volcanic vents *fathoms* further below and breaking around the city. The bottom of

the city is the warmest spot, and therefore *prime* drell real estate—although the entire city is humid, because good luck getting all the humidity out of a bubble that is over a thousand meters below sea level.

'Downtown' Cnidaria City is at the top and center of the bubble, where the electricity wired down from the turbines attached to the space elevator reaches. Most of the electricity generated by those turbines is used to maintain the mass effect fields necessary for the city's continued survival, as well as the mediocre climate control. Lighting is last on the list, and as soon as you leave the Potemkin village of downtown Cnidaria City, most light is generated by the bioluminescent algae that grows on *everything*.

The architecture of Cnidaria City is a mosaic of hanar and drell styles. The hanar excavated stalagmites from the seafloor to fill the bubble and hung small dwellings from these rock formations. In the two centuries of living here, the drell have since created labyrinthine structures of salvage and prefabs to mimic, as best they can, the huts of their nomadic desert existence. Imagine the most densely packed Hong Kong apartment district you can think of built around an underwater version of Lothlorien.

Very few drell live in the original hanar buildings except the most devout, Compact-employed drell; those who also have the credits to maintain small dehumidifiers and lights, or who have undergone genetic enhancements and body modifications to allow them to live more comfortably on the hanar homeworld.

Where is Titoh on this day in 2175?

CHÉ: So Titoh is currently trying to contact this particular guy that she knew her father went through previously, that she has now met once before, and essentially trying to *convince* him to give her some sort of work without her father being there because he's off somewhere. She doesn't know where. She'd *like* to know where, but no one seems to want to tell her that, not even her father. She hasn't really heard from him in a few months.

She's at the point where she's like: *Okay*, I know what I'm doing; I'm gonna seek out this guy who seems to have contacts and see what kind of work I can get to support my family and my—my dying mother at this point.

KAYA: What kind of jobs has Titoh done so far?

CHÉ: Mostly, like, odd jobs. You know, she's pretty young at this point—she's 16, but she's mostly done, like odd jobs, like clearing someone's yard, you know? She'll go there and clean—cleaning the houses of the fancy drell, like *anything* she can get, any sort of odd job, essentially.

So she's made lots of little contacts around the place, but as she's gotten a bit older—since she was about fourteen, fifteen-ish, she's been going on, kind of tagging along with her father a little bit more. And these... these jobs have been... not like *illegal*-illegal, but, like, *eehh*— [squeaking with skepticism]

KAYA: A little bit on the *gray* side.

CHÉ: Yes, kind of skirting that line, like, *oh*, from a certain *point of view*—

KAYA: Sure, sure.

CHÉ: —kind of things, or maybe, “*Shhh, doesn't matter*, no one knows about it, it's fine,” you know, no victims, therefore who cares if it's illegal, no one's getting *hurt*—

KAYA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHÉ: —kind of situation, and *this guy* has kind of been the main guy for these sorts of jobs.

KAYA: Mm hmm.

CHÉ: Because he can connect you to whoever needs specific work. His name is Drinu, by the way, this drell who gives them some *interesting* work. And aside from that, she has been trying her own luck to make her own contacts, but no one really believes her because she's, like, a sixteen-year-old girl and they just don't think she has any skills; so she's like, “I'll go back to this guy. He's seen me do stuff, at least.”

KAYA: So where does Drinu live—or where does he work from? Those may not be the same place.

CHÉ: So he works from, like, y'know, typical shady front. There's like, there's like a shop front, you know, where he, like, repairs *stuff*. But, like—him and his crew, like, *repair* stuff, but you know, you go past the back curtains and they're kind of more *breaking* things...metaphorically. [laughs]

KAYA: As you show up, Drinu has done well enough for himself with his work that he has a couple of actual lights, one above the door and one inside. I feel like they're— it's the doors in the slum districts, they don't have enough electricity for like actual moving doors, and so they've just taken them all out and they're like curtains—

CHÉ: Yeah.

KAYA: —that sort of thing. So she shoves it aside and goes in, and Drinu is arguing in a dialect of the drell languages— a drell dialect that Titoh has *heard* before, it's one that her father used, but very *distinctly* does not use it at home. And so you don't know what Drinu is saying to this other drell, but he doesn't seem happy, that's for damn sure.

And the young man leaves in a huff and sort of elbows Titoh on the way out and then shoves you, is like,

DRELL: [disgusted] *Σόλο ρό κεφερέ'fazi, siri šolikãf.*

KAYA: And stalks off into the slums. Drinu sees Titoh and kind of rolls his eyes at the departing young man.

