

VI: A podcast by the Intergalactic Improv Initiative.

KAYA: *Dangerous Dangers*, Minisode Two: *Solace Phone Home*. Featuring the voices of Alanya Campbell and creator Kaya Renwick.

Where words fail, music speaks. *I Should Roll*.

VI: January 19, 2189, Terran Universal Coordinated Calendar. The Citadel, Widow System, Serpent Nebula, Zakera Ward.

KAYA: Solace, you are free on the Citadel. You have picked up your—you ordered your food supplies, and they are on the way to the *Corsica*. What else do you wish to do?

ALANYA: Because we've noticed that our new companion Jesse has a very weird song going on in his—Sorry, quick question. The song that I'm hearing, I'm able to—they don't have telepathy, but it's like a quantum communication thing?

KAYA: Yeah, rachni speak and communicate on this metaphysical plane of existence that is entirely information based. And they experience it as sound and colour and sensation.

ALANYA: Okay.

KAYA: On a physical level, it's biochemical processes being activated by quantum movements in... that—that's how they could, that's how they speak over great distances is essentially organic quantum entanglement communication... sort of... more complicated than that... physics! But yeah, so when Solace spoke to Jesse—when Solace speaks to *anyone* as Solace experiences the world, they hear everyone's songs because that's how... that is how rachni experience communication, experience life. They interact with their spaceships via sound. It's all sonic. It's all elec—electric and static electricity and sort of—that sort of thing.

Probably I would imagine what Solace would have experienced when Jesse arrived was kind of this unsettled, maybe sort of like almost like out-of-tune or out-of-key—

ALANYA: [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

KAYA: —sensation? And you know it's—it's...what we would conceive of as 'negative emotions', aren't necessarily—

ALANYA: [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

KAYA: —bad music—

ALANYA: [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

KAYA: —like it's not necessarily cacophony—it *can* be. But it doesn't, you know, we're not—we're not thinking in Western classical temperament.

ALANYA: Okay.

KAYA: Right? And so, you know, Solace's initial reaction probably would have been like, "We wonder if he's having a bad day,"—

ALANYA: [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

KAYA: —but then when they would have spoken to him, they would have gotten the intense, or like the—the more concentrated version of it. And you have never heard a song like this human's before. And you see a *lot* of humans. You work in a *ramen* stand.

ALANYA: [chuckles] Alright. So while Solace is like going out to get the—the food, they communicate, they try to reach their—the queen, the mother. And so they will say:

SOLACE: **Mothersinger, we wish to seek an audience with you.**

KAYA: As Solace focuses on the rachni web, this... silvery strands of sound that permeate the entire universe, and they pluck one of them and send this message out into the galaxy. And it is not long before Solace feels the warm, all-encompassing blue and green thick strings, chorus of—of cellos that is deeply associated with Free-Flickering-Flame—the rachni queen, Solace's mother, the mother of all rachni currently in existence—and her deep, deep love for all of her children.

EFFY: **Greetings, young explorer. We are pleased to hear your melody more closely. Is your journey pleasant? Do you hear many new songs?**

SOLACE: **We hear many new songs that are wondrous and also disconcerting. This particular one that we have heard today is very unusual. Its—its song feels... like it's missing... notes. We don't know how to describe it—**

ALANYA: Would Solace be able to *imitate* the sounds that they heard?

KAYA: Yes. Solace would be able to imitate. Solace would also be able to recall. So, and so you could—you could not only imitate, you could basically, like, echo it back to Effy.

ALANYA: Okay, okay... That's so cool. [chuckles at realisation]

KAYA: Rachni are *fucking* cool, man!

ALANYA: Ohh, too bad they're scary looking!

KAYA: [excitedly] I know! [laughs]

ALANYA: I will echo back the songs to, uh, Mothersinger, and the song that—Can I make it up?

KAYA: [thrilled] Yeah, *absolutely* make it up!

ALANYA: Of course. Gotcha. The song is... it starts off kind of staticky, like, um, there's a song that *is* supposed to be playing like maybe a violin kind of song, but it's like...

it screeches and it feels like it clips away, like it's missing. Like it's missing... like the song like clips away. Like it suddenly stops playing and then starts playing again like it's... there's a song there, but it's definitely not completely there. If that makes sense?

