

THE COMPLETE  
GELITECH

VOLUME 4  
3<sup>rd</sup> SEASON

BY SHETIRA ANWAE

# THE COMPLETE GELITECH

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## GELITOWER THREE

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# A NEW HOME

“This is all just so... weird,” the lovely, deep brunette shibi remarked to herself as she cautiously stepped out of the unpleasantly confining little cylindrical lift. The building’s sixth floor was even more sterile than the bottom floor lobby. The walls were pearly white. The ceiling and floor were glossy black. There was nothing on the outer wall besides the eight oval white doors, and to make matters even stranger, there was nothing to indicate which room was which.

*Really, really weird,* she thought, looking over her shoulder to watch as the tiny lift’s door closed with eerie silence. *I’ve never seen a*

*place like it before. And now I'm supposed to live here?*

Nenya looked at the collection of lifts that seemed to be the room's only notable feature. The quartet of vertical tubes were arranged in a cloverleaf pattern. Between the lifts were planters which transformed the cloverleaf into a circle that took up much of the room's floor space. In each of these planters grew a well manicured mop of dark green ivy. Growing, perhaps, but the waxy leaves were just a bit too perfect. Were they real, or were they actually just highly realistic plastic?

The shibi leaned down to look at the ivy a bit more closely. It was real. She could tell that from the places where it had been cut in the course of its maintenance. The moist soil it was growing in was real as well. But...

Nenya stood back up and looked around again. There were no visible vents. Nothing she could see that might be circulating and

filtering the air. But if that was the case, how could the air be so bereft of smell that not even damp earth, less than a meter away, had any noticeable odor?

The shibi backed away from the planter and again looked around the room. The more she looked, the more time she spent thinking about what she was seeing, the less sense it all made to her. It was just... wrong. A liminal space that her mind just couldn't quite comprehend. A place that no living thing was meant to see, let alone explore.

Nenya's eyes turned to the eight doors in the hope that the space she currently occupied had been composed simply to discourage people from lingering in a particular space. It was a common enough architectural strategy, but how could she not linger if she couldn't tell which of the attached rooms was which? Was there some secret that someone hadn't remembered to reveal in the message assigning her room to her? Was she just too dull to see

something that most would consider obvious?

The confused and deeply disturbed shibi pulled out her comm and began to reread that long, somewhat rambling message. She was certainly in the right building. It was the Gelitech Dorm Tower Number Three. According to the message it had been one of twelve such dorm buildings in the Mashiva Mariners' University campus. All of them had been paid for by the famous makers of biogel based lifestyle goods as a showcase of 'pure', biogel inspired, high-tech architecture.

"Pure," she muttered, shaking her head as she looked for something, anything really, that might enlighten her as to how she was supposed to identify the room that had been assigned to her. "Come on. How do I find room C? Which room is C?"

While the message displayed on her comm offered no useful enlightenment, the painfully obvious that Nyena had been overlooking was

more than happy to step into its place. The building's computer responded to her question by displaying a set of lovely, glimmering purple holographic room numbers on the left panel of each sliding door. On the right panel were displayed the names of those who were assigned to live there. The blank walls between the doorways were adorned with pulsing holographic arrows that directed the thoroughly surprised shibi's attention to one door in particular.

“Ah,” Nanya sighed, shaking her head and silently chastising herself for failing to try voice commands. If voice commands worked for most functions in the living areas of starships, why wouldn't they work here as well? It was MMU, after all. “There's room C. And there's my name. I just hope it's a little less weird inside. I really don't want to spend the next four years questioning my sanity like this.”

The door leaves of room C slid aside as

Nenya approached, revealing the single room apartment that was to be her home for at least the next four years. Much to her considerable displeasure, what she saw was more of a cold, sterile chamber than a proper living space. Indeed, aside from certain consideration to the needs of student life, it didn't look all that much different from the one she'd just come from.

The small dorm room was shaped like a truncated wedge, about twice as wide at its far end as it was by the door. To make it feel even more confining, the walls curved upward and inward, following the same smoothly arched shape as the door through which she'd entered. The top of the arch was made up of a single lighting panel, its cool white glow showcasing the unsettling perfection of the room's pearly whiteness.

Instinctively drawn away from harsh interior of the room, Nenya's eyes focused on the room's broad, full height windows. These

offered a fairly sensible view across City Highway 201, otherwise known to the locals as Spaceport Road. There, a reserved copse of dense woodland served as a barrier between Mashiva's Shipyard District, and the unsightly Industrial District to the west. The only feature that blemished the deeply green strip of tangled woodland was the six track railroad right of way that cut straight toward the dorms, before vanishing into tunnels that ran beneath.

Much closer than the trees and the incessantly darting commuter trains was a narrow balcony. The center window pane could slide to one side, offering access to fresh air, a couple of nice, comfy looking outdoor chairs, and escape from the harsh whiteness of the room's interior. A harsh whiteness to which the shibi now returned in hopes of finding some way to make it more comfortable to her eyes.

Immediately to the right of the doorway was a shallow, squared off alcove in the wall. Into

this had been installed an L-shaped desk, with its main surface sticking out almost to the center of the room. Within the alcove, above the smaller, narrower arm of the desk, was a single bookshelf. Above this was a set of covered cubbies which offered a more private place to store things.

“This is so strange,” Nanya murmured as she put her deep pink duffle bag down on the floor beneath the desk, right where a chair *should* have been. But there was no chair. In fact, there wasn’t a single seat in the room whatsoever.

What there was, however, was a section of shiny black glass slightly recessed into the wall beneath the desk. It ran nearly the full length of the room, and made the puzzled shibi wonder if some of the room’s furniture was designed to fold out of the way when not in use. If that were the case, though, then why was the desk itself not retractable, considering how far it stuck out into the room? And what

was the patch of black glass on the wall beneath the bookshelf for? And the little black hemisphere beside that?

The shibbi turned to the left side of the room at gazed with considerable consternation at what, she could only presume, was intended to be her bed. Within the full-length alcove were what appeared to be a pair glistening black mattresses. One was placed directly on the slightly raised floor of the alcove. This wasn't *too* unusual. Plenty of cultures considered such a sleeping arrangement to be perfectly acceptable, her own included.

The other mattress, however, was attached to the ceiling. Was it just being stored there? Could she drop it down to double the height of the bed? Of course, those questions were purely academic at the moment. She had no way of accessing either of them, as the whole alcove was filled with a clear, slowly undulating substance.

“What in the hells?” NENYA muttered to herself as she stared into her own slowly shifting reflection on the surface of the clear... something. “This is all so ridiculous! How am I actually supposed to live in a place like this?!?”

A light, airy chime filled the room. “Hello!” a bright, feminine voice called out from nowhere in particular. “Welcome to Gelitower Three! My name is VixNeta, and I will be your very personal assistant for the duration of your residence here! Before you settle in, we’ll need to set up your personal residence preferences. Let’s begin!”

## GELITOWER THREE

---

# INFORMATION SYSTEMS

“VixNeta? Gelitower? Wait a fucking minute! This isn’t that crazy biogel lifestyle crap, is it?” Nanya demanded as she came to the abrupt and very unpleasant realization that the glistening black bits, and even the clear, undulating substance that filled her bedding alcove, were actually all made up of that famous, and infamous, living goo. “I didn’t apply for the biogel thing. I applied for information systems! Why the hell did I get assigned to this... this... place?”

“A neutral analysis of your application suggests that you have a distinct interest in biogel and biogel technology, including biogel

based information technology,” VixNeta replied. “In due consideration of these factors, you have been assigned to residence in this fully biogel equipped dorm room, controlled by the most advanced biogel information technology currently available to the public. This carefully composed environment will facilitate your familiarization with biogel and its many useful functionalities. This familiarization will assist you in informing your future educational path decisions here at M.M.U.”

“Seriously!?! I just said I was interested in biogel and wanted to take some basic elective courses!” Nanya replied with a huff. “Did I say I actually wanted to do that whole biogel thing? You don’t seriously expect me to slather myself with that black goo, do you?”

VixNeta didn’t need to say a word. All the displeased shibi had to do was look around her designated abode for the answer. Of course they expected her to have her beautiful body

permanently coated in shiny black biogel. They were probably hoping that she went much further with it too. That was how things usually went for biogel-clad freshman here, wasn't it?

This definitely wasn't how Nyenya had wanted her youthfully rebellious adventure to start. It wasn't that she found biogel displeasing to the eye. Quite the opposite, in fact, and especially when compared to all the other sorts of severely body altering horrors that were so popular with young, rebellious shibi like herself. Young, rebellious shibi who weren't going to stop at merely casting off the snappy, overly competitive, and deeply unpleasant culture that their elders insisted had to go on, lest the whole universe come to an abrupt end.

No. Nyenya and her rebellious peers were going to all go so much further than just walking away from their home. They were going to cast aside everything it was to be a

shibi. That included their shibi bodies, almost invariably given up in exchange for unspeakably monstrous forms, so utterly divorced in body and mind from their former selves that no one would ever know what they'd been. No one would ever associate them with their cast-aside culture and its ruling herd of imbecile elders again.

Despite her intentions, Nanya just couldn't quite cast off all of her unpleasant shibi ways. She really was quite curious about biogel. Still, she just couldn't help but insist otherwise. Then again, she definitely hadn't planned on introducing herself to biogel so quickly. She'd wanted time to get a feel for it. Time to decide exactly how she wanted to use it in order to cast off her shibi body and everything it represented.

Nanya began to wonder if someone, somewhere, had taken account of her people's nature. She'd showed curiosity about biogel in her application, but had been very definite

about choosing a different major. But... here she was. Surrounded by the trappings of the biogel lifestyle whether she wanted them or not. Had they actually gone and assumed that just because she was a shibi that she actually *did* want to go all-in?

“Would you like me to set myself, and this room, to the defaults typically preferred by female shibi of your age and personality?” VixNeta inquired.

“No,” Nanya replied without even a moment’s consideration. Responding otherwise was almost sure to result in her very premature transformation into some manner of biogel object in very short order. Then gain, if the computer was taking her shibi nature into full account, would ‘no’ actually mean ‘yes’?

“Excellent!” VixNeta replied with disturbing enthusiasm. “Let us begin assessing your residential desires!”

“Residential desires?” Nanya inquired. Instead of getting a clear answer, she’d been left to wonder exactly how the machine had interpreted the word ‘no’. Had it taken it as an actual no? Or had it taken it as a yes? Or was it performing a pre-programmed routine and expecting her to just play along?

“I will ask you three questions that will help ensure that the initial configuration of your residence will meet your expectations for comfort and functionality,” VixNeta replied. “Question one: Firm or soft?”

“Uh... soft?” Nanya responded with a confused shrug. Was she being asked about her ‘bed’?

“Question two: social or solitary?” VixNeta inquired.

“Uh... solitary? I guess?” Nanya replied. She was definitely more of a solitary soul, at least when it came to home life. She could only assume that was what the computer meant.

Assume, and hope.

“The third and final question,” VixNeta said. “Light or dark?”

“Uh... neither? Both? In between?” Nanya responded. “I don’t really understand the question.”

“Residential preferences recorded,” VixNeta stated with a cheery warble and a complete indifference to the shibi’s confusion. “Preferences will be applied shortly. If you have any questions, concerns, or require assistance with anything whatsoever, you may summon me by name! Please enjoy your stay here in Gelitower Three!”

“Hey! Wait a minute!” Nanya snapped. “You can’t just ask a few stupid questions and just say ‘have a nice day’ and expect me to...”

Without any real warning, the black ‘glass along the wall began to undulate and swirl amid a cacophony of sticky, gooey noises. The

shocked shibi stepped back so quickly that her back pressed into the cool, wobbly surface of the biogel that filled her 'bed' alcove. She jerked away and stumbled toward the door, watching in horror as the glistening black biogel spread into the room.

The black goo wasn't spreading out in search of NENYA. It was slowly expanding into strange, irregular shapes along the wall, and beneath the desk right next to her duffle bag. As the seconds ticked past, these forms shifted and began to solidify into things that were, on the one hand, quite familiar, yet on the other, not just a little bit disturbing owing to their physical substance.

Taking up most of the space between the desk and the windows was a big, puffy, biogel couch. Solid blocks of biogel served as end tables. Biogel 'plants' with luminous, transparent purple leaves and black stems sat atop these in black biogel pots. Two more of these plants were formed on the desk, beneath

the bookshelf. Beneath the desk formed a big, puffy black biogel chair.

No sooner had the biogel stopped moving, a bright holographic computer screen formed above the desk surface. A luminous force field tactile keyboard took shape beneath it. NENYA'S university mail account popped up without prompting. There were a number of new messages that clearly needed her immediate attention.

“Dammit,” NENYA muttered as she took a tentative step toward the desk, and the comically large chair that stood in the way. She wanted to carefully lean over it to look at the messages, but was so afraid to touch it that she couldn't get close enough to read the small text. The last thing she wanted to do was get coated from neck to toe in the gooey blackness... or worse.

“They do this on purpose, don't they?” the shibi muttered as she gingerly touched the

cool, strangely oily feeling surface of the chair with one nervously quivering finger. It was so slick and wet to the touch that she fully expected her fingertip to be covered in oil or something similar as she drew it back. Much to her astonishment, however, it was completely dry. “That’s so... strange. How can it feel so wet if it isn’t actually wet with something?”

Nenya again reached out, this time with her whole right hand. She slid it over the soft, slick back of the chair. She could just about imagine what it might feel like to settle down into its thick, disturbingly enticing cushions. To let herself get comfortable in its glistening, living embrace. To let it...

“It’s... it’s just a chair,” the shibi told herself as she bit her lip and nervously started to slide herself between it and the desk. It was so big and puffy that she couldn’t get by without rubbing her posterior firmly against it. It felt... strange. Almost wrong. “It’s just a weird chair. Just like all the other ones that are all over the

place around here. They don't actually just do things to people, do they?"

Neyna cringed as she took hold of the desk edge with both hands, and let her modest rump slowly press down into the glistening blackness. It was like sitting down on a half-filled water cushion. Before she even knew it, she'd sunk down until the sides were well above the tops of her thighs.

"Ugh," the shibi muttered as she tried to get comfortable. The biogel was a bit too cool for her liking, and the heavy softness made it difficult to keep herself sitting level. Perhaps if she leaned back and really settled it, it wouldn't be that big of a problem. Her skepticism about the biogel, however, kept her sitting straight upright.

On the other hand, at least she didn't have to feel the biogel's oiliness all over her legs. Apparently, that quality of the living substance didn't have the ability to pass through even the

thin material of her tight ‘fey-li style’ shorts. And, quite oddly, those shorts didn’t slide along the biogel nearly as smoothly as they should have if it actually been as oily as it had felt.

For a few long moments, Nanya waited to see what the biogel might do to her. She naively imagined that she could somehow escape at the first sign of trouble. At the first feeling of something strange happening. Fortunately, the biogel didn’t seem to have any inclination to demonstrate otherwise.

The shibi looked at the holographic screen. Most of the messages were just the sort of mundane things a new student would expect to receive on her first day at university. Welcomes. Listings of services. Class schedule. Those sorts of things. Two in particular, however, caught her eye.

The first was a message noting that she’d been assigned a job as a part-time assistant to

the night librarian on weekends at M.M.U.'s main library. She hadn't requested a job. Was it a requirement for freshmen? She wasn't sure, but given the fact that she'd been assigned it, she had to assume that it was.

Nenya frowned and shook her head. A weekend overnight job was definitely going to put a severe crimp in her future social plans. She was going to have to think of some way to get around it. Could she work different nights? Was it just a temporary arrangement that wouldn't last past the first semester? She was going to have to find out, but that was going to have to wait until tomorrow. For now, there was that other odd looking message to attend to.