DRINU: [sotto voce] *Nãfibreže...* [friendly] Ah, Titoh, come in, come in.

TITOH: Ugh... Hey Drinu, what's got his... ass?

DRINU: Well, when you don't deliver on a job...

KAYA: And he just leaves it at that.

TITOH: Oh, well, you know I'd never leave you hanging, Drinu.

DRINU: Oh, I know. I know you're good.

TITOH: So on that note, you got anything going? I mean, can I pick up that guy's slack or... I just need some work at this point. You know, my dad's been gone for a while and... you know.

KAYA: Roll me an Insight check.

CHÉ: Insight... that's an eighteen.

KAYA: You can tell, as you mentioned your father, that a memory flicks across Drinu's eyes, and he very, *very*, *VERY* deliberately keeps his mouth shut on it—which you would know that takes a *lot* of self-control for a drell to not voice a solipsistic memory.

CHÉ: Mm hmm. I want to kind of lean into that and see if I can... kind of force—

KAYA: Sure!

CHÉ: —the solipsistic memory—

KAYA: Yeah!

TITOH: Yeah, cause Drinu, you know, it was about what, two months ago? Three months ago? Right? that he left. Something like that. Do you remember the exact day? It was the day when the hanar came through in the parade, remember that? And he kind of snuck under the... what was it, whatever that song they're saying, what their— singing lights, flashing lights, where he snuck under that. Do you remember that day? That was— that was a crazy day, wasn't it?

KAYA: As Titoh is talking, his grip on this—on the edge of his counter is getting tighter and tighter. I would like you to roll me... [debates] I mean, your choice of Persuasion roll. So a Charm or Intimidate, however you're trying to tone this, and I will say that you get advantage—

CHÉ: Okay,

KAYA: —on this 'cause you already know he's hiding something.

CHÉ: —okay, definitely *Charm*, I'm sixteen and little. [laughs] Okay, so it's nineteen plus... [math-on-fingers-noises] six.

[appropriately pleased with herself] That's twenty-five.

KAYA: [amused] Yeah, okay! [laughs] I'd say you manage it! Yeah, as you're describing the parade, which *of course* you remember. It's one of the— it was the Hanar New Year, and there's a *huge* procession: it's the celebration of the Enkindlers giving language to the hanar. And the grand parade, of course, goes by Cnidaria City to, you know, *bless* the drell with the *wondrous* cultural advancements of the hanar... *Eyeball*. [audible eye roll]

Yeah, so yeah! You remember it in perfect clarity because it is—it actually *is quite* the spectacle. It's quite beautiful. Hanar light dance is a beautiful thing! And I don't think Titoh's *quite* so jaded as to not enjoy it...*yet*. I mean, that's obviously up to you, but...

CHÉ: Yeah. She hates *parades*, but she can't help but appreciate just the beauty of the actual artwork, despite hating parades.

KAYA: Yeah, fair enough—

CHÉ: As a concept. [laughs]

KAYA: —fair enough, sort of begrudgingly watching from the side.

CHÉ: Yeah

KAYA: Right, like, “I *guess* it's pretty.” [with brooding admission]

CHÉ: Yeah, “I guess it's *gorgeous!* [*ultra teenage sullen power* 🎵🎵] *Fine!*”

[laughing]

KAYA: As you remind Drinu of the parade, his grip slackens as the solipsism takes over.

[flashback swoop sound]

DRINU: The father watches his daughter from afar.

[swoop]

The hanar swoop and swirl in a kaleidoscope of light and color beyond the edge of the city.

[swoop]

He knows that time is short and his time is yet shorter.

[swoop]

He regrets his decision, but he has no choice.

[swoop]

He has taken a job that will take him far away. And he never intends to return.

[swoop]

KAYA: The inner eyelids flip open again, and Drinu obviously wants to, like—he would go and *dive into the ocean* at this point. And he just stands there and he looks at you because *you* are between him and the ocean right now.

CHÉ: [her own life flashing before her eyes] *Uh huh.*

KAYA: Yeah. And so he just, he just stares.

CHÉ: I just look at him for a moment.

TITOH: So... he's never coming back then?

KAYA: Drinu just shakes his head.

TITOH: [sighs] *Why?* Where did you send him, Drinu?

KAYA: He—again, his eyes slip to the side, he doesn't want to answer this. But you can tell: you've worked with him long enough, and between your Insight check and your Charm check, he can't hide anything from you right now. And so you can tell he does not want to tell you this, but he feels like he owes it to you.