KAYA: It makes perfect sense. I love that, okay. Solace can feel Free-Flickering-Flame listening and teasing apart the parts of the song. Teasing apart these—these strains of clipped melody. And after some time the last echoes have faded through the silvery web. She says:

EFFY: **We do not know this song. It rings *strangely*. It is out of temperament. But it is not sour. It is not the oily yellow note of one who is not their own. It is the thin and quiet song that does not know its origin nor its progression. To whom does this song belong?**

SOLACE: **This song belongs to... a human that we have met today. His name is Jesse. We don't know too much of this Jesse, but his song is the one we find most concerning out of the companions that we have met today.**

KAYA: As Solace mentions that they have met Jesse today and met other companions today, they feel Free-Flickering-Flame's music grow darker and more sheltering. There's some maternal instinct to protect her child going on here, but she is *wise*, and she says:

EFFY: **Do you fear for your safety, young explorer? Are you safe?**

SOLACE: **We feel safe. But we feel as though we should follow this song. This clipped song that seems both absent, yet...there's more to it. Ah... We don't know how to describe it but we feel as though we should follow these new companions that we have acquired.**

KAYA: I love that choice of words. It's just like, "Yoink!"

[KAYA AND ALANYA softly laughing]

EFFY: **What do you know of this human? Is he well? Are these companions his shipbrood?**

KAYA: You would know that means 'crewmates'.

ALANYA: I'm trying to remember as Jesse doesn't know any of us at all—

KAYA: [overlapping] I think by this point—

ALANYA: —he doesn't have any intimate ties with any of us, I don't think.

KAYA: No.

ALANYA: Okay. Gotcha.

KAYA: And I think you would have overheard him telling Vraga, and Clous, and Athena at this point—I think you were there for most of it, that he—he had lost all of his shipmates and he's looking for his ship.

ALANYA: [chuckles] Yes, Clous said he had no brain. [gleeful laughing at remembering the first 2189 recording session]

KAYA: Yeah! [amused] He's looking for his brain. I mean, Clous is *not at all that far off*. But yeah, he's—so yes, you would—you would know that, A) Vraga and Athena and Clous and you, you are not his shipmates. He is, in fact, *looking* for his shipmates.

ALANYA: That's right. Okay. Gotcha.

KAYA: Yeah.

SOLACE: **From what we know, the songs from our other companions don't seem to be familiar with Jesse's song. We can only assume that they have no relation to each other. We are all *strangers* as far as we know.**

EFFY: **Your melodies have not yet found harmony with one another. It is a noble pursuit to find companions with whom you may sing. Will you help him, young explorer?**

SOLACE: **Yes, we will. If we are able.**

EFFY: **Your name befits you in this. May your song provide him solace as he searches for his key.**

SOLACE: **Thank you, Mothersinger. We are always pleased to have an audience with you.**

EFFY: **And we are always pleased to provide counsel to our children. Be well, young explorer.**

KAYA: And the connection drifts away into silvery tinkling wind chimes.

ALANYA: [calls out to the distance] We love you, Mama! [chuckling]

KAYA: [chuckles] I love Effy. I love Effy so much.

ALANYA: Can I also do the web again? I was—I was also thinking of, um, 'cause Solace... I don't—I feel like they would have never actually been companions with like, I guess, humans or like a different sp—like, even—even like the—the krogan. 'Cause I don't think they've ever regularly been like shipbrood or shipmates, so I'm wondering if they could go out on the web to ask like, how... What are some ways to kind—to make others feel comfortable around the rachni? If that makes sense, 'cause I know, I think that—

KAYA: Yeah, sure.

ALANYA: [overlapping] They've noticed that—who was it? Um, sorry, uh, Athena? I think was also kinda weirded out—

KAYA: [overlapping] Yeah, Athena was like, “Ooh?!? There's a *bug!*”

ALANYA: [overlapping] So I'm wondering—

KAYA: Sure. Okay. Yeah. Absolutely. Um, I think that Solace would know that the best person to ask about that would be Reflections-in-Deep-Waters, the Citadel cou—the rachni Citadel councillor. Because she is *very* familiar with dealing with other species—

ALANYA: [overlapping] That's right. Uh-huh.

KAYA: —So yeah, same deal—

ALANYA: [overlapping] Alright.

KAYA: —Just pluck the web and so—so, okay. [exposition time] Rachni names, I think you and I have talked about this, are—are translated for other sapient's benefit.

ALANYA [agreeing noises]

KAYA: It's more—it's like it's a song and it's a feeling. And so just as Solace called for Free-Flickering-Flame by speaking into the web, they were probably also imagining or sending out like, her *name*, which is the sensation of a tiny little flickering flame. Reflections-in-Deep-Waters, same idea. You imagine the song, you send out the song, and they will—that—that—that rachni would be like, “Oh, hey, I hear my song. Hi. What's up?”

ALANYA: I'm wondering, so how does—how does, how do we address Deep—Deep-Reflections and Flickering-Flame? It's not Mothersinger as well. It's something else, right?

KAYA: The rachni term for the council is the Chorus of Queens... Queenspeaker.