-----

Hello Nenya!

I'm Mia, and I would like to personally

welcome you to the superb Information Systems Technology program here at Mashiva Mariners' University!

I am extremely excited to hear that you've expressed a personal interest in biogel information systems and would like you to know that I would just love to make you a part of our extensive and expanding biogel information system network. First, however, you're going to need to dress yourself in a magnificent coating of perfectly polished biogel and spend at least one month enjoying its unique qualities. Again, all you need to do is let VixNeta know, and she'll do the rest.

I hope you enjoy your biogel experience here at M.M.U., and can't wait to see you around campus covered in shiny blackness. Once you're ready to join the biogel information systems network, and I just know you're going to want to, see me in my office at the Biogel Systems building. I'll be more than happy to give

you the most incredible biogel intellectual experience that you can possibly imagine!

Sincerely, Mia Kaiow, Lead Biogel Information Systems Engineer, Mashiva Mariners' University.

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Nenya couldn't help but notice the odd wording of the offer. "Become part of the biogel information systems network?" she murmured to herself. "Does that mean... literally?"

The shibi's attention was broken by the distant and distinctly unpleasant sound of rolling thunder. She looked up from the holographic screen to stare out the window at a line of dark clouds looming ominously to the west. She knew about the Mashiva Valley's infamously intense multi-day storms, and the terrible flooding they so frequently caused. The prospect of the latter didn't really bother

her all that much. Leaving the university campus wasn't something she was likely going to have to do for at least a couple of weeks. The prospect of the storm itself, however, sent a shudder down her spine.

Back home, a typical thunderstorm rarely lasted more than an hour. Even then, they made her feel unreasonably anxious, despite the fact that she knew they'd pass by quickly. Here, however, she would have no choice but to endure the rain, wind, lightning, and thunder for two, perhaps even three, days. Just thinking about it made her start to feel the first tense pangs of anxiety in her chest. The fact that she was in such a strange and unfamiliar place only made them worse.

Nenya was torn between deciphering the mystery of the strange message and looking for some way to ease her growing anxiety. Something familiar might make her feel a little better. It might take the edge off the strangeness of her new apartment. But...

what?

The shibi's stomach rumbled. Her day had been so hectic that she hadn't found time to eat in at least the past six hours. Something nice and familiar to eat would certainly make her feel a bit better. Or perhaps something to drink. But where was she going to get it?

There was no place to obtain food in her room. As far as she could recall, there didn't seem to be any sort of food service in the building whatsoever. The looming storm made going out virtually out of the question. Of course, she could trek all the way to one of the big cafeterias using the network of tunnels beneath the campus to avoid the rain and thunder, but she just couldn't summon the energy for that.

Nenya took a deep breath and watched as a bright flash of lightning that lit up the whole valley. The storm was advancing over the vast farm fields that lay beyond the city of Runai,

just past the giant reservoir to Mashiva's west. She couldn't tell how fast it was approaching. Whether or not it was going too slow for her liking, or too fast, she didn't know. Either way, she was almost compelled by her room's layout to watch every moment of its approach. There weren't even any curtains to block the view.

Nenya was almost sure wind up with full-on anxiety attack if she couldn't get her hands on something comforting, and quickly. But... it seemed as if the only way that she was going to find the familiar comforts she desired was to summon VixNeta again. That machine which the strange message suggested had the power to cover her body in biogel. Could she actually trust it not to lead her astray?

"VixNeta?" Neyna asked, biting her lip as she waited for the computer to reply. She really didn't have a choice but to ask. Either that or go out without any guarantee that she was going to find what she was looking for. That she would have to come back to this

strange room without anything to soothe her anxiety. That she would be paralyzed by her fears at the time when she needed to be most focused and attentive, as she took her next steps into university life.

“Hello!” VixNeta responded with its unnaturally cheery tone. “How may I please you today?”

“Where do I get a drink?” Nanya asked, desperately hoping for an answer that didn’t involve further encounters with biogel.

“What sort of drink would you like?” VixNeta inquired.

“Hot lanni cream-tea,” Nanya replied. It was common enough that it should be available someplace like M.M.U. “Were do I get hot lanni cream-tea around here?”

VixNeta didn’t reply. Instead, and much to Nanya’s considerable surprise, several odd sounds came from behind the biogel panel

beneath the bookshelf. It was almost like someone had hidden an old style vending machine in the wall. Clunk. Thunk. Whoosh. Hiss. Then the biogel melted away to reveal a small alcove containing an insulated can of hot lanni tea.

“Your hot lanni tea is ready,” VixNeta announced.

For a few long moments, the astonished shibi was left speechless. Apparently, her room did have food service after all. “Does this thing do anything besides drinks?” she asked as she reached out and took hold of the can. She took a sip of the sweet, creamy tea, reveling in its light, floral aroma.

“A selection of popular basic per-packaged snacks is available,” VixNeta replied. “You may peruse the menu on your comm using the M.M.U. Life application.”

“Thank you,” Nanya replied, taking another sip of tea while trying her best to focus on her

remaining messages. No matter how much she tried, however, her mind kept switching back and forth between the looming storm and that strange biogel network message. VixNeta had been mentioned in the message. Perhaps the computer might know more about what it actually meant. “VixNeta?”

“Yes?” VixNeta replied. “Do you require something else?”

“This message here is asking me to become part of the university’s biogel information systems network,” Nynea said, pointing to the holographic screen. “What does that really mean? Does it mean a network of people who are doing biogel information systems stuff? Or does it mean... like... literally becoming part of an information systems network? Like... a computer network or something like that?”

“That is an interesting question with components that may prove to be quite personal in nature,” VixNeta replied. “An

exploration of its aspects requires due consideration prior to commencement.”

“Uh...” Nanya replied with a raised eyebrow.

“Presuming that you have considered the matter appropriately,” VixNeta went on, “do you genuinely desire that I help you commence your personal exploration of the question?”

“Well... yeah,” Nanya replied as another, somewhat closer flash of distant lightning distracted her from the computer’s unusually worded reply. “Why else would I have asked?”

“Very well,” VixNeta answered with an even cheerier tone than before. “I will now assess the data available. Once my assessment is complete, I will assist you in opening your exploration.”

“And how long will that take?” Nanya questioned with considerable skepticism. What could possibly require that much time for the computer to assess? Surely it already had all

the relevant information at hand!

“Up to three hours,” VixNeta replied. “I shall inform you when the assessment is ready. You may then commence your exploration at your leisure.”

“Fine,” Nenya replied, rolling her eyes. It didn’t make much sense. Then again, nothing so far had really made any sense.

Another flash of lighting caught her eye. The storm was slowly getting closer and now she had yet another cause for nervous anticipation to add to the thunder and lightning. But what else could she do but wait?

“It’s probably just trying to make me read all this other stuff first,” the shibi sighed as she turned back to the other messages. They were certainly more important than that strange message, and not a few required a timely reply. “Let me get through all these and then maybe I’ll lay down on the couch and try to relax. If I can relax. But with this storm

coming... I just don't know..."

## GELITOWER THREE

---

# BEDTIME STUDIES

Thunder rolled hard and heavy through the night sky. Bolts of lightning flared through the low clouds, and smote the tall lightning rods that poked up from the roof of almost every building in the city. Vast quantities of energy were thus directed into massive underground steam generators tucked away beneath the low lying districts, and in the deep bowels of the New City proper. These directed steam into giant turbines, not to produce energy, but to drive the massive pumps that kept water from the city's vast maze of subways, tunnels, and even some of the long abandoned Old City mines.

No one was really sure why the old, abandoned mines needed to be kept pumped dry. The valuable ore had long since been plundered, leaving nothing but bare tunnels, vast stopes, and myriad dangers that no sane soul would dare to face. Collapses. Bad air. Fungus. Mold. Slime. Magic flowstone. And even, if rumors were true, a colony of gorgons who happily decorated their cavernous abode with the petrified bodies of interlopers who chanced to discover their home.

Nenya sighed. For a video channel dedicated to documenting the long history of the City of Mashiva, she would have expected more urban facts than urban myths. Then again, urban myths were just as much part of the city and its life as the facts, weren't they? But still...

It was getting late. She desperately wanted to sleep, but the thunder and lighting were keeping her awake. There seemed to be no escape from them. No escape other than the distraction provided by the holographic video

screen that hovered upon the surface of the bedding alcove, opposite the couch on which she lay.

It had been quite the surprise that the universal media control app on her comm had summoned the holo-screen. It had been her last hope of entertainment after discovering that the M.M.U. Life app was only good for summoning snacks, checking schedules, making appointments, and buying university branded things. She would have thought a place like M.M.U. would have had a universal app for just about everything. Or at least one app to control everything in her room. As it turned out, there wasn't one, unless you counted VixNeta, and that was definitely an app that she didn't want to download onto her own personal comm.

Nenya's thoughts turned from the odd documentary and its speculations about the depths beneath the Old City. It was late. Very late. VixNeta had said it would only take three

ours to get its information in order. Surely, far more time had passed than that.

Almost as if on cue, a soft chime sounded. “Good evening, Nenya,” VixNeta cooed with a softness to match the darkness in the room. “I have completed my assessment of your prospects with regards to the biogel network question and am pleased to report that your inquiry can be answered far more quickly than had originally been estimated.”

“Huh?” Nenya replied, thoroughly perplexed by the computer’s declaration. Was she really *that* tired, or was it actually trying to deliberately confuse her?

“Would you like to commence the first step of your exploration now, or would you prefer to wait until some other time?” VixNeta inquired.

Nenya sighed and rubbed her eyes with both hands. She was tired, but so long as the storm persisted, she doubted she was going to be able

to get any sleep unless she could figure out how to cut her apartment off from all the thunder and lightning. Or at least cut herself off from it all.

“I’d rather go to bed,” Nanya replied with a shallow yawn. “Someplace where I can’t see or hear this damned storm.”

“Would you like me to configure your bedding alcove to satisfy your desires?” VixNeta asked.

“Well... sure,” Nanya replied without knowing quite what that was supposed to mean. “I mean, I guess. What are you going to do with it?”

Just as with her first can of lanni tea, VixNeta replied with actions rather than words. The clear biogel that filled the bedding alcove melted away. The floor mattress puffed up. A heavy blanket of glistening blackness parted from its surface, while pillows formed at the end closest to the windows. Finally,

along both sides of the alcove opening, wavy curtains of shimmering black biogel took shape.

“Oh! Uh... that’s... that’s okay, I guess,” Nanya stammered at the alcove’s transformation into something one step short of mundane. After spending so much time sitting on her biogel desk chair, and laying on the biogel couch, the prospect of laying down on a biogel bed, perhaps even under a biogel blanket, didn’t seem quite so perilous. Assuming that clear biogel didn’t come back, that is.

“That’s not going to fill back up with the clear stuff while I’m in there, is it?” the shibi asked as she stood up and walked to the alcove opening. While the room had previously smelled almost belligerently neutral before, the air was now taking on the piquant scent of natural latex rubber. This wasn’t particularly displeasing, but it did suggest that the bedding in the alcove might not be quite so innocent as

that elsewhere in the room.

“You may request a return to the encasement configuration at any time,” VixNeta replied.

“No thank you!” Nanya responded as she looked down at the soft, puffy mattress. She wondered just how deep she was going to sink into its surface. Was it going to feel as oily as the chair and the couch? More importantly, was it going to feel cool beneath the blanket, or was she going to be warm and cozy? Should she keep wearing the warm, soft pink exercise pants and shirt she liked to use for pajamas, or should she slip into something more appropriate for a nice warm bed?

“Nudity is the universally preferred manner of sleeping in a biogel bed,” VixNeta observed. “The uniformity of sensation greatly enhances the quality of relation and sleep.”

Nanya pulled her shirt off and tossed it onto the couch. “Okay. I’ll try it.”

Despite her worries about VixNeta's periodic bouts of duplicitous language, nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Even the strangest things in her room were turning out to be far less strange than she had imagined. The biogel was just performing the functions of various mundane objects, and doing so in ways that offered so many options that no other technology could match. That was something she could definitely appreciate, and something that she found herself now wanting to explore much more thoroughly.

Nenya untied the belt string on her pants and let them fall to the floor around her ankles. She kicked them back toward the couch, and they landed at its foot, right next to her pink duffle bag. She took a deep breath. She bit her lip. She stepped up onto the alcove floor.

“You have no activities scheduled for tomorrow,” VixNeta noted. “Would you like to sleep in?”

“Sure,” Nenyra replied as she reached down to pick up the edge of the biogel blanket. She could barely get a grip on it.

“Allow me to assist,” VixNeta said as the blanket slid down sufficiently to allow the tired shibi easy access.

“Thank you,” Nenyra replied as she flopped down onto the glossy black mattress beneath.

“Ah!” the surprised shibi gasped as she instantly sank into the warm, soft mattress so far that she was almost completely beneath the level of its upper surface. Only the somewhat firmer pillows kept her head raised above the rest of the puffy blackness.

Nenyra was practically helpless, wiggling and squirming about as she tried to get herself in the middle of the bed. It was no use. The biogel was just too oily against her skin.

“Can you make this any firmer?” the shibi asked. “So I’m not sunk in so far?”

Again, the response was an action rather than words. Nanya found herself rising up as the mattress became considerably less puffy. She still had trouble getting herself straight in the bed, but at least she could move around with considerably less difficulty.

“Thank you,” Nanya said, rolling onto her back and closing her eyes as the blanket began to slide up over her. “Oh... that feels so...”

“Pleasant?” VixNeta replied.

“Yeah,” Nanya responded with a deep, sonorous sigh as the oily-slick, and pleasantly heavy blanket seemed to flow up her legs, over her tummy, and around her modest breasts. It almost felt like it was liquid.

The curtains closed, casting the bedding alcove into complete darkness. The rubbery membrane seemed to absorb the sound of the thunder, while a fan blew cool air into the chamber, drowning out what was left of the sound with its soft hum. The shibi took a deep

breath. The storm was gone. She could finally relax and get some sleep.

“Before you dream,” VixNeta softly cooed as the shibi hovered on the cusp of falling asleep, “would you like me to commence your exploration as you rest?”

“Yeah, sure,” Nanya replied, neither really hearing or comprehending what the computer was asking.

“As you wish,” came VixNeta’s reply.

Nanya was overcome by the scent of warm rubber. As her mind wavered on the edge of dreams, the oily slick biogel seemed to hug her more closely. It began to creep in the open pockets of air around her legs. Up around her sides. Even up into the crease of her firm little rump.

It was just a dream, of course. A dream born from watched videos, imagined sensations, and the very real feel of the biogel bed in which she

lay. An arousing dream, that made her feel sexy. Even horny.

Nenya could feel the biogel pressing into her body. It slipped smoothly into her tight little ass. It opened her soft pussy and thrust deep inside. It felt so good. So dreamy. So... perfect.

The shibi could no longer move. It was as if the biogel bed had encased her with its now quite firm surface. It was touching her everywhere except her head. It was touching her... and loving her. Loving her to sleep with its tender thrusts and firm rubs against her hypersensitive little clit.

Waves of whirling, dreamy arousal filled Nenya's half-conscious mind. Pulses of growing pressure gripped her between the legs, and within her quivering abdomen. One by one, they drove her toward climax. She was helpless to resist.

All at once, she came crashing down. Firm thumps took the place of pulsing pressure. A

wave of euphoria cast a final layer of fog over her already dampened mind. Sleep took hold, even as the final orgasmic pulses shuddered through her body.