And I will also say, based on your high rolls and the fact that you've been working with him for like, a couple of years now on and off, you've been watching him; you can tell that he feels bad for you... and he disagrees with Nuyat's decision...but obviously not enough to not give him the job.

CHE: Okay.

KAYA: So you get all of this from his reluctance to tell you. His shoulders slump a little bit, and he says:

DRINU: Omega.

TITOH: *Omega*. [sharply exhales] What the *hell* is he going to do on Omega? He can't barely survive *here*.

[exasperated sigh; fuck it] Okay. You know what? Forget him. I just need something for now. Okay, you—you—you gave him a ship or sent him away, okay, the *least* you can do is now give me something that *I* can support my family. If he's never coming back, then I've got to do it myself.

KAYA: He thinks about this. And not in a way that he's—he's like considering *what* to give you. It's not "I'm not going to give you something." It's a "What do I give you?" He finally—he nods and brings up his omnitool and taps on it a few times, and your omnitool bleeps. And as you bring it up, he has sent you three options...and there is also a message from your sister.

CHÉ: Okay, I'll listen to my sister's message first, because that's probably important.

KAYA: Your sister's message is short and a little bit frantic:

YULMI: Please come home.

CHÉ: Okay, I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to turn tail and, and head out. And rush back home as fast as I can.

KAYA: You, I have no doubt, have found the quickest ways through Cnidaria City.

CHÉ: Parkour. *Hardcore* parkour. Yes.

KAYA: [overlapping] Oh yeah.

CHÉ: [overlapping] Yeah.

KAYA: [overlapping] Oh yeah.

CHÉ: 'Cause I've got high Acrobatics. [laughs]

KAYA: Yeah, I imagine it doesn't take you very long at all to get home. What does home look like?

CHÉ: I imagine it being kind of like, this sort of apartment blocks that have like, doors, opened up into a balcony kind of situation, and it's like a small, like, one bedroom with, like, a kind of tiny little room off it for like, for Isuya to sort of rest in. And then the other main room, is where everyone else sleeps and the, like a little dinky kitchen and basic supplies kind of thing.

KAYA: Sure. Yep. Yep. What sort of decorations are here? How have the Raases decorated their home?

CHÉ: Very sparsely. However, Titoh has a soft spot for art in general and wherever she can, she's painted her own with, like, whatever—whatever tools have been available to her charcoal—whatever she's able to find. And she's like, drawn on some of the walls in like a nice way. And you know, just like, kind of higgledy-piggledy amount of artwork mostly done by Titoh. Or, like, *pilfered* by Titoh.

KAYA: Ha!

CHÉ: [laughing] And there—it's again, it's all different mediums, because just whatever she could afford at the time or—

KAYA: [overlapping] True. Yeah, yeah.

CHÉ: —whatever random stick she was able to engrave with or—yeah, yeah.

KAYA: What does she like to draw? What's her favorite subject?

CHÉ: She likes to draw mountains.

KAYA: [overlapping] Cool.

CHÉ: That's like her thing, landscapes, mountains, the sky. A lot of the time, the stars. And she—she loves, he's never really *seen* many flowers before, but she's seen some like—

KAYA: [overlapping] Sure.

CHÉ: —images of them on like—



KAYA: Yeah, holos, vids, stuff, yeah

CHÉ: —she's like, passed by museums, holos, that kind of thing. So to her, those things are like—

KAYA: [overlapping] Mm hmm.

CHÉ: —I don't know, fantasy, a fantasy world, that's just this—

KAYA: [overlapping] Yeah, true.

CHÉ: —amazing thing. And and she's—she has some desert-y kind of stuff from her homeworld, but in her mind, it's kind of like, that's the world that killed her people and kind of sent her here so she doesn't have a strong affiliation with *that* sort of landscape, specifically—

KAYA: Sure.

CHÉ: —she kind of has a weird resentment to this inanimate planet. [laughs]

KAYA: Fair enough. Fair enough. So, Titoh, I'm sort of imagining, like, she's, like, swung in onto the balcony, sort of thing, like, not bothering going in on the ground floor.

CHÉ: Nah.

KAYA: Yeah, yeah just, straight in—

CHÉ: [overlapping] Getting in there.

KAYA: [overlapping] —straight in.

CHÉ: [overlapping] Straight in.

KAYA: When Titoh arrives and pushes aside the curtain on the balcony, she smells the equivalent of like, burning eggs, and hears sizzling and crying from the kitchen.

CHÉ: Is anybody in the kitchen? Like when I come into the main room is—is like Yulmi in the kitchen—

KAYA: Yeah, Yulmi is there, Yulmi is there.