ALANYA: Ah! And I'm wondering, I know, because we see that—like the rachni see themselves as a big family, so, would the... would the Queenspeaker be like my big sister? [chuckling with little reverence and a little joy]

KAYA: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, yeah. And hilariously, she's like—she's like, a year old. She was—she was—Effy literally like made her to be the *councilor*. She's like, “I need a little queen because I need somebody who can... who will know all of the rachni's ancestral memories without having to ask me so that she can like do her job. I don't have another queen. Guess I'm making one!” [stops, amused] But yeah, yeah, you prob—yeah, Solace would probably see Reflections as a sort of big sister.

ALANYA: Okay, gotcha. So Solace will reach out on the web, and their song will... will sing for the Queenspeaker. And so they'll think of the, like, the waters, and like the...

sounds that kind of wave through it, and will sing for Reflections-in-Deep-Waters. Okay, there we go.

KAYA: Solace—Solace's reaching into the web is once again quickly answered, as Reflections-In-Deep-Waters, the rachni councilor, her—ah, responds. Her song is of a similar timbre to the Queen's, to Free-Flickering-Flame's, but younger, less widely resonant, but Solace—so you can—Solace can tell they're sort of in the same key. They have the same overtones and undertones.

REFLECTIONS: **Good day, sister explorer. What may this one help you with today?**

SOLACE: **We have encountered companions today that we wish to... wish to follow. They are of different songs, and we have never been in harmony with others of different... different species and cultures. We are wondering if there is a way to make our song less... less frightening to them.**

KAYA: As Solace is saying this, they hear just this light, it's just like lavender tinsel-like glockenspiel laughter with these—with deep undertones of purple understanding. And Solace gets the feeling that Reflections has *deep personal experience* with scaring people and feeling terrible about it afterwards. And she—she very much sympathises with Solace's plight.

REFLECTIONS: **Ah yes, we understand. Those of other species tend to find us... unsettling. What can we tell you? What can we tell you..?**

KAYA: And we get this sort of like the—the spinning disco ball, or spinning beach ball of thought, as Reflections is considering what best to say. I feel like that's the rachni version of elevator music.

[ALANYA and KAYA giggling]

ALANYA: That's so cute.

KAYA: Eventually, she says:

REFLECTIONS: **If we are correct, you are exploring the cuisine of other cultures, yes?**

SOLACE: **That is correct, Queenspeaker.**

REFLECTIONS: **In our experience, this is a most excellent way of harmonizing with one's multi-species broodmates. We brought—what was the human word...—*hors d'oeuvres* to a meeting of the Cou—of the Chorus of Queens of all of the various species and... How did—how did Shepard Mothersinger put it? It was a hit!**

[KAYA AND ALANYA stifling giggles]

REFLECTIONS: **So we would recommend exploring your new broodmates' food preferences.**

We would also recommend...being very open and... unsurprising with your

communication. There are no other species that communicate as we do. [music turns quite dark and dissonant] And the experience can be deeply disconcerting for those who are not prepared for it. Be gentle with your songs. Be kind. And do recall—

KAYA: And here her song turns sort of a—a disquieted sort of yellowy brown. And Solace would immediately recognise that this is the—this is the undercurrent, the ostinato that underlies any rachni memories of the Reapers. While most of the rachni alive today were birthed *after* the Reaper War, Free-Flickering-Flame has made a point of teaching the songs and lessons of the Reaper War to every rachni. Because Free-Flickering-Flame values peace and harmony so deeply, she is committed to teaching all of her children the dangers of those who would usurp their songs. And so this—this undercurrent is there, and so Solace will have this—will know what that means. And Reflections continues:

REFLECTIONS: **Know that unless you are... unless your companions are very young, they will be... they will carry discordant notes and distemperment from the great war. And they will fear...even if they do not realise it...they will fear the possibility of their minds and their songs not being their own.**

Be gentle with them, we urge you. Be gentle and kind. And above all, listen to their songs. Seek to understand their harmonies, and sing those harmonies back to them. The more you understand, sister explorer, the more they will be able to understand you.

SOLACE: **Thank you, Queenspeaker. That is most apt advice. And perhaps it will be very fun to explore their unique and...*strange* cuisine.**

REFLECTIONS: **We anticipate great joy in your reports, young explorer. We will always make time for you.**

ALANYA: And Solace will have this, um—this bright green kind of flickering, almost ost like they're kind of fluttering from their big sister's approval. [cute giggles].

KAYA: [tickled] Awww, that's so sweet!

ALANYA: They will say:

SOLACE: **Thank you again, Queensinger.**

ALANYA: And I guess they will dispatch from the web.

KAYA: Okay, cool.

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