Nenya drifted into the world of real dreams. Dreams that she wouldn't remember. Dreams that wouldn't affect her life in any way, shape, or form whatsoever. But that first dream... the dream that wasn't really a dream... that would have consequences that no one could possibly have foreseen. No one, perhaps, save another, very particular university overnight librarian...

## THE NEW LIBRARIAN

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# MIDNIGHT

The silence was deafening.

Well, it was *almost* deafening. Every so often, its all-encompassing peacefulness was quite rudely interrupted by a soft rustle. The hushed sound of a chair sliding on smooth carpet. The low rumble of a wheeled ladder as it was rolled ever so carefully along the meticulously dusted and polished wooden shelves.

The exquisite shelving, along with the rest of the Mashiva Mariners' University Library's furnishings, was all hand crafted from native timarri oak. The wood was stained in a truly lustrous deep brown which glimmered in the

light of the brass lanterns that hung over the aisles. Brass accents were everywhere, from the corners of the reading tables, to the railings of the upper level balconies, to the hinges of the locked cabinets that protected the more delicate and valuable books in the library's extensive collection. Potted plants were placed all around the lower level, specially selected for their naturally humidity controlling properties.

Also located on the lower level was the library information desk. This was tucked in between the lifts on the eastern end of the library and kept staffed all day, every day. The assistant librarians who called their modestly equipped little open office home were mostly graduates with library science degrees who hoped to use the job as a stepping stone to a full fledged academic librarian position, or perhaps to a senior position at one of the city's numerous public libraries. Few intended to stay on for very long. Being a librarian was one thing. Dealing with students who didn't know

that they didn't know what they were actually looking for, 8 hours a day, 4 days a week, however, was something else entirely.

It wasn't that Chyka found the job stressful. Being a night librarian was actually quite boring. Granted, she was never lost for new things to read, but that could only go so far to keep her mind occupied.

Every so often, the little snow leopardess would get a strong yearning to cast off the stuffy mantle of 'librarian' and leave M.M.U. in search of something different. Normally, those moments of yearning would vanish the moment someone decided that they needed her help to find that one book that they'd heard about, but didn't actually exist, because they were remembering something completely different than what they'd been told. Recently, however, those moments of yearning were becoming more frequent. They were also starting to tug in her directions against which her common sense ought to have rebelled.

Chyka had long since become desensitized to the more repellent aspects of transformative xenoexperience, of course, and that was even before one considered all she'd been through in 'that other life'. It had only been a few days since she'd found herself all the way back at this point in time. One would have thought it would have been hard for her to slide back into the life she'd been living before... before all that. In reality, she hadn't had any difficulty at all.

It had only taken a good, thoroughly exhausted night's sleep to leave the little snow leopardess feeling as if 'that other life' really had just been a dream. A dream with a strange premonition of the future. A premonition that had momentarily given her strange powers over things that she couldn't quite comprehend anymore.

So far as Chyka could now tell, she'd never actually been anything besides an assistant librarian. At least, that was how she felt deep

down inside, despite knowing full well that there were real world consequences of that 'dream' still taking place all around her. Perhaps it was for the best that her connection to it all was fading. The less she remembered, the safer she would be. Safer, that is, unless that lost branch reality came looking for her...

Chyka looked at the clock and sighed. It was midnight. She was supposed to be getting a brand new student assistant on the weekends. That student was now two hours late showing up, though given all the stress new freshman were under, even before the start of classes, that was no real surprise. They often forgot, or thought they were supposed to start only after classes had begun. It was just as well. The only thing worse than being bored in the library alone, was being bored with someone else.

*PSHHHHHH!*

Chyka's ears perked up. A door had opened way down at the far end of the library. With

nothing else to do, she tried to deduce which door it had been. Was it one of the lavatories? No. No echo. It couldn't be the head librarian's office either. She was off on weekends. Stairwells? Perhaps. Most of the students used the stairs. But... it sounded just a tad too sharp. Given the lack of other possibilities, it must have been one of the lifts. But who was wandering into the library on a stormy weekend night, two days before classes were set to begin?

A wave of heavy rain washed over the library's three story high windows. The storm was finally starting to taper off. The thunder and lightning were gone. So too was the constant rumble of heavy rain. This had been replaced by a light patter, occasionally punctuated with a momentary downpour.

It was one of these downpours that now left Chyka's sensitive ears deaf to what might be happening all the way down at the other end of the library. Granted, she could look at the

video feeds that were displayed on the south wall of her office. Turning her head, however, seemed a bit too much like work. Instead, she looked up from her xeno-kink magazine and down two long lines of old fashioned reading desks that ran the full length of the library. She didn't see anyone.

“Odd,” Chyka remarked to herself as she looked back to her magazine and the fascinating, very well illustrated article on the pleasures of becoming marketable vegetable produce. “Must be one of the cleaners.”

The cleaners had been working on the library's two upper levels for hours. Their job involved dusting, replacing air filters, steaming the carpet, and engaging in all of the other various sundry tasks that were required to keep the library looking pristine. As far as the little snow leopardess knew, they were going to leave the bottom floor for last. That way all the dust that had been blown down the open, three story galleries at each side of the

library could settle before being cleaned up.

Chyka waited for the usual sounds that marked the beginning of that final stage of cleaning. There was, however, no whirl of the handheld vacuum brushes that were used to clean the books. No rolling of the ladders to get them out of the way. No sounds whatsoever, that could be heard over the roaring downpour.

“New student, I guess,” the little snow leopardess murmured to herself as she began to explore the bizarrely tempting wonders of ‘melonification’.

M.M.U.’s maritime book collection was quite popular with new students looking to get some sense of the scope and history of the fields in which they were about to become educated. Of the three sets of shelves to each side of the reading desks, this collection filled all but the outward facing shelves. Those were mostly filled with casual reading and periodicals, made more easily accessible to students who’d

come to the library for some peace and quit among the lush greenery and comfortable seating the library's outer wall.

It was from the collection of recent periodicals that Chyka had acquired her magazine. At the moment, its contents were far more interesting than the mystery of the opening door. The very idea that someone had engineered a plant that could transform someone like herself into a vaguely humanoid, super-sweet watermelon seemed quite ludicrous. The fact that there were plenty of volunteers to undergo the process seemed even more so. But there it was. And there they were. A thousand credits a piece, and if the reviews were accurate, worth every last bite.

“I can't even imagine what that must be like,” the little snow leopardess murmured as she tried to imagine what it must feel like to be a melon. To be getting sliced or cubed and eaten. And what would happen to her soul, trapped in the juicy flesh of the melon? Would

it actually be consumed along with her melon body? “I wish there were some way to know. To just try it. But there never is, is there?”

The downpour abated. New sounds greeted the little snow leopardess’ ears. There was a soft snap. A hesitant squitch. A plaintive squeak. The variety of stretchy, rubbery sounds seemed to have no end as their source wandered their way in her general direction.

Chyka again looked up over the help desk counter. She may not have been able to see who was approaching, but the sounds of their approach were more than enough to give her a good idea of what sort of person it might be. For starters, it simply *had* to be someone who’d only recently been introduced to a neck to toe quit of biogel. Every biogel wearing soul would make some pretty kinky sounds as they walked around, but only a biogel newbie could manage to make that kind of racket. Given that this was M.M.U., that biogel newbie was almost surely a student who’d just gotten

themselves snared by the whole biogel lifestyle thing.

It wasn't just any old student, either. Anyone but a freshman would have much better things to do with their new biogel suit at midnight on a weekend. The more the little snow leopardess thought about it, however, the more she was convinced that even a freshman would have much better things to do with their new coating of shiny black goo.

Chyka shook her head and turned back to her magazine. Still, the rubbery sounds were getting closer. And closer. And closer. Again, she looked up over the counter. As she did so, the rubbery sounds came to a very abrupt halt...

## THE NEW LIBRARIAN

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### THE HELP DESK

“Uh... hello?” Chyka inquired in her soft, ‘librarian’s voice’ as she looked around to try and figure out exactly where all the squeaky racket had been coming from. “Can I help you?”

The rubbery sounds began again. They were coming from off to the left, several cross-aisles down from the help desk. They seemed much more pensive now, as if their source wasn’t quite sure she actually wanted to be seen. There were several starts and stops before the tan skinned elf-ear poked her head out to look this way and that. As far as the little snow leopardess could tell, the woman had become

completely confused with the library's very simple layout.

“Hi,” Chyka said a little bit louder. She couldn't help but wonder this new student had imbibed a bit more 'nip than she should have over the course of the evening. “You seem a bit lost. Can I help you?”

“Oh! Ah... I... uh...” the elf-ear sputtered as she staggered out from between the bookshelves. The expression on her face was strained as if she were struggling with some heavy burden, even though she wasn't carrying anything. Nor was she dressed in anything, save a glossy black coating of biogel. “I'm... uh... having trouble...”

“Oh!” Chyka exclaimed as the awfully familiar looking elf-ear tried her best to hobble toward the help desk on the high platform 'soles' that her biogel coating had put under her feet. “Let me help you!”

“Thank you,” the elf-ear replied with a look

of considerable relief on her face as the little snow leopardess opened the swinging help desk gate and started toward her. “I’m... I’m so sorry I’m late. This... this suit is so hard to walk in. I didn’t realize how long it would take me to get here.”

“It’s okay!” Chyka replied, taking one of the elf-ear’s right arm in her left and leading her toward the desk. “It happens this time of year. A lot. At least you’re working out the kinks before you have to try to walk to classes. Some girls wait to go out for the first time until the very last minute and... well... it’s something to watch, I’ll say that much.”

“I’ll... I’ll bet,” the elf-ear replied, doing her best to feign a laugh as the little snow leopardess got her leaning on the high help desk counter. “I really hope this job doesn’t require any walking right now. Does it?”

“Ah! So, you’re my new assistant, are you?” Chyka asked as she held open the gate for the

elf-ear. “Come in and sit down before your legs give out. Shoes that tall are pretty exhausting for us short girls, aren’t they?”

“They really are,” the elf-ear replied as she followed the snow leopardess’ gaze to one of the several fancy faux-leather office chairs that were located behind the desk. She slowly settled her perfectly polished backside down into the thick cushion amid a new cacophony of rubbery squips, snaps, and squitches. “Sorry! I just can’t help it.”

“It’s okay,” Chyka chuckled as she returned to her own chair, right beside the elf-ear. “All the biogel clad girls are noisy like that when they sit down.”

“It’s so embarrassing though,” the elf-ear replied, shaking her head and blushing slightly. “So... um... I... I don’t actually remember your name from the message though I was kind of...”

“Tied up dealing with the shiny black goo,

eh?” the little snow leopardess replied with a warm smile. “It’s okay. I’m Chyka. And, I have to confess, no one left message letting me know who you were. They just told me someone was going to show up tonight.”

“I’m Nanya,” the elf-ear said with an expression that might possibly be interpreted as something approaching a smile.

Chyka’s heart skipped a beat. No wonder she’d looked so familiar. But... how was it even possible? Hadn’t the Nanya she’d known spent years trapped in Gelitech’s biogel network? Clearly, this Nanya had only just encountered biogel. And... she didn’t look quite as old as the Nanya who’d revealed herself in the bathroom back at Gelitech. Was she actually the same person, or was Nanya just a common name among the shibi?

“Pleased to meet you, Nanya,” Chyka responded as she tried to figure out the puzzle. Perhaps this was the same Nanya, and she’d

been sent by Lady Anwae to... what? Ensnare her in the Unity again? Or... had she done something amid all the time jumping to upset more than just her own path in life?

Try as she might, the little snow leopardess could not, for the life of her, figure out how she could have affected something that took place prior to her waking up aft her the final time jump. She hadn't done anything before that point in the timeline, had she?

A sudden flash of insight came to Chyka. If it wasn't something that she'd done, then maybe it was something that she hadn't. She'd never gone back in time to the ancient Dari temple, had she? But how could her brief time there have affected the present without affecting it in a much larger fashion?

The little snow leopardess sorted through her memories of that trip into the distant past. The arrival at the temple. Her being led down beneath, into that terrifying chamber. The pit.

And... the mi'ah who had let herself be dragged down into the Nine Heavenly Hells. The tan skinned, elf-eared mi'ah. Was it actually possible that the self sacrificing mi'ah and Nanya were somehow related?

Chyka shook the puzzle from her mind. It didn't really matter, did it? This was a whole new reality, and she was just going to have to accept it all for what it was.

“Have you even worked in a library before?” the little snow leopardess inquired.

“No,” Nanya replied, shaking her head. “It's not very easy, is it? And all the walking...”

“Don't you worry about walking!” Chyka replied with a chuckle. “This isn't like a public library. Students are expected to re-shelf their own books.”

“Ah,” Nanya responded with a shallow nod.

“Typically, if they need more than a few for

something, they'll just snag copies from the book-fab," Chyka went on, gesturing toward the large machine that took up about a quarter of the office frontage, between the gate and the left wall. "Day staff takes care of any of the bulk returns from the academic staff and whatnot. We only have to run around if there's a problem that needs to be documented, or someone's looking for something that isn't where it's supposed to be. Stuff like that. We also do any paperwork on books that have gone properly missing, though that pretty much never happens around here. Unless it's something that's valuable in and of itself, we just use the book-fab to make a new one."

"So, basically, we just sit here and wait for someone to come looking for help?" the elf-ear asked with a raised eyebrow.

"More or less," Chyka responded. "It's honestly the perfect time to do assignments and study. Well, for you. For me... I kind of just read a lot. There's really not much else to do."

“Ah,” Nenyia replied. “So... why do they need me to help you?”

“No idea, really,” Chyka responded with a shrug. “I guess it’s just supposed to be part of the maritime education. Everyone has a job aboard ship, even when they’re still training. Speaking of which, have you perused the library layout and orientation book yet?”

“Not yet, no,” Nenyia answered.

“They didn’t send them to you, did they?” Chyka replied, shaking her head as she got up from her chair. She turned to the overhead cabinets on the right side of the office. She slid a pair of particularly worn looking book copies to the edge of the desk with one foot, before stepping up onto them in lieu of a step-stool. “Don’t worry. They never do. It’s not like there isn’t plenty of time to read it here, though. It’s really well written too. It’ll get you oriented with everything in no time.”

“Sounds good,” Nenyia responded as she

watched the petite snow leopardess stretch to open one particular cabinet door.

“Almost...” Chyka muttered to herself as she pulled the door open before reaching inside to grab at a small blue binder which was quite helpfully labeled ‘Library Orientation’. It wasn’t proving very easy to pull out, however, and the little snow leopardess found herself needing to get up and kneel on the desk to get a good grip on it. “Almost...”

As the little snow leopardess pulled the recalcitrant binder out, it snagged on an unlabeled cardboard box. Someone had jammed the box in between the binders and office supplies, and now the changing pressure on it caused it to pop out with considerable force.

“Ah!” Ckyka exclaimed as the box went tumbling over her shoulder. “Dammit! Look out!”

The box hit the floor just behind the

surprised snow leopardess' unoccupied chair and immediately burst wide open. It's contents, tightly wrapped in a strange, glistening black bubble wrap, bounced clear across the office. As it tumbled, the bubble wrap started to unroll. By the time that it came to a rest, by back of the self-service book-fab, it was almost completely unwrapped.

“Oh! I hope that didn't break! It looks important!” Chyka exclaimed as she climbed down from the desk and raced to pick the unusual object up off the floor. It was a mask of some sort, with a sensuously curved clear face plate mounted surrounded around its edge with a thick, shiny black seal. It reminded her of a face hugging dive mask, or the face plate of an envirosuit, minus the rest of the helmet. “What... what the heck is *this*?”