CHÉ: Okay. Okay.

TITOH: Yulmi? Where's mom?

YULMI: [sniffing] In—in her bedroom.

TITOH: What are you doing out here, then? Come with me—

YULMI: *Trying to make supper!*

TITOH: Okay, well just—put it off, it's obviously burning, just put it to the side and come with me.

CHÉ: Just going to rush into mum's room.

KAYA: Yulmi bursts into even more tears. You hear the angry turning off of the stove and the clatter of the pan shoved to the side. And then as you enter Nuyat's room, your little sister basically like, attack-hugs you, like *thump* into the side of you, as you go in.

TITOH: Look, I don't have time for this, this second, *just get off me*, okay?!

KAYA: She sort of backs away and tries to like, shut herself up and, like, cover and keep herself quiet.

YULMI: [sniffing] I'm sor—I'm sorry. She—*I couldn't get her to breathe*.

CHE: [heart breaking] *Aww*.

TITOH: She's not dead *yet!* Just— Get. My. Med. Bag. It's in the corner. Get it—

KAYA: Yulmi scurries off to grab it for you.

CHÉ: I'm going to like, feel pulse, all the classic, you know, check eyelids, whatever I need to do...

KAYA: Sure. After a quick check, you—you've been around this block a few times and you've been watching your mother deteriorate and deteriorate and deteriorate... She *is* still alive. Her pulse is quite slow, and as you listen to her chest, her breathing is...it sounds like bubbles coming through water.

You've never heard her this bad.

CHÉ: Okay. Should I roll, like, a Medicine check or anything like that? Or is it just straight up—?

KAYA: I think you would need to roll a Medicine or First Aid check to know what you could *do* with this. I will say that you have enough like, familiarity with the symptoms that you—I won't make you roll for like, what you just found out.

CHÉ: Okay.

KAYA: But in order to do something about it, yes. You need to roll for that.

CHÉ: Okay.

[the air is sucked out of the room]

*Oooh*, that's rough. That's a three. I don't think any modifier is going to help with that.

KAYA: There's not... [reluctant sigh] There's not a lot *to* be done, right? You have—you and your father have gathered all of the folk wisdom about how to treat people with Kepral's syndrome, and the closest anyone can guess is that you need dry air, but to get dry air in this part of Cnidaria City would require a small fortune on a regular basis...and to get off-planet would also require a small fortune. Neither of which you have.

And so your—what you can do, you know, there's—sometimes your father would massage your mother's back and try to dislodge some of the phlegm, but the problem isn't really that her lungs are full of anything foreign. It's that the tissue is so soaked that it can't absorb oxygen and so there's—there is not much that you can actually do.

CHÉ: Is she conscious? Or...?

KAYA: Barely.

She can tell as you're checking her over, she sort of—she twitches a little bit, like her eyes are a little bit open when you come in initially and you're not quite *yelling* at Yulmi, but you know, telling her to “get the bag, get the bag”, and then as you are checking her out, she doesn't really move.

But when you rest your head on her chest, she manages to lift her hand, and put it on your shoulder.

CHÉ: Kind of realizing what this all means, I keep my head still on her chest and lift my gaze to where Yulmi is. And I'm just going to beckon her over with a hand. You know, hand—hand—hand signal. For to come, come sit by me.

KAYA: Yulmi comes and sits and kind of folds her knees underneath her and puts her hands on and she leans in and whispers:

YULMI: Are you going to call the doctor?

TITOH: I don't think the doctor's going to be able to do anything, Yulmi. Not this time.

CHÉ: And I want to put her arm around her and kind of bring her in, like I didn't do before, and kind of just rest—try to get her head to kind of rest on mine, so we're both sort of lying on Isuya, so she can feel us both.

KAYA: Yulmi initially fights you in sort of this, you ca—you feel her, like her whole body sort of shakes once with this *sob* of understanding what you're saying. And then in her ten-year-old “What is—what is going on? I understand, but I don't understand,” you feel her get tense and she hits your chest with the side of one fist. Not—not hard, obviously,

CHÉ: [sharply exhales] Yeah she's...

KAYA: —and half *weeps*, half *shouts*, cries into you:

YULMI: But that's what the doctor is *for!* You can't give *up on her!*

TITOH: Yulmi, if we go and get the doctor now, mom's going to die here alone. And you won't get to say goodbye. So... you need to say goodbye now.

KAYA: She is still not ready to accept this, and she says almost fully buried in your chest:

YULMI: Where's Dad? Dad should say goodbye. Doesn't Dad want to say goodbye?