The mask had clearly been designed to seal onto the face of an average humanoid. The thickness of the seal meant it would conform to just about any facial structure, and there

was plenty of room under the clear plate for a feline muzzle. What really caught the puzzled snow leopardess' attention, however, was the lack of any means through which the wearer could breathe. There were no air holes. No artificial gills. No hose connections. Nothing at all.

“There’s no way to breathe in this, is there?” Chyka commented as she lifted the mask up to her face. Surely, there had to be some way for the wearer to breathe. Were the materials porous? Was there something hidden in the thick seal? She just couldn’t help but want to know, and there was only one way to find out.

“Oh,” the little snow leopardess muttered as she the scent of fresh latex rubber filled her nose. She hesitated. The smell of the soft black seal was virtually indistinguishable from the scent given off by Nenya’s biogel suit. Was the seal just made of natural rubber, or was it actually biogel?

“Hmm,” Chyka murmured as she reached down for the long sheet of tangled up bubble wrap. “Is there anything else in here to say what this is?”

“I thought I saw a folded up paper or something when it was unrolling,” Nanya helpfully noted. “I didn’t see where it went.”

Chyka shook the bubble wrap, but nothing fell out. She then took a good, hard look around the office floor. “Ah!” she exclaimed as her eyes were drawn beneath Nanya’s chair. “There is it!”

The little snow leopardess cast the bubble wrap aside and knelt down to grab the plain looking little booklet from beneath the elf-ear. For the briefest of moments, her nose brushed against Nanya’s right leg. A new smell filled her nose. It was... faintly musky. Oddly sweet. And... it was making her feel kind of... sexy.

Chyka quickly grabbed the stray booklet and returned to her chair. The last thing she

wanted to do right now was to start getting the hots for her new assistant. Who knew what would happen if she started emitting her own pheromones? Would there be a biogel fueled feedback loop leading to a virtually involuntary round of lesbian loving under the desk where no one could see it? Granted, it wouldn't be the first time the carpet down there had been graced with sweet midnight lovemaking... or so the rumors said. She didn't have any real reason to doubt them.

“What does the cover say?” Nanya asked as the little snow leopardess thumbed through the small booklet.

“It says... Gelitech!”

## THE NEW LIBRARIAN

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### THE MASK

“This is *sooooo* weird,” Chyka said as she perused the booklet with a mixture of fascination and consternation. The former came from the astonishing nature of the mask. The latter from the fact that she’d been so close to falling victim to its biogel driven powers. “Can you even believe this? It says that if you put this mask on, it’ll instantly transform you into a biogel coated, VixNet controlled Vixie Personal Assistant!”

Nenya didn’t seem to be particularly impressed. In fact, she seemed to be rather put off by the concept. “What’s a Vixie Personal Assistant?” she inquired with a slightly raised

eyebrow and deeply suspicious glare at the mask which now lay on the desk between them. “Is that anything like that stupid VixNeta thing I have to deal with in my dorm room?”

“Sort of,” Chyka replied as she read further. “Wow. Like... it literally turns you into a computer controlled zombie and uses your brain to add ‘organic’ interpretation of requests and results. Complete corenet network integration. Information. Domestic work. Bedtime entertainment. Like... who would willingly do this to themselves?”

“Network integration?” Nanya asked. “Getting turned into a computer controlled zombie? Don’t tell me that’s what they meant...”

“What *who* meant?” Chyka asked, looking up from the booklet to see that something she’d said had made the shibi visibly uncomfortable.

“I got this message about joining the

university's biogel network," Nanya replied, nervously clasping her hands together as she glanced up at the little snow leopardess before looking back down to stare at the mask. "It was an invitation. It was really strange. And when I asked VixNeta about what it all meant, it... it tricked me into letting it cover me with this biogel stuff while I was sleeping."

"Tricked you?" Chyka questioned. There were lots of rules about what Gelitech stuff could and couldn't do at the University. Tricking people into letting it do things to them was strictly off limits. "I mean, I've been told the thing can be pretty cryptic at times, but actually tricked? Are you sure you didn't mishear something and agree to it by accident? Though... it's supposed to verify that once or twice afterwards, isn't it?"

"How would I know?" Nanya replied. "All I know is that it wanted permission to explore the answer to my question about what joining the biogel network really meant, and then it

did this to me. And it never gave me an answer, either. All it keeps telling me now is that I need to explore the possibilities myself. Does that mean I have to go to the network place and see for myself?”

“Uh... right,” Chyka responded with a frown. Was this just an aberration, or had something about Gelitech changed as a result of all the time shifting? “Don’t do that. It’s really not good for your mental integrity.”

“Why?” Nenya questioned.

“Because that involves getting your whole body melted into a mass of liquid biogel, complete with your soul stuck inside, and then getting pumped into the physical biogel network,” Chyka explained. “Then you’ll spend the rest of forever all mixed up with every other mind in there, stripped of your individuality, doing the bidding of whatever particular soul is in charge.”

The little snow leopardess wasn’t supposed

to know anything about biogel networks, of course. More importantly, she wasn't ever, *ever* supposed to let anyone else know that she knew those things. Her safety depended on it. A sane, rational future for herself and those she'd once known probably depended on it too.

By the time she caught her error, it was much too late for Chyka to correct herself. The best that she could hope for was that her warning might simply dissuade Nanya from getting turned into a digital nutcase in the biogel network. Of course, if Nanya started telling everyone else about it...

“That’s... awful!” Nanya stammered.

“I guess it could be worse. Anyways, everyone who decides to do that knows exactly what they’re getting into beforehand,” Chyka replied in an effort to make the shibi’s being targeted for inclusion in the biogel network seem far less significant than it was. “There’s lots of paperwork and all that. You’re safe as

long as you don't actually start down that path."

Safe, the shibi almost definitely wasn't. There had to be some reason that they had picked her for the purpose. Some quality they'd judged would make her the perfect member of the gestalt. Some trait that seemed to justify starting her on the path against her will. They weren't going to give up on her easily. Not unless someone else got a hold of her first and made it impossible.

"So... this Vixie mask thing," Chyka said in an effort to change the subject. "This is so strange and fascinating. It says here that this particular version of the mask doesn't actually transform its wearer's body into biogel. It's just a mask, and it can actually be taken off by its owner. I mean, the mask's owner, not the wearer. Hmm..."

"What do you mean, hmm?" Nenyia inquired, eyeing the little snow leopardess with

suspicion.

“It makes you wonder, doesn’t it?” Chyka responded as a pang of that yearning for change forced its way into her mind. “What it’s like and all that. And... you can actually just try it to find out. There’s no commitment. Well, except for having to wear biogel for the rest of your life bit. And having someone trustworthy to ‘own’ you. But still. You have to wonder what it’s like, right?”

“I suppose,” Nanya replied, eyeing the mask with visible disdain.

“I don’t mean you, specifically,” Chyka replied with a laugh as she started to wrap the mask back up in the shiny black bubble wrap. “And anyway, this thing isn’t mine. The last thing I want to do is mess with it and wind up being told that I get to be Vixie as punishment.”

Chyka wrapped the mask back up as best as she could, tucking the booklet in between

layers as she went. It took a few minutes, but she managed to get it wrapped in a reasonably acceptable fashion. She was no professional packer, though. Getting it back in its box was completely out of the question, no matter how much packing tape she might try to use. She was just going to have to tape a note to it and hope no one was too upset that she'd accidentally opened it.

“You know, I kind of remember something about us maybe getting a Gelitech assistant for the library at night,” the little snow leopardess remarked as she set the mask back down on the desk between the two. “I thought they meant something like VixNeta. Then when I saw you all covered in black goo, I figured maybe it was you. But now... I really have to wonder if it's this Vixie thing. But who's going to wear it? It's not like any of us librarians are into the whole biogel thing. I mean, except for you.”

Nenya shook her head. “I don't think so.”

“Are you sure?” Chyka asked, half-musingly. “It’s not like it would change your actual job here, would it? It’d keep you out of that whole biogel network mess too, wouldn’t it?”

“I guess,” Nanya replied, shrugging her shoulders. “But... I just... I don’t know.”

“It’s not like you have to commit to it, right?” Chyka responded with a mischievous smile. Her new assistant’s failure to offer a clearly negative response had gotten her thinking. If the shibi was the library’s Vixie, then they couldn’t just make her vanish into the biogel network, could they?

*Here I go, messing with the timeline again,* the little snow leopardess thought to herself as she pondered the possibilities offered by the mask. Nanya was the only thing she had right now that connected her to experience is that alternative timeline. She really didn’t want to lose her to the biogel network, even if there was still the chance that she’d be taken back

out. Even then, it would likely still require Chyka to don her as a biogel suit, with all the complications that would inevitably result. It just wasn't worth the risk.

The other option was to just let the matter go and risk losing Nanya before she could entangle her in some other way. Given how aggressive they'd been to get her on the road into the biogel network, that path seemed very much out of the question. She had to do something soon, and the Vixie mask seemed like the perfect solution.

The Vixie mask was also the perfect solution to Chyka's boredom and curiosity about xeno-kinks. It would be so much more fun to toy with a brand new Vixie than to sit there reading kinky magazines while the shibi just stared off into space with virtually nothing to do all night. All she had to do was convince the woman to give it a try.

"It's not permanent," Chyka mused. "I'll bet

the nights will just fly by too.”

“Even if I wanted to,” Nanya said with a deep sigh, “how could I know that you wouldn’t do anything to me when I’m wearing it?”

“Because I’d get in lots of trouble, that’s why,” Chyka replied. She didn’t really know how much trouble she’d actually get into, but she was sure that, at the very least, it would involve getting her own body back into biogel. “You just know I’d wind up with the mask on *my* face if I did anything you wouldn’t want. Or worse.”

Nanya looked down at the wrapped up mask with a slight frown on her face. Several long minutes passed as her expression shifted between displeasure, disdain, curiosity, and uncertainty. It was obvious that she found the mask tempting, though not quite tempting enough to try it without some serious thought.

Chyka opted not to press the issue. She

turned back to her magazine and its lurid article about tourists being turned into giant, succulently sweet melons. If her new assistant was going try on the mask, she was going to have to convince herself to take the last step on her own. Otherwise, she'd probably never trust the little snow leopardess to take care of her while she was wearing it.

More long minutes passed before Nanya reached out to pick up the mask and begin to unwrap it. She pulled out the little pamphlet and began to read it for herself. What was left of her disdainful look slowly faded as she flipped through the pages. "This sounds more like a toy than something serious, doesn't it?" she asked. "I suppose it couldn't hurt to try it, could it? But... but only for a little while. You'll take it off me after a little while? Yes?"

"Sure," Chyka replied, doing her best not to sound too happy with her assistant's decision. "Maybe an hour? How about an hour? Or two if you look like you're enjoying it? Or three if you

look like you're *really* enjoying it? How does that sound?"

"Okay, I guess," NENYA replied as she fully unwrapped the mask. She ran her fingers over its thick, jelly-like seal. Countless little rubbery squeaks and snaps ensued. She began to blush ever so slightly, no doubt recalling the rubbery cacophony her own suit of biogel like to make whenever she moved.

Chyka bit her lip as she watched her companion lift the mask up and gaze into the inside surface of glass faceplate. For a moment, the shibi hesitated. Then she pressed the mask home with both hands.

The seal fit snugly around NENYA's face. It covered everything but the area between her eyebrows and her chin and extended halfway out over her cheeks. For a very brief moment, it looked like the shibi couldn't breathe, but then the biogel seal began to liquefy. So too did the biogel around her neck.

Nenya looked quite shocked as the liquid biogel from both sources quickly spread over her head, completely sealing it in a perfectly smooth, exquisitely polished, and disturbingly featureless coating. She looked even more shocked as the glass faceplate began to darken. After a few short moments, it had become as shiny black as the biogel that coated her body.

Chyka gawked in curious fascination as the shibi's face vanished behind the darkening faceplate. It was almost instantly replaced by an illuminated faux 8-bit style computer face which reproduced the shibi's expression with uncanny accuracy. Shock became alarm as her body shuddered. Alarm became horror as her body began to fall limp. The 8-bit eyes then closed and the mouth vanished as her body again shuddered a few times.

The little snow leopardess was on the verge of assuming that something had gone horribly wrong when her companion suddenly sat bolt upright. "Uh... are you okay?" she inquired as

the 8-bit face switched to a perfectly neutral expression. “Hello? Is anybody home in there?”

“Hello! My name is Vixie!” the computer controlled shibi replied in a voice just like the shibi’s, only smoother and more ‘idealized’ in tone. “In order for me to perform my duties, I require a registered owner. If you wish to claim ownership of me, please state your name now.”

“Chyka,” the little snow leopardess replied, conveniently forgetting that she wasn’t actually the one who owned the mask. “Chyka Riyalli.”

“Thank you Chyka!” Vixie replied. “In accordance with all applicable laws, I am now no longer a person, but an object in your personal possession. You may utilize me in whatever manner most pleases you, so long it is within my physical and digital ability. Please state your desires at any time, and I shall do my best to fulfill them!”

VIXIE

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## THE DIGITAL ZOMBIE

There were certainly benefits to having a computer controlled zombie girl as a companion during long, boring nights at the library help desk. A snow leopardess could ask her anything and she'd have an answer for your almost instantly, relayed in the smoothest, sexiest voice that she'd ever heard. Nothing was off limits. Not even Chyka's strangest kinks.

Along with the silky voice came instant access to videos she'd never seen before. Deeply intimate videos that seemed to hit her particular fetishes in just the right way. Videos she would never get away with watching on

the library computer. Instead, they were projected as a holo-screen by the Vixie mask itself, carefully hidden away under the counter where no one would be able to see what she was watching.

Then again, Chyka couldn't *really* enjoy the digital zombie conversation and videos the way she'd have liked here in the library. She couldn't let herself get too horny, lest she face the embarrassment of having to face some random interloper coming up to the help desk while she was half way into her umpteenth orgasm. If she really wanted to make the most of Vixie, she was going to have to contrive a way to take the thing home. But... that would break her promise to the shibi trapped behind the mask.

Breaking her promise, and the shibi's trust, was the last thing the little snow leopardess wanted to do. She'd already blown past the promised three hours. It was four-thirty in the morning. The rain that had pounded the city

for three long days had finally diminished into a foggy drizzle. By the time the sun was well up, it would be replaced by clear skies.

It wouldn't be long before people would be up and about. There would be at least a few visitors to the library before the morning crew started to show up at six. She really couldn't delay any longer. She had to take the mask off the shibi.

Chyka sighed as she looked up from the rather disgusting and completely unscripted video of rowa hunting during the opening of the Rowa Vale. The genuine reactions of the completely unsuspecting victims as they were snared, spooaged in, and transformed into new rowaform monsters were certainly something quite different to see. But, despite the confusion and sometimes even terror, they still somehow managed to make it look so... kinky. Sexy, even. It piqued the little snow leopardess' curiosity in ways no other rowa video had. She sorely wanted to watch it

through to the end, but that would take two more hours. It was time that, at least for the moment, she didn't have.

“Vixie,” Chyka said, looking up at the digital zombie that was still sitting rather stiffly upright in the chair beside her, despite her best efforts to get the digital zombie to relax. “End the current video, please.”

“As you wish,” Vixie replied with a shallow nod and a soft digital smile on her 8-bit face.

The holo-screen froze for a moment, with a stunned tigress held aloft by a rowa flea, just as the creature's spoo slathered, penile tail had penetrated her anus. It only took a moment for the holo-screen to fade away, but that one image became drilled into the little snow leopardess' mind. She felt a sudden, unnatural urge to go someplace where she could watch it happen for real.