TITOH: He wants to say goodbye, Yulmi, but you know he's out there. He's going to be back... soon. But he had to go get... he had to go and... do something for us so that we could get out of here, but [sighs] we are right now all that mom has.

YULMI: It's not fair. [sniffing] Dad should be here.

TITOH: Yeah, he should.

YULMI: I don't want mom to go.

TITOH: I don't either.

CHÉ: I'm gonna hug her a little bit closer. And sort of lift my head to see if my mother is registering at all at this point.

KAYA: Yeah, she is. She's watching as much as she can. You guys have— Kepral's patients, you have them like, propped up a little bit to try to keep them breathing. And so you guys are sort of like, leaning on her, it's not quite like a sitting bed, but sort of reclining.

CHÉ: Yeah.

KAYA: Her arms—you've got Yulmi on one side and she's got her arm on the other side of you. And she is—she's watching, but she's so tired.

She meets your eyes as you look up at her. And you can see her working to swallow and working to breathe. And breathing in, it's—it's this wet, raspy, like

trying to breathe through a wet paper bag. But she fights through it. And grips your shoulder as much as she can.

ISUYA: I'm so sorry. Take care of her.

KAYA: She has to stop, because she's run out of breath. Yulmi at this point is just *sobbing*. Isuya hauls in another breath.

ISUYA: May Kalahira guide you both when I am gone...and bring you across the ocean to me...many, many tides from now.

KAYA: You see the flash of solipsism across her eyes and a smile—tiny little smile.

[flashback fwoop sound]

ISUYA: My first daughter greets the world with a cry that mimics my own.

[fwoop]

Her turquoise scales gleam in the darkness and her voice is full of daring and courage.

[fwoop]

She is a fighter.

KAYA: She's desperately trying to get a hand on Yulmi at this point.

[fwoop]

ISUYA: My second daughter sees the ocean before she sees me.

[fwoop]

Her cheeks are dusted with rose and her smile holds the joy which I have forgotten.

[fwoop]

She is a dreamer.

[fwoop]

KAYA: The solipsism passes, and she meets your eyes again. And she is trying to take another breath.

CHÉ: I'm going to work my hand from around Yulmi. I've still got—sort of leaning on Isuya with my left side and I'm gonna reach around and grab the back of her head so she can lift a little bit more, and sort of hold her face.

TITOH: It's okay, mom. I'll take care of her. You can go.

CHÉ: And I'm just going to sort of lean my forehead on hers. And kind of, almost sort of breathe in time like, so she can follow the rhythm of—of my breath, but like, kind of slowing it down almost, I try to guide her—her breath not to be so labored, by sort of feeling my breath on her face.

KAYA: Isuya follows you. And her breathing slows and thins.

You are close enough to the edge of Cnidaria City that... when she does not breathe in again, you hear the tide taking your mother out to where Kalahira awaits.

CHÉ: Once I feel her final little breath, kind of, and I can tell, I can feel surreptitiously—I move my hand down to her neck to feel, pulse and breath, and all that kind of stuff. And then once I've confirmed that she's gone I'll bring my arm back around Yulmi, who I assume is still a mess.

KAYA: Yeah.

CHÉ: And sort of bring her around to me, try to hold her.

TITOH: I've got you now, Yulmi. It's just the two of us.

CHÉ: I just hold a little bit tighter and—Titoh is obviously emotional and trying, but she's trying not to actually cry because Yulmi's already lost it. She can't—she can't see her only role model in the world now, essentially, losing it, so she's trying to just, you know, give her a rock, a steady rock to lean on.

KAYA: Yeah. Yulmi cries into Titoh's chest for a few breaths. And then once the—once the sobbing relaxes a little bit, lessens a little bit, she sniffles out a:

YULMI: Where do we go now?

TITOH: Well... we can't stay here.

I will do whatever we need to do to get off here, off this *planet*. We're not meant to be here.

YULMI: Are we going to... are we gonna go find Dad?

CHÉ: Titoh takes a big breath in. Doesn't exactly want to let her little sister know that her dad's bugged off, theoretically.

TITOH: Yeah, we're going to go find Dad.

YULMI: Okay.

KAYA: And she gives you one last little hug and then pushes you away and turns to Isuya and crawls up a little closer and does the same head touch that you did.

YULMI: Goodbye, mama.

KAYA: You have been listening to *I Should Roll*. Ride of the Valkyrie, Minisode Three: *The Wretched Refuse of These Ones' Teeming Shores*, featuring the voices of Ché Grové as Titoh Raas and Kaya Renwick as everyone and everything else.

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