“Would you like me to save your video progress for later?” Vixie asked with a

questioning expression.

“Sure,” Chyka replied, though she knew that picking it up again a third of the way through probably wouldn’t get the motor between her legs running nearly so well as starting over. Or at least going back to the point before that buxom tigress started on the path to her anal encounter.

“Would you like to watch something else now?” Vixie inquired. “Or may I satisfy some other curiosity? It has been several hours since we were introduced. Do you require a drink? Something to eat? I can visit the vending machines on the main floor if you wish.”

“No thank you,” Chyka responded with a reluctant shake of her head. She’d become so transfixed with Vixie and the videos that she’d completely lost track of time. Her lunch was still sitting in the little refrigerator that was located under the shelves, in the corner behind the self-service book-fab. “I have something in

the fridge already.”

“Is there anything else I can do for you right now?” Vixie asked.

“No,” Chyka replied. “Well... actually. I think it’s time that mask of yours came off. The pamphlet didn’t say anything about how that works. Do I have to do anything specific? Or do I just, I don’t know, ask you to remove it yourself? How does that work?”

“Under normal conditions of use, you may verbally request that I remove my mask,” Vixie responded with a slightly disappointed looking 8-bit expression. “However, I would much prefer to keep it on unless some critical functionality which only my host alone can provide is required.”

“Okay. That’s easy enough,” Chyka noted with a nod and a feeling of deep relief. Given the lack of instructions in the pamphlet, she was afraid that the process would be made deliberately inconvenient, just for the sake of

discouraging removal. “And yes, I do require Neny’s functionality right now.”

“I would very much like you to enlighten me with respects to exactly which functionality is required,” Vixie replied with a confused 8-bit expression. “By acquiring this knowledge, I can take steps to enhance my own functionality. In doing so, I can hopefully eliminate any need to be separated from my host, thereby maximizing my utility.”

“I need Neny because... well, I just need her and not Vixie right now,” Chyka replied, shaking her head with mild frustration at the mask’s programmed faux-desire not to be parted from its host. “It’s complicated. Don’t worry about it. You’ll be back on her face soon enough, for sure.”

“I see,” Vixie replied. “Though I cannot understand your reason for wanting to part me from my host, the prospect of a quick rejoining is most pleasing.”

“Good,” Chyka said, nodding at Vixie. “Now that we understand each other, please take off your mask.”

“I’m very sorry,” Vixie replied with a sheepish 8-bit expression. “I’m afraid that I am unable to complete your request at this time.”

“Wait... what?!?” Chyka sputtered as real frustration set in. “What do you mean you can’t take the mask off at this time? You said all I had to do was ask? And the book... I promised her I’d... I mean... *why the hell can’t you take it off?!?*”

“I’m sorry that my inability to complete your request displeases you,” Vixie answered with an apologetic 8-bit expression. “I am unable to part from my host until its body and mind are fully attuned and programmed for maximum comfort and minimum stress while transitioning to, and serving as, a Vixie unit. This process is currently incomplete. If the current rate of progress is maintained, the

process will complete in roughly... thirty-eight hours. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you.”

“What... what am I supposed to do now?!?” Chyka stammered. “I can’t just... I don’t know... what the fucking hell!?!”

The little snow leopardess was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Not only was she going to have to somehow convince the buyer of the mask that Nenya’s putting it on had just been the result of an overly curious freshman taking musing banter a bit too seriously, but she was going to have to convince said buyer that her own claiming ownership of the resulting Vixie unit had been the result of her own lack of initiation into such matters. And then, to top it all off, she was going to have to convince the mask’s buyer to let her keep the Vixie unit.

“Goddess, I’m going to have to replace this thing, aren’t I?” cost,” Chyka groaned, turning

to her computer to try and find out. “Vixie masks. Not permanent. Oh... *really?!?* There’s no listing for non-permanent Vixie masks on VixNet!?! Come on! I need to know how much they cost!”

“Vixie masks such as the one used to create this Vixie unit are currently only available for in-person purchase at Gelitech Gelariums,” Vixie replied with a knowing 8-bit expression. “The current listed price is twenty-five thousand credits.”

“Twa... twenty-five *thousand* credits!?!” Chyka stammered in utter disbelief. “Where am I supposed to get twenty-five *thousand* credits!?!”

“Gelitech offers financing for eligible individuals,” Vixie answered with a strange, almost mischievous expression. “Application is in-person only. Fortunately, the nearest Gelitech Gelarium is very close by. It will open to visitors at oh-six-hundred.”

Chyka groaned and rested her head in her hands. “Dammit. Dammit. Dammit. I knew that thing was going to be trouble. I just knew it. Dammit. How am I going to get myself out of this? Twenty-five thousand credits!”

“I don’t really have a choice, do I?” the little snow leopardess moaned. “I’m going to have to go there and try to get one on credit. But what if I can’t? What are they going to do to me? Dammit... just... dammit!”

VIXIE

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## THE PLOT THICKENS

“Well, well, well,” a certain familiar, biogel clad jaguaress chuckled as she leaned on the help desk counter and smiled down at the visibly distraught snow leopardess. “It looks like you didn’t have any trouble finding my gift, did you?”

“Wha... hey!” Chyka responded with wide-eyed shock and laid-back ears. “How long have you been standing there?!?”

Given how distracted the little snow leopardess had been with her kinky rowa transformation videos, the jaguaress could well have been standing there for an hour or more and she likely wouldn’t have noticed.

How much had she heard? How much had she seen? How much had she learned about the little snow leopardess and her budding obsession with girls getting their cute little fluffy asses bugged?

“Not too long,” the jaguaress replied with a disappointed smirk at the softly blushing snow leopardess. “Just long enough to see that despite my best efforts, my gift wound up on someone else’s face. How you managed that, and with her of all girls, I just don’t know. But... ah well. I guess you can’t win them all, can you?”

“Wait... did you *seriously* expect *me* to put that thing on *my* face?” Chyka questioned with an audible combination of confusion and displeasure.

“Yes,” the jaguaress answered. “I did.”

“You’re nuts,” Chyka responded with a shallow scowl. Beyond that, she really didn’t know what to say. Who was this jaguaress,

exactly? And more importantly, what in Goddess' name was she up to?

The woman had been so helpful the first time they'd met. She'd clued her in to Dr. Lae, helping her to end all the time jumping madness before it had even begun. The more the little snow leopardess thought about it, however, the more she could have sworn that she'd encountered the jaguaress once before as well. Once before...

"Wait a minute," Chyka said, one eyebrow raised as a sudden realization came over her. "You. You're the one who convinced me to join Gelitech, aren't you?"

"Shhh!" the jaguaress hushed, raising a lone glistening black finger to her lips. "Don't say another word. Neither of us are supposed to know anything about that, are we?"

The little snow leopardess bit her tongue and stared into the jaguaress' deep amber eyes. She was the one who'd convinced her to

join Gelitech. But... that hadn't happened in this timeline had, it? So how could she know? Unless...

“Well, it seems that you're not quite as ready to abandon yourself to glossy black servitude this time around, are you?” she went on with a sly, mischievous smile. “It's such a shame, really. I had so many sexy plans for the two of us. But I guess it shouldn't be that big of a surprise. Things are... different now, aren't they?”

“Not really,” Chyka replied, shrugging her shoulders.

“Oh, really?” the jaguaress responded with a raised eyebrow. “Surely you'd have noticed by now. Odd things. Things that don't quite match how they were back... then? Really?”

“No,” Chyka answered with a looked around the library office. The only thing she could see that was any different than it had been the last time around was Nyena. Her presence was

certainly odd, but it seemed at least vaguely plausible that the preemptive defeat of Shi could have brought their paths together in this way. “I mean, there’s Nanya but...”

“Mmm,” the jaguaress responded with a purr. “Things haven’t played out quite the same way, have they? What else? What about your grandmother not being tied up in Dari? And... what about *you*?”

“What about me?” Chyka questioned with a deep sigh. She’d already had a long night and the jaguaress’ game was starting to get awfully tiring. It wouldn’t be long before people started finding their way to the library either. “Can you just get to the point, please?”

“You used to have your own little place in Shipyard, didn’t you?” the jaguaress noted with a smirk. “Now you’re living in that fancy upscale apartment of your grandmother’s. A place she never had back then, did she? And you. Nowadays you’re all caught up with those

irrepressibly kinky inclinations of yours...”

“How do you know about that!?!” Chyka snapped. No one, besides perhaps her grandmother, knew about her kinky inclinations. There wasn’t a chance in all the hells that she’d told anyone about them, let alone those very specific urges to offer her herself up to various manners of total, mindless servitude. “Who told you about...”

“Does it really matter?” the jaguaress asked with a sly grin.

“Yes, I think it *does* matter,” Chyka replied crossing her arms and glaring up at the jaguaress. Had her grandmother actually told this woman about her kinks? Or... or were her memories and everything still a part of Omega? Was *she* still a part of Omega, despite all impressions to the contrary? That alone would explain so much.

“Don’t worry yourself about it,” the jaguaress cooed. “It really won’t change a thing

in the long run. All that matters is that things have changed. Not a lot. But just enough to have made some certain, very important things rather... unpredictable.”

“I want to know!” Chyka demanded. “Who was it?”

“It was someone special,” the jaguaress replied with a thoroughly disingenuous smile. “Someone very, very special. And someone who wants to make very sure that the past gets laid to a very permanent rest.”

“That’s not an answer to my question,” Chyka replied, crossing her arms with considerable frustration.

“You know it’s only a matter of time before it all catches up to you,” the jaguaress continued. “You’re going to go and set the whole world on a path straight into the Nine Heavenly Hells. Again.”

“You have to be kidding me,” Chyka

snapped, glaring up at the jaguaress with angry frustration. The past already was the past, so far as she was concerned. The path no longer existed. “How can I possibly do that when everything... when the past is the past? It’s gone. And I’ve got no way to relive it.”

“That’s what you think,” the jaguaress replied, glancing at the silent Vixie unit. “And yet, there she is. Nanya. Your intimate partner once again. Or at least she will be once you get her home, won’t she?”

“Hey! I promised not to make her do anything...” Chyka retorted with an angry scowl.

“Unless she was enjoying it, hmm?” the jaguaress hummed.

“You *were* standing there all the time, weren’t you?” Chyka snapped.

The jaguaress laughed. “And she *will* enjoy it, I can assure you. The mask has already

taken away her ability not to. She's yours as much as she was back when... you know. Even when the mask comes off."

"What? Are you... are you kidding me?" Chyka sputtered in disbelief. "I don't want to..."

"What *you* want is irrelevant," the jaguaress replied. "The past is working very hard to bring you back into its fold. To correct its mistakes. It brought you into Nenya's companionship again. What's to stop it from leading you to Jumie? Sakie? *Ki'su*? What's to stop it from setting us all back on that path, only this time with no way out?"

"That... *beast*. Whatever you want to call it. The dragille. The past. It's *gone*," Chyka hissed. "Forever. It's not coming back to fix its mistakes again. Period."

"The dragille?" the jaguaress replied with a raised eyebrow. "Was all this really *its* doing? Or was it just one of many such powers caught

up in the greater plot while seeing to their own nefarious objectives. You know. Like Shi. And Ki'su. And... *you!*"

"What!?!?" Chyka responded with considerable incredulity. "You have to be kidding me! I didn't do anything Omega didn't push me into. That *you* didn't push me into. You were the one who started this mess and, quite frankly, I'm done with it! I'm not playing your game anymore. I've moved on. If there's still a problem, then someone else can deal with it from now on."

"Someone else *is* dealing with it right now, aren't they?" the jaguaress answered with a low, insidious chuckle. "Or at least she's trying to. But you seem to have other ideas at the moment."

"What do you mean by that?" Chyka questioned with another angry snarl. "By trying to turn me into a Vixie? What good would that do to stop 'the past'?"

“It was just a small step on the path to other... things,” the jaguaress replied, shaking her head in defeat. “But that’s neither here nor there right now. I tried. Let me just give you a bit of advice before I leave you with your new friend. Some sort of drastic change is going to have to happen to your future path through this world. If you’re not going to make it, someone else is eventually going to try and make it for you. And this time around...”

“I know!” Chyka answered, pounding the desk with one fist as she glared up at the jaguaress. “No one is going to force me to do anything. No one! Especially not you!”

The jaguaress sighed and turned to leave. “Suit yourself. Just don’t ever say that I didn’t warn you!”

“I’m not becoming anything,” Chyka snarled as the jaguaress walked away. “No one is going to dare to touch me. Not as long as grandma has anything to say about it. And she’s

definitely going to have an awful lot to say...”

VIXIE

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## WALKIES

“Oh Goddess,” Chyka muttered under her breath as she led her new companion through the broad pedestrian tunnel that connected the library to University Station. “This is so embarrassing!”

The little snow leopardess lowered her head and did everything she could to avoid eye contact with the many passers-by who were making their way to and from the main areas of the M.M.U. campus. On any other day, most of them would have been too absorbed in their own little worlds to have noticed that there was anything unusual about the biogel clad woman walking beside the little snow

leopardess. They'd just walk on by without giving so much as a second glance to the beautiful, glossy black shape in their midst. That was how common biogel wearers had become on campus. No one cared anymore. Well, not until today, apparently.

Today, absolutely everyone was gawking at the glistening black figure walking beside Chyka. Her mask seemed to draw their gaze like a magnet. They stared at its brightly illuminated 8-bit expression of vaguely contented neutrality. No doubt they wondered if it actually reflected the feelings of the woman trapped behind its otherwise featureless surface.

The little snow leopardess bit her lip and did her best to ignore all the gawking. It was hard. Too hard, in fact. What were they all thinking as they watched her lead her Vixie down the corridor? Were they curious? Were they fascinated? Or were they shocked that she and her partner were so uncouth as to try to play

out their shiny bondage fantasy in public?

In spite of all the gawking, only one passer-by actually said anything that Chyka could hear.

“Oh! Just like those ads that are all over the place this morning!” the tigress had whispered to her friend as they’d paused to watch the objects of their attention pass by.

The little snow leopardess had almost stopped to ask what ads the tigress was talking about. She hadn’t seen any ads for the Vixie mask. Ever. But, in spite of her curiosity, her sense of embarrassment was just too deeply entrenched at this point. She just couldn’t do it.

Chyka’s curiosity wasn’t to be left unsatisfied, however. In the very last tunnel section before University Station, video panels on both walls displayed directions and information on local events, attractions, and goods that might be of interest to a passing

traveler. As was so often the case, they were showcasing today's featured product from the Gelitech Gelarium. That product, of course, was none other than the Vixie mask.

"No wonder everyone's staring," Chyka murmured as she watched the ad for a few moments before continuing on into University Station's mezzanine level. It featured a Vixie working in store, assisting a cute ashiri shopkeeper with various sundry tasks. Intimations of physical intimacy were on full display, with the Vixie and her owner seemingly quite comfortable with plenty of touching that was much more than casual in nature.

"What are the chances they'd feature that today of all days?" the little snow leopardess murmured to herself as she broke away from the ad before it started to give her ideas. She'd made promises to Nenyia. Promises that she couldn't quite keep now. But she could still do her best, and that would mean not taking

advantage of the situation no matter how much she might have wanted to.

The little snow leopardess took a deep breath and sighed. Seeing that ad was at least a small bit of relief. Given the proximity to the Gelarium, everyone was probably thinking that the two of them were out modeling. Or, given her own visible embarrassment, that the Vixie was out modeling by itself and had decided the best way to do it was to follow a random pedestrian around all morning.

The latter idea put a brief smile on Chyka's face. It was just the sort of thing the girls at Gelitech would arrange as a bit of a prank. And if the poor random stranger somehow managed to tolerate it, they might just wind up being allowed to take the Vixie home.

"Come on," Chyka said, leading the Vixie toward the elevator that led down to the lower level's north platform. "Let's grab a train and get back to my place so we can... uh..."

whatever.”

Life as a Gelitech model had been a fun life, but given all that the mysterious jaguaress had said, the last thing she wanted to do was let herself get tempted into the company’s grasp once again. She really had no choice but to assume that Omega had sent the jaguaress to try to snare her again. To take her into the fold using the Vixie mask. And then... what?

Just having Nanya around all the time was going to be a problem. Theoretically, Omega could use the shibi’s biogel coating to snare her against her will. She could lay down in bed and wake up and coated in biogel, just like they’d almost certainly done to Nanya herself. Or worse, she could wake up an inanimate biogel gummy sex doll and shipped off to be fucked day and night by some anonymous alien that had been specially selected for its willingness and ability to fill her over and over and over...

“There goes my imagination again,” Chyka

huffed to herself as the lift door opened. “I really need to learn how to keep my mind from wandering like that.”

Thankfully, there was no one inside the rectangular lift. Thankfully, and oddly, University Station was a bit of a major transportation hub for those wanting to avoid getting entangled with the maze of Spaceport Station, or the sheer size of South City Station beyond. Catching an empty lift at any time of day was a rarity, let alone during the beginnings of the morning commute.

“I’m not really that different than I used to be, am I?” the little snow leopardess asked herself as she led her Vixie into the lift. “I don’t think so. I’ve always been like this. Right?”

The lift door closed. It began to descend.

Much to Chyka’s surprise, the video panels on the lift walls were showing Vixie Mask ads. These were different from the ones being

shown in the tunnel corridor. They featured domestic scenes, suggesting that Vixie servants could vastly improve life in a biogel equipped home.

“Weird,” Chyka remarked as the lift came to a stop. “I don’t remember these masks being more than prototypes back then. Maybe things really have changed...”

The lift door opened, and the little snow leopardess stepped out onto the broad subway platform. There were two parallel platforms on University Station’s lower level. The south platform served the Yellow and Pink Lines. The north platform served the Blue and Green Lines.

Chyka intended to head straight home on the Green Line. Fleet Street Station was only two blocks from Mimarri Tower. The trip would be quick. She’d be home in no time. Then she could figure out just what to do with her Vixie, and how to explain it all to Nenyra

once she could finally get the mask off of her face.

A chime sounded as Chyka led her Vixie along the north side of the platform, toward its eastern end. She wanted to get a seat in the second or third car. These would stop closest to the exit at their destination. It was something she did purely out of habit. It made the trip seem a little bit faster.

On the tunnel wall, across the subway track, were numerous video displays showing a wide variety of advertisements. Most of these were fairly mundane ads for tourist traps, products, and sundry services. A few were ads for Gelitech products. One of these screens, of course, was advertising the Vixie Mask.

A chime sounded. “Yellow Line Westbound arriving at platform four.”

As Chyka moved down the platform, she could see the screen’s cycling through different ads out of the corner of her eye. Every time she

glanced at them, the Vixie Mask ad was right across from her and her Vixie companion. Was it just a coincidence, or was the ad actually following them?

A train rumbled into the far side of the South Platform. It was painted a very pale blue-gray, with a broad yellow stripe down its side.

*That would be totally Gelitech, the little snow leopardess thought as she pondered the question. Detecting Gelitech products in use and then advertising them to those who might be watching was definitely something Gelitech would do. Would do... but she couldn't remember them ever actually doing it while she was a model. Some things really have changed, haven't they?*

Again, a chime sounded. "Blue Line Eastbound arriving on platform one."

Chyka stopped about two thirds of the way down the platform and stepped back toward its

center. The Blue and Green Line trains typically alternated with one another. They shared tracks through Spaceport Station before branching out along their own paths. Both ran big loops through the whole of Mashiva, offset from one another by a few blocks except when traveling through the area of the Spaceport.

A train with a blue striped down its side rumbled into the platform. It had barely stopped with the doors opened, and dozens of travelers poured out. Most of these were tourists heading for the escalators leading to Anwae Arena and the Gelitech Gelarium beyond. There were a few other folks headed the other way, toward the University. And then there was one particular face that seemed as out of place as it did familiar.

“I was hoping I’d catch you here,” Dr. Kidan whispered as he pulled Chyka to the back side of the platform’s east lift.

“I’m not supposed to know you,” Chyka

whispered back as she found herself practically pressed against the cold concrete wall by the soft-spoken scientist.

“I know,” Dr. Kidan replied. “Listen. I have to be quick, so I can’t tell you this more than once.”

“Tell me what?” Chyka questioned with a raised eyebrow.

“You need to be very careful,” Dr. Kidan replied. “Things are different. People are different. Even the ones you think that you know. Not drastically, mind you. But subtly. Like something’s missing from our collective past. Something very minor, yet significant enough to shift things just a bit.”

“How do you know?” Chyka asked. “You weren’t...”

“Variances in the transdimensional flow,” Dr. Kidan answered. “Errant patterns that don’t quite make sense. I’m still trying to

figure out where things went wrong.”

“Wrong?” Chyka inquired. “What do you mean, wrong?”

Dr. Kidan looked around with a deeply concerned expression on his face. “It just can’t be right. I don’t have time to explain it. You just need to be very careful. Don’t automatically trust anyone. Not even the people you’ve always trusted the most. I need to go. I’ll talk to you again when I can.”

“I don’t understand,” Chyka replied as Dr. Kidan turned away and headed for the Anwae Arena escalator. “What the hell was that all about?”

Again, the chime sounded. “Green Line Eastbound arriving on platform one.”

“That was weird,” Chyka muttered as she stepped up to the edge of the platform. First the jaguaress trying to get her to put on the Vixie mask and now the Gelitech scientist

saying she couldn't trust anyone?

The Green striped train rumbled into the platform. Its doors opened.

“Come on, Vixie,” Chyka said as she led her companion onto the train. “I’m not letting Gelitech tell me what to do with my life. Let’s go home.”

## DIVERGENCE

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### SETTING THE STAGE

The crowd shouted lewd encouragement as the beautiful brunette leopardess enthusiastically mounted the sleazy xenobar's semen slathered dancing stage. They laughed with giddy excitement as she knelt there in the slippery mess of warm, sticky spoo without the slightest bit of hesitation. They cheered wildly as she rose with stunning physical confidence, countless strands of translucent white cum hanging from her arms and legs. They went positively nuts as she reached out for the glowing pink force pole, and smeared its ethereally solid surface with the alien ejaculate that coated her hands.

To the casual observer, it seemed almost as if the crowd had never seen someone mount the stage so perfectly willingly before. That this sexy leopardess was the only one who had the supreme self-confidence to do it without question. Given how they'd just treated her, there was a pretty good chance that she was.

The lovely leopardess was already naked. The crowd had made good and sure of that. How she hadn't noticed the signs was anyone's guess. The intense staring. The hushed whispers. The approving nods. She hadn't even had a chance to order her first drink.

Before she'd even known what was happening, the questionably dressed leopardess had been parted from her slutty, translucent green miniskirt and bikini top. These vanished into the hands of strangers, who no doubt considered them rightly won trophies not to be returned under any circumstances. Moments later, she was being pressed toward the stage, her ears filled with

sexy coaxing and promises of fun and physical pleasure. Somewhere along the way, some unseen tramp had managed to get a big double shot of cherry Eronip into her mouth. She didn't have any other choice but to swallow it.

Despite the rough handling, the hopelessly naive leopardess was more than happy to play along. She pranced around the pole without even a single passing thought about what she might have gotten herself into. It didn't really matter. She was more than used to writing checks that her soft, fluffy rump had a hard time cashing.

Exactly who had sent her the very personal invitation to visit the nastiest xeno-club in Mashiva was a total mystery. The prancing leopardess assumed it was one of her patrons. Clubbing wasn't really her thing, but curiosity had gotten the better of her. Or perhaps it had been the free admission, free drinks, and a full night's worth of free xeno-kink entertainment. That alone was worth at least five hundred

credits. How could she possibly pass up a deal like that?

Granted, the increasingly dis-inhibited leopardess hadn't expected to be shoved up onto the stage herself. She didn't particularly mind, though. She was always looking for a new market full of big alien cocks wanting to pay for the chance to spend a night jammed all the way up into her tight little fey'li pussy. How could she pass up such a great chance for free advertising?

There was no way for the broadly smiling leopardess to know just how many acts of public pussy pounding had been performed on the stage prior to her arrival. It couldn't have been many, though. The bar had only been open an hour. Still, there was already so much musky smelling cum on the stage that it looked like she'd just missed out on a comically messy alien tentacle orgy.

*Hells, wouldn't that be so much fun? Jumie*

asked herself as she swished her tail from side to side and did a little pensive twirl around the pole. Getting two holes filled was fun, but she'd never been triple penetrated before. She'd always wondered what it might feel like. Or better yet, how about getting a bit of 'all the way through' tentacle action?

*Dammit, just thinking about it makes me feel so horny!* the aroused leopardess thought as she swung herself around the pole a bit more quickly. She didn't need much help to get her irrepressibly horny motor running at full speed. Anything that looked even remotely sexy would do. Even things that she'd never willingly try out for herself.

*I wonder what's going to fuck me?* Jumie asked herself as she made a much more aggressive spin around the pole. Her tail whipped outward over the heads of the nearest members of her gawking audience. No doubt quite a few of them would have been happy to answer her question themselves.

Whatever those pussy gazing members of the audience might have wanted to do to her wonderfully inviting rump, whoever was responsible for running the club had *very* different ideas. As the twirling leopardess started to get a bit friskier with the pole, a floating orb appeared from the darkness above. Its upper half was clear and partially filled with whitish fluid. The bottom half was silver, with an articulated metal tentacle hanging out from a hole in one side.

Dribbles of fresh alien cum bubbled out of a hole in the tentacle's tip, adding to the mess that already covered the stage. The pungent odor was rather different than that of the existing splatters of alien spoo. It smelled of brine, flowers, and something that resembled slightly burnt caramel. It was a scent that the surprised leopardess had smelled before, and it sent a sharp, deeply displeased shudder down her spine.

*Oh... oh no! That's... that's a...* Jumie thought

as the orb zipped around her head, spreading its strangely stimulating scent all around her. The crowd fell silent as her eyes opened wide with the dawning realization that she hadn't been pushed up on stage to have sex with some alien monster. She'd been pushed onto the stage so that she could *become* an alien monster!

The stunned leopardess was way outside her comfort zone. She was all about riding alien cock. Getting herself filled with copious gobs of hot semen. Having countless little sperm swimming around in her belly, looking in vain for eggs ripe and ready to fertilize. That was fun. And for such a beautiful and willing fey'li, it was quite profitable too.

There was certainly no profit in being permanently transformed into an alien creature. Into a rowaform bug-thing. It would mean no more sex. No more pleasure. And no more Jumie. She might as well just cease to exist altogether.

The horrified leopardess had always been so careful to ensure that the alien ministrations of her nightly customers weren't going to cause any permanent changes to her mind or body. She only accepted blue or green card customers. Even 'safe' yellow carders who might cause temporary effects were a no-go unless they had a positive reference from the Erotic Services Guild. Orange and red were completely off limits.

Jumie was now deep in the red. One little taste of that bug-spoor was all it would take to send her on a terrifyingly quick, one-way trip to becoming a mindless member of the local rowa hive. But... what could she do at this point? What other choice did she really have?

Here she was, on the stage in the middle of a packed xeno-club. Countless sets of eyes were gazing up at her warm, fluffy ass. Every one of them was expecting her to dance. Dance while her ass was transformed into some sort of cold, hard bug-butt. While her body was

transformed into some vile little rowaform monster. While her mind was reduced to something barely better than animal intelligence.

To the nervously dancing leopardess, there didn't seem to be any way out. She'd let them strip her naked, after all. She'd let them push her up onto the stage. She'd done it willingly, without a single word of objection. And... for some strange reason she no longer felt particularly bothered by what she knew was about to happen to her.

*Goddess, Jumie thought as she found herself completely unable to feel upset about what that rowa orb was about to do to her beautiful body. It's that Eronip, isn't it? That stuff is so strong. I never should have swallowed it!*

It might have been the Eronip. It might have been the smell of the dripping bug-spo. Most likely, it was a combination of both that had left the increasingly sexy feeling leopardess

with virtually no inhibitions. No concept of peril, or risk, or consequences. The world seemed to contract to the here and now. The prospect of stimulating sensations was totally compelling.

Images of rowa transformations danced around in Jumie's head. She'd watched enough xeno-porn to know exactly what it all looked like. Now she wanted to know what it felt like. In fact, now she *needed* to know what it felt like.

*It can't feel that bad, can it?* the completely dis-inhibited leopardess asked herself as she continued to dance around the pole. The orb continued to follow her, the tip of the tentacle wandering closer and closer to her face. *So many people do it. It has to be fun, right?*

The tip of the tentacle was soon hovering right in front of the Jumie's quivering muzzle. It squirted gobs of warm bug spoo all over her face, neck and chest. The wonderfully

stimulating scent filled her nose and made her level of sexual arousal soar. It was all she could do to keep her mouth closed and resist the temptation to lick her lips.

The entranced leopardess couldn't hold out forever, though. The effect of the hot rowa spoo's scent was just too overpowering. She just had to open her mouth. Lick her lips. Take in the soapy-sweet flavor.

Jumie began to open her mouth. She began to run her tongue along her lower lip. The mechanical tentacle took it as an invitation to force itself inside.

“Wow!” came a gasp from the audience.

“Right in the mouth!” came another.

The tentacle clearly had no intention to linger in Jumie's mouth any longer than it had to. No sooner than it had gotten in side than it forcefully released a massive wad of sticky rowa cum. Its piquant flavor was almost

overpowering. It was all she could do to resist gagging as the tentacle wiggled around and making it difficult to swallow.

“Did she actually swallow that stuff?” came a stunned exclamation from the audience as Jumie finally managed to gulp down the first gob of rowa cum.

“That’s nasty!” came another as a second mass of hot spoo filled the leopardess’ mouth.

Again, Jumie struggled to swallow. Again, the moment she managed it, another massive gob of hot rowa jizz filled her mouth. The tentacle then withdrew, but not before adding yet another massive squirt to the mess that covered her muzzle and upper chest. The sloppy mass of hot spoo began to ooze down between her bouncy breasts as the orb zipped off whence it had come.

“She really liked it, didn’t she?” someone said as the cum filled leopardess tried to regain her composure.

“I think she did!” someone else replied.

*That... that wasn't so bad*, Jumie thought to herself as she licked the remaining bug spoo from her lips. She started to twirl around the glowing pink force pole again and smiled at her audience as if nothing unusual had just happened. *I wonder if it tastes like that when its fresh from the rowa cock...*

## DIVERGENCE

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# ONE WAY TRIP

No sooner had Jumie returned to twirling around the pole and wiggling her furry rump for her audience than she began to feel a weird, tingly tightness in her abdomen. Then a spot just beneath her bellybutton started to feel strangely firm and leathery. Moments later, a matching spot in the small of her back began to feel the same way.

*That feels so strange,* the cum slathered leopardess thought as she looked down to see a that a small patch of her long, soft belly fluff had fallen out. The soft supple skin beneath had been replaced by pleasantly smooth, though disturbingly stiff, patch of off-white

flesh. *Oh... wow. That's so... so... weird!*

“Is she already changing?” came a question from the audience as the fascinated leopardess did her best to keep prancing and twirling around the pole while watching the change that spreading out from the initial spot on her tummy.

“Yeah! Awesome!” came the reply.

“She swallowed so much,” came another. “She’d gonna go quick!”

Changing, Jumie definitely was, and far faster than her mind could really keep up with. Before she could really comprehend that her body really was undergoing a physical transformation, the change had spread half way down toward her crotch, and all of the way around her hips. *Oh... oh wow... it's going so fast! I don't even have time to really feel it!*

The firm, leathery flesh was already forming into distinct grub-like segments. The

borders between these rubbed and interacted in strange ways. It made the puzzled leopardess' body feel quite strange and alien, despite the fact that it had barely covered her belly and lower back. Nor had it done anything particularly anatomically significant.

As the moments ticked past, the transformation accelerated. The slowly twirling leopardess gasped as she felt the leathery firmness run down between her butt cheeks. Her anus seemed to pull inward for a brief moment before vanishing into the dull smoothness that had consumed it. The soft rolls of her beautiful rump hardened into one leathery segment, making it momentarily quite difficult to move her legs.

It was just as well that Jumie was forced to limit her dancing. She could feel the change wash down her front. The hardness pulled up on her soft, womanly folds. It tugged on her sensitive little clit. And, as the transformation started on its way down her legs, it pulled her

feminine flesh flat. For a very brief moment, the suddenly, deeply aroused leopardess' pink inner flesh was on display for all to see.

“I would sooo do that!” a member of the audience exclaimed as the formation of her first leg segments forced her to bend over a bit, showing the juicy opening of her enticingly tight vagina for a particularly lucky portion of the audience to see.

“You go girl!” came a shout from someone way in the back.

“I wonder what that feels like,” came a remark from much closer, and from the first woman's voice that Jumie had heard since she'd arrived in the club.

“I kinda want to find out,” remarked the woman's companion.

Jumie's surprise at hearing other women's voices in a club that was clearly marketed toward men was almost instantly drowned out

by the feel of something pressing out from within her womanhood. Something firm. Something... dull.

Despite the sensation, the fascinated leopardess wasn't actually expelling anything from her exposed vagina. It was the transformation wiping away her ovaries. Her uterus. Her cervix. And then her vagina itself.

Time seemed to slow to a near standstill as the leather firmness closed over her womanhood on the outside. She bit her lower lip as the genetic eraser dissolved the last bits of her physical sex from within. There was a sudden spike in pleasure. A sudden surge toward the precipice of sweet, sexy, alien induced orgasm. And then... it was all gone.

Jumie gasped as everything down there between her legs seemed to vanish all at once. Not only had she been denied what was almost sure to have been a gloriously intense orgasmic expression of her physical sex, she'd

been striped of the entire anatomy of sexual pleasure. It was gone. Gone forever. And with it, most of her sense of being female.

“That girl is *spayed!*” someone called out to a chorus of approving hoots and laughs.

“I’d still do her in a heartbeat!” came the reply from the same audience member who’d declared their willingness just before the flat-croched leopardess had been stripped of her womanhood.

Jumie held onto the pole with one hand and did her best to prance and dance around it in spite of her very strange feeling hip joints. There wasn’t actually a proper joint anymore. Instead, the segments that had subsumed her hips and upper thighs were connected to her butt and crotch segments with dark seams of softer flesh. These seams compressed and stretched as the muscles within pulled one way or another. This placed the actual ‘joint’ rather lower than it had been, and restricted

movement quite considerably. It also made every movement create leathery noises as the segments shifted and rubbed up against one another.

The sexless leopardess' other hand slipped down between her legs. Her fingers rubbed the perfectly smooth surface and smiled at the strangeness of it all. So much pleasure followed by so much nothing. What other strange sensations were still in store for her?

While Jumie was contemplating what had just taken place between her legs, the transformation had continued to progress with considerable rapidity. A second pair of segments had subsumed more of her thighs, and there were the beginnings of a third pair forming above her knees. These were much more solidly affixed to one another than the hip segments were to her abdomen, which was quite fortunate given what was happening to the segments around her flanks.

Every seam between segments above the transforming leopardess' hips was almost as flexible as the hips themselves. It took all her effort, and a very firm grip on the glowing pink force pole, to stay upright. *It feels so alien*, she thought as she flexed her abdomen forward and back and side to side. *It feels so... kinky!*

“Shake that ass!” someone in the crowd shouted.

“She’s so confident!” one of the women remarked.

“Look at that smile!” the other woman observed. “She’s having so much fun with it!”

*I guess it is kind of fun, isn't it?* Jumie thought as she felt new segments forming around her lower ribcage and down over knees. She was already getting used to the flexibility of her lower torso, and began twist in ways that would have been quite impossible only a few minute before. *Hells, if it's like this*

*all the way up, I'll be able to turn around and look down at my own ass! Won't that be something?*

The giddy leopardess twisted and twirled as the joint segments formed over the front of her knees. Now, the fur of both lower legs began to fall off all at once. Both limbs began to blacken and shrink inward, while her toes began to fuse together, leaving only two on each foot. In mere moments, the black flesh of her lower legs and feet had transformed into hard, matte-black chitin.

All of Jumie's weight was now carried on her forward facing toes. These new toes were chitinous and articulated, making them both solid and surprisingly flexible. Along with along with single 'heel toes' on the back of each foot, they gave her an incredible means of balance that completely offset the problems cause by the massively altered ranges of motion offered by her hips and torso.

“Look at her keep prancing on those bug legs!” someone in the audience bubbled. “So sexy!”

The crowd laughed and cheered as Jumie just smiled and kept on dancing and whirling around the force pole. She was really into it now, deeply savoring the exotic alien sensations that the transformed parts of her body were providing her. *This really is so much fun! I wish I'd tried this a long time ago! Hells, it feels so damned kinky! I just can't get enough of it!*

The enthusiastic leopardess could just begin to feel the rising transformation begin to tug at the skin just beneath her playfully bobbing breasts. At the same time, the fur of her long, puffy tail began to fall out. It began to shrink in length, almost as if it was being pulled back up into her spine.

*Oh! Oh wow!* Jumie thought as the leathery transformation rose up between and around

her warm, soft tits. Her already hard nipples swelled. Sweet milk dribbled forth, mixing with the rowa cum that had been splattered all over her chest.

*Oh! Too... too tight!* the entranced leopardess thought, gasping hard as her changing flesh assaulted her tender breasts. Her sensitive glands were pulled from the sides, from the center, and from below. They were squished flat as the leathery whiteness spread inward over them. As her nipples dribbled and squirted their last milk before being completely smoothed over.

“I’d *still* do her!” came a familiar voice from the audience.

“Man. Look at her keep going!” said another. “I can’t believe she actually likes it!”

The mono-mound that was left quickly shrank until it was just another perfectly smooth and flat segment on the barren leopardess’ chest. At the same time, the stub

that was left of her tail wiggled its last before vanishing entirely. The transformation spread up over her shoulders, and the fur began to fall from her arms.

Jumie's fingers began to fuse together as her blackening arms shrank inward over the bones. Moments later, the black skin transformed into black chitin. She now gripped the force pole with rock hard, articulated fingers, two and a stubby thumb to each hand. Her arms themselves were hard and stiff, with joints that didn't quite work the way she was used to.

Despite the limitations the enthralled leopardess arms now imposed, she kept on dancing around the pole with a big silly grin on her face. *This is so much fun! I'm a bug! I'm really a bug! It feels so neat!*

As the transformation spread up Jumie's neck, she began to twist and flex the whole of her torso. She soon found that she could indeed twist so far that she could look more or less

straight down at the broad leathery segment that had taken the place of her soft fluffy ass. For the first time in the show, she felt compelled to vocalize her mood, giggling softly as she twisted this way and that while the audience cheered her on.

The sexy bug's long brown hair started to fall out as the segments spread up the back of her head. Two little black antennae began to poke out from her forehead, just above her eyes. Her ears began to shrink against the sides of her head as the segments spread over its top.

"She's so close!" an audience member observed. "Do you think she's gonna keep smiling to the end?"

"They never do, do they?" came a grumpy reply. "Once they realize they're done..."

"Oh, shut up for fuck's sake," someone else snapped. "It's all part of the fun. If you don't like it..."

Jumie's nose began to tingle. It felt strange. Stimulating. Arousing, in an oddly familiar way. She reached up to touch it with her free hand. A hard, chitinous finger rubbed the strangely soft and moist pink flesh.

“Ah!” the astonished bug exclaimed as she instantly felt the same sort of heady feeling that she'd once gotten when an alien cock had just started to rub between her leg. The feeling was followed by a strange, involuntary pursing of her lips. Her whole muzzle was softening and splitting apart vertically, from her nose right down through her chin.

At the same time, the former leopardess' whole body began to shrink. She barely noticed, though. The sensations around her face and head were just too close and intense for her to feel much of anything else.

“Oh... uh...” Jumie murmured as the fur fell from her face. Her ears finally vanished entirely, leaving her almost, but not quite deaf.

Still, she kept on dancing, and smiling as much as her rapidly changing muzzle would allow.

*This feels so amazing,* the shrinking bug thought as her face hardened over with black chitin. Her mouth was now little more than a vertical slit between stubby rounded mandibles. Her tongue and teeth had simply vanished somewhere along the way, leaving only a tight little fleshy tunnel in their place. She reached up to finger this strange, soft place, even as she continued to twist and whirl around the force pole.

“Uh... ungl... ungu... un...” Jumie mouthed as sticky mucous bubbled out from the soft pink folds that formed an ‘oral pussy’ on her face, complete with the clitoral nubbin that had taken the place of her nose. She slid a cum-soaked bug-finger into the tight fleshy tunnel that had once been her mouth.

The aroused bug greatly enjoyed having something stuck in the tight little tunnel that

now seemed to be growing straight back into her head. Straight back into her brain, in fact. The whole world seemed to be shifting around her. Memories flashed and faded as her brain shrunk toward the front of her skull. Still, she kept dancing.

Jumie could feel something welling up behind her eyes. A strange feeling of pressure that felt almost unbearable. Her eyes glazed over and went completely black. For a brief moment she was completely blind.

When the world came back into focus, it consisted of a broad tapestry of countless little facets. Each was focused on something different, though all were meshed together into a single image in her mind. This so entranced the nearly complete new bug that it hardly noticed how little of it's former life that it remembered.

Jumie was barely Jumie by this point. She was still the same being, of sorts. Her singular

stream of consciousness had never been interrupted. Most of her brain, however, had been replaced by the oral vagina that now reached all the way to the back of her head, and the large mucous glands that surrounded it. What was left was concentrated in the front of her head, where a structure of internal chitin was forming a protective shell around the still shrinking organ.

“She did it!” came a muffled voice that the prancing bug could barely understand. “She really went all the way with a smile on her face!”

“That was so fucking hot!” one of the women bubbled. “I really wanna know what it feels like.”

“So do I!” the other woman replied.

“You girls saying you’re gonna go next?” an oddly firm and domineering voice demanded.

“Well... sure,” the first woman replied. “I

guess I'll try it."

"Me too!" the other added. "It's gonna be so much fun!"

Jumie was struggling to understand the meaning of the words that were being spoken around her. There was something going on in her head. She couldn't understand what. She was feeling strange urges to obey some unseen master. An invisible hive mind among whom 'Jumie' had no place.

"Who's gonna buy her fur once we wash and package it?" the domineering voice called out. "You all know the drill. Bids start at a hundred credits! Let's go!"

A singular moment. A sudden change. What was left of the new bug's brain rumped and shrank down to the size of a small walnut.

In that moment, Jumie ceased to exist. She was still very much alive, of course. But she was just a rowa hive worker now. Once barely

intelligent bug among tens of thousands of identical bugs. A cog in a machine. Useful, but completely disposable.

The new bug felt the urge to wander away from the pole, down the stage toward a curtain at one end. This was where the hive mind was telling her she needed to go. It was the path that would lead her to her countless sisters. To the hive. The Mashirowa Hive.

## DIVERGENCE

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# MASHIROWA

“Isn’t she such a sweet little bug,” the strange figure cooed as the newest member of the Mashirowa Hive entered the massive living antechamber. “I’m sure she’s going to just love being absorbed into the hive-flesh.”

The vast chamber was dark. The only illumination came from several dozen bioluminescent yellow-green bulges that were scattered around the rumples of rolls of living insect flesh. These formed the subterranean chamber’s high domed roof, broadly arching walls, and the dozen or so branching pillars that held it all aloft from the flat, slightly squishy floor.

Also scattered around the vast mass of sticky, smelly bug flesh were the writhing shapes of lesser rowaform creatures who'd been bodily half-absorbed into the structure of the room. These poor captives were mostly creatures who'd lived past their prime and were no longer as useful to the hive as fresh recruits. Rather than simply let them die, they would become part of the hive structure itself, extended their useful lifespan in a process that ensured not a single gram of their body mass would go to waste.

Those half-absorbed creatures dangling about in the massive antechamber were all types suited to defend their Queen and her private chambers at the heart of the hive. Dangling stingers. Gummy pussy-mouths spitting psychoactive mucous. Male members ready to fill incapacitated intruders with their transformative ejaculate.

Elsewhere, such half-absorbed lesser rowa would be put to other uses in addition to hive

defense. Groping arms that stuck out of walls. Male members positioned to feed other lesser rowa. Even female looking openings in which male lesser rowa could satisfy their insatiable urges to fill warm tight holes with their copious ministrations.

As time passed, even these half-absorbed rowa would be more fully absorbed into the structure of the hive. That wasn't to say that their barely intelligent minds would then be allowed to finally die. Instead, each new walnut sized brain would be joined to the rest, forming the 'mind of the hive'. They would live on as long as the hive itself remained alive, bound in a state of servitude so total that whatever sense of individuality they might have retained in their life as members of the hive would be completely and utterly destroyed.

"You *are* going to have her *fully* absorbed, aren't you?" the strange figure asked as she adjusted the filter mask that covered her feline

muzzle and most of face. “Our plan is already on thin ice thanks to your failure to snare our first target.”

“Chk’kr’rk’ch’kssss’chk,” the huge, mucous oozing Mashirowa Queen replied with a broad gesture of her four chitinous black arms. “Ch’rrr’ks’k’k’ch’rk’rk’chsss.”

“Legalities?” the strange figure huffed, waving a dismissive hand as watched the new rowa worker wander around, mindlessly searching for something that might tell it what it was supposed to be doing in the vast antechamber. “I ask you to dispose of a few whores that no one in all the Empire cares even half a shit about and you worry about legalities? Especially with all that’s at stake?”

“Chr’rk’kr’kss’ch’krr’chsssss,” the Queen replied with another broad gesture that hinted at both frustration and displeasure.

“I can assure you, it won’t imperil anything that’s already been done,” the strange figure

responded. “The four new satellite hives out to the west have been approved. You can start digging any time you like.”

“Chrrr’rk’krr’ks’kssss’ks’kr’chk,” the Queen remarked, folding her arms across her narrow, grub-like chest.

“Yes,” the strange figure replied. “I’m still working to get you permission to colonize the old mines beneath Xinta. That’s the ultimate goal here, isn’t it? We have to secure the divergence. Keep it from slipping back and correcting itself. It’s the only way to save the hive and keep it from becoming a slave to... *them.*”

“Chkr’chss’sss’ksss’kr’rk’kss,” the Queen responded.

“No,” the strange figure answered. “I’m not going to be able to finish that until you can show me that you’re going to uphold your side of the bargain. Because if you can’t, then you taking over Xinta isn’t going to solve the

problem, is it?”

“Chr’rk’krrrrr’chs’kss,” the Queen said, waving one arm in the direction of the wandering worker.

Two rolls of living flesh on the pillar nearest the oblivious worker parted. A glistening, mucous dripping, olive green tentacle lashed out. It snatched the surprised worker up off of its feet and pulled it until its back was pressed firmly into the pillar’s open cleft.

“Grb’rb’rbl!” the worker bubbled, mucous splattering from its little pussy-mouth as its own grub-like torso flesh began to merge with that of the pillar.

“Wonderful,” the strange figure remarked as she watched the worker struggle in vain to free itself. “Absolutely wonderful.”

The process of total absorption was astonishingly fast. No sooner than the strange figure had made her remark than the whole of

the worker's torso had become a new roll of off-white flesh on the pillar's side. The creature's black chitin limbs and face were all drawn into this mass and withing a few short moments there was nothing left of it. Nothing left but the new roll and the knowledge that its tiny little walnut brain was forever trapped inside.

“Perfect,” the strange figure said with a nod of satisfaction. “Now, I trust you have good plans for the others. They aren't nearly as critical as this one was. I don't much care what you do to them. All I care is that they're permanently rendered incapable of affecting matters moving forward.”

“Chrrr'chk'kss'krr'ch'chk,” the Queen responded with nod. “Kr'kr'chsss'rk?”

“Don't you worry about a thing,” the snow leopardess replied. “A deal is a deal. You take care of them, and my little family belongs to you to do with as you please.”

“Kr’kss’rk’chss’kr’ksssss’kr’kss,” the Queen replied. “Chr’rk’rss?”

“Yes,” the strange figure replied. “Let’s.”

DISPLAY

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## ASPIRATIONS

“I guess it can’t hurt to give it a try,” the pretty cougaress sighed to herself. “I mean, it’s better than nothing, right?”

Sakie had been told that only a foolish fey’li would even think of trying to make a career of modeling in a big city like Mashiva. There were already far too many exuberantly exhibitionist feline tails in the market and far too few businesses looking to purchase their services at anything resembling a reasonable rate. Day contracts were hardly worth the effort of getting out of bed in the morning. Bigger contracts paid better, but unless she somehow managed to get on the ‘A List’, she didn’t stand

a snowball's chance in hell of getting one.

There was only one way for a fey'li girl like her to make any real money in the modeling industry. That was to find some very specific, under-served niche and make it their personal brand. Given the niches still left to be filled, she was almost certainly going to have to give up all pretense of personal dignity. If she really wanted to make a fortune, it was going to mean giving up far more. The former didn't much bother her. The latter, however, was more than enough to give her pause.

Sakie had given more than her share of pause to the various offers that piled into her inbox like drochaki drawn to a honey thief. Heck, she'd even been offered a job modeling what happened to honey thieves for a book on the topic produced by the local drochaki honey-makers guild. What she hadn't been offered, ever, was a chance to do anything resembling 'normal' modeling work.

Rejection had come, not in a trickle, but in a torrent of highly uncomplimentary replies. The reasons were always the same. She was just 'too stiff'. 'Too plain'. 'Too rural'. 'Too ordinary.' One respondent even had the gall to call her 'One step short of ugly for a fey'li'. That latter remark had bitten particularly hard.

That most regarded her as being too 'rural' looking wasn't really much of a surprise to the deeply resigned cougaress. She was, after all, reading her messages while sitting on a hay bale in the barn of the family farm. There was just no escaping the look of having come fresh from the fields no matter how hard she tried.

Sakie moved like a girl who was always ready to get down on her hands and knees as start pulling up weeds. That was how she spent most of her day, after all. Soberries were just too delicate for the automated weeders. They had to be cared for by hand, and well cared for indeed. The wineries wouldn't buy anything less than the most perfect berries.

Any physical damage prior to full ripeness gave them a bitter taste that rendered them totally unsuitable for any use other than as fertilizer for the next crop.

To make matters even more difficult for her modeling aspirations, the rural cougareess' face really was as plain as plain could be. Pretty, for sure, but in a very plain way. And her long braided ponytail? The one she was so proud of that she tied it with fancy bows even when she was out working in the fields? To the snobby big city modeling agents, it just screamed 'I chase cows all day'.

That left the displeased cougareess only one real choice if she was going to model. She was going to have to accept one of those unusual job offers. She was going to have to find that niche. And she was going to have to live it, if she wanted to make any real money.

"Mom's going to kill me," Sakie murmured as she stood up and dusted the loose bits of

hay from her blue denim overalls. “But I’ve gotta start somewhere, right?”

The barn’s dust protection system responded to the conflicted cougaress’ attempt at self-reassurance with a roar. The dust detectors hadn’t worked right for years. Even the slightest provocation would trigger them, switching on the huge overhead vacuums.

Normally, the dust would be sucked into the quasi-pulse-jet engine that was built into the system’s exhaust. The thrust produced by the burning of the dust would then drive a turbine generator to recover some of the energy used to run the vacuums. It was loud. It scared the cows. But they’d never had a barn fire. Not once in over three hundred years.

This time, there was no dust to burn. The few bits of stray hay weren’t even light enough to get pulled up into the vacuums. After a few minutes, the whole thing shut down.

The barn was quiet again. More quiet than it

had been before. At least that was always how it seemed to the equally quiet cougaress. It was almost certainly her ears playing tricks on her, but she just couldn't shake the idea from her head.

“Sakie?” came a low, smoothly feminine voice from the half-open barn doors. “Is that you?”

“Yeah, mom!” Sakie replied.

“Thank goodness!” Sakie's mother replied, poking her head inside. “For a moment I thought the cows got into the hay stocks again. You did remember to lock the field gate, didn't you?”

“Yes, mom,” Sakie replied.

“What's the matter, sweetie?” Sakie's mother asked. “You look like you've got something on your mind.”

“Well... do you remember when I asked if it

was okay to make get some work in the city?” Sakie hopefully inquired. She’d never gotten a clear answer. Then again, she also hadn’t gotten a reasonable, or even sane, offer when she’d last asked.

“Mhmm,” her mother responded with an unwelcome look of harsh skepticism on her face.

“Well, I found one that’s just for a few days and I was wondering…” Sakie declared despite her mother’s look of borderline disapproval.

“Just a few days?” her mother questioned. “What kind of job only lasts ‘just a few days?’”

“We talked about this,” Sakie replied with a deep sigh. “It’s a media shoot for an advertising campaign. For a business.”

“Really?” her mother responded with a raised eyebrow. “What kind of business?”

“A custom crystal business,” Sakie replied.

“It sounds pretty fancy. It pays pretty well too.”

“After all that rejection calling you plain, all of a sudden someplace fancy wants to pay you well?” her mother quipped.

“Yes!” Sakie replied.

“And why in all the heavens do you think that is?” her mother inquired.

“The offer said they were looking to hire a new face that better represented their market,” Sakie replied with a shrug.

“And let me guess,” her mother huffed, crossing her arms. “They gave you a date to just show up and all the details will get sorted out later.”

“No,” Sakie replied. “I mean, not really. It doesn’t spell out *all* of the details. It’s done through the government free agency contract site, so it has to be legitimate. The payment is

guaranteed too!”

“And how much are they offering to pay you?” her mother questioned.

“Two thousand credits for the shoot!” Sakie replied.

“Really?” her mother responded with audible disbelief.

“That’s not all, thought!” Sakie excitedly bubbled. “I get a fifty credits for every week they make adverts from the shoot, and a commission on all ‘net sales that are made through adverts with me in them too!”

“That sounds much too good to be true,” her mother noted with a deep frown.

“Can I sign up for it or not?” Sakie asked. “We’re not planting another batch of soberries for three weeks, and you always let the others take side jobs when there’s nothing to do.”

“Oh, sure,” her mother replied, shaking her

head. “You can sign up for it. But don’t come back complaining to me when you wind up pregnant with alien larvae because you’re too caught up in this whole modeling idea to see an obvious porn scheme to save your soul.”

“Mom!” Sakie exclaimed.

“You just tell me when you’re headed out so I can have Sirra or Kai’ee take care of the cows while you’re gone,” Sakie’s mother said, turning to leave. “And once you’re done satisfying your inclination to be taken advantage of, maybe you can find someplace that sells sensors for the dust system in town. I think maybe it’s finally time we got it fixed.”

“Yes mom,” Sakie replied as her mother departed. “Dammit. She’s not happy, is she? But... maybe she’ll change her mind when she sees the money. I hope...”

## DISPLAY

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# MR. Q'ZUN

“Ah! So perfectly wonderful!” the diminutive alien sputtered in his light, metallic voice. “You are the spitting image of the pictures provided to me by the Association! Truly magnificent!”

The thoroughly lost cougaress couldn't quite tell where the voice was coming from at first. She'd been milling about Northwestie's Megablock 4-3 for almost an hour now without being able to locate her destination. Every directory she came across seemed to have different listings, and the custom crystal shop wasn't on any of them. No one seemed to be able to help her either. The location of The Bejeweled was as much a mystery to them as it

was to he.

Now, there was a voice in a crowd that seemed to suggest that she'd somehow found her goal. Or, rather, that her goal had found her. She looked around frantically, lest the source of the voice decide to change its mind about her. It wasn't until she looked down, however, that she found herself gazing into the giant black eyes of her new employer.

“Oh!” Sakie sputtered with embarrassment at not having noticed the alien sooner. “I’m sorry! I didn’t see you!”

“Such are the trials and tribulations of being so vertically challenged,” the alien chuckled as he looked the cougaress up and down. “Mmm. Yes. Yes. You will definitely do quite splendidly!”

“Uh... thank you?” Sakie replied she looked the little alien over in turn. His skin was a dull, greenish gray and seemed to absorb light in a way that made him look almost two

dimensional to the naked eye. His eyes were giant black orbs set within a permanently furrowed brow. His forehead was disproportionately large, as were both his hands and his feet. He wore only a kilt made of fine golden scales. “Are you Mr. Kw... Kwa...”

“I am indeed the Mr. Q’zun whom you seek,” he replied. “Pronounced Kuh-zuhn, if you do so kindly please.”

“I’m pleased to meet you Mr. Q’zun,” Sakie responded with a soft smile. “I’ve been having a hard time finding your shop. I don’t see it on any of the directories.”

“Ah, yes! Such a bother! One would think that the local authorities would be much keener to promote local establishments by updating the directories in a timely fashion!” Mr. Q’zun exclaimed. “Did you know that there are directories here that have not been chanced for ten whole years? Ten whole years!”

“That really does seem like quite a bother,” Sakie replied, carefully adjusting the short, wrap-like dress that she’d bought from a discount shop just for the occasion. It was a pleasant silvery-blue in color, with a silvery-gray sash around the waist to hold it all together. It was also far, far too short for her liking.

“It is, that I can most definitely assure you,” Mr. Q’zun replied, momentarily smiling with visible bemusement at the cougaress’ attempts to make her short dress just a little bit longer. “But enough about my personal peeves. Come! We have much work to do and the sooner that we start, the better for all!”

“Where are we going?” Sakie asked as she did her level best not to laugh at Mr. Q’zun’s almost comical proportions and his weird, shuffling gait. Granted, the cougaress’ own gait wasn’t all that much more elegant. Every step seemed to push her dress up just a bit further. Before long her panties would be visible for all

to see. At least that was what it felt like to the farm girl who had grown up wearing plants and overalls.

“Up this way,” Mr. Q’zun replied, pointing toward an escalator that led up, directly toward a broad storefront completely covered with brightly illuminated stained glass. “Just up the moving stairs. Not far at all.”

Sakie had passed through the lower level more than once, but had never noticed the escalator or the balcony level above. If she’d just looked up, she would have seen the place as clear as day. Anyone would have. And from the traffic going up and down the escalator, plenty of people had. But... every time she’d asked, no one seemed to know anything about the place. It was strange. Very strange. But in a big, confusing place like this, perhaps there was so much going on that no one had really noticed it well enough to remember its name.

“Come come,” Mr. Q’zun declared as he led

the puzzled cougaress up the escalator and toward the sliding stained glass doors of his establishment. “Here it is. My most cherished pride and joy! So much work it was to bring my jewelery technology to this place. So much more to satisfy all the inane desires of the government for reams upon reams of pointless paperwork. But here it is! Let us now enter so that we can begin our work posthaste! The quicker we get started, the quicker we get paid, after all!”

“Yeah,” Sakie replied with an awkward smile. The quicker she got paid, the better indeed. With a bit of luck, one paying job would lead to another. With a bit more luck, maybe she’d actually be able to get out of niche work and into the mainstream before she was too ‘typecast’ into it.

The beautiful stained glass doors rumbled open. “Welcome to The Bejeweled!” Mr. Q’zun exclaimed as he led the cougaress inside.

Sakie gasped in wonder as she stepped into the little alien's surprisingly large shop. For a farm girl who considered simple things like an ordinary restaurant meal or a discount rack dress to be luxuries, the interior of the shop was absolutely opulent. Everywhere, there were statues. Magnificent statues crafted almost exclusively from beautifully colored transparent crystal!

“Behold! My work!” Mr. Q.zun declared as he led his new model into the maze of colorful crystal statuary. “Each one is cast in perfect solid gemstone. Yes, actual gemstone! Sapphire here. Emerald there. Diamond. Ruby. Jade. Amethyst. Common quartz. Even less precious stones in the case of certain special requests. Anything of mineral nature is possible in jewelery, so long as the materials are available!”

The astonished cougaress' head whirled as she followed the proud jeweler through his collection of work. Many of the statues were

lone subjects, crafted in all manner of poses. Most of these were purely artistic in nature, though some were composed for more practical purpose. Most common seemed to be the lantern holders, with their glowing orbs that seemed to contain no source of power to illuminate them. Others held bowls, or vases, or vessels. A few seemed to be intended for use as coat racks, with lower arms held out horizontal for convenience.

Many of these statues were mounted upon platforms and plinths of granite or marble. Others were mounted upon strange stones the likes of which she had never before seen. A few were mounted on the same colored crystal from which they'd been made.

As Mr. Q'zun led her deeper into his establishment, Sakie found her eyes drawn to a collection of statues who's nature sent a chill down her spine. Half a dozen figures were held aloft in the embrace of tentacles. These extensions of each statue's plinth were treating

their captives to various erotic ministrations, as tentacles were so often wont to do.

More chilling was the fountain that sat among the tentacled figures. This features a sapphire fey'li figure which issued a constant stream of water from her upturned mouth. This water entered the figure through a hose inserted into her open gemstone anus. From there, it shimmered through her disturbingly accurate, albeit nearly invisible, digestive tract.

“That’s... weird,” Sakie murmured as tentacles gave way to less outrageous erotic statuary. Figures masturbating. Playing with gemstone toys. There was even one large composition featuring a couple making love.

“You find something unusual about my works of art?” Mr. Q’zun asked as he led his new model toward a service desk near the back of the shop.

“Well, I mean, that fountain was a little...

you know... odd looking,” Sakie replied. “The insides, I mean.”

“Ah, yes. The fountain,” Mr. Q’zun replied. “There really was no other way to go about it, I can assure you. Not without harming the subject, at least. Either you keep the natural passage open during the jewelring, or you are forced to make a positively garish artificial one after. The latter is quite impossible without disfiguring the result, so I must go about the former.”

Sakie’s heart skipped a beat. “Wha... what do you mean by... by natural passage?”

“Ah, yes, I do so rudely forget,” Mr. Q’zun responded with a smile as he stopped in front of the service desk. “You know nothing of jewelring, do you? Well, worry not! There is really no mystery to it all all! You will soon know all you need to know!”

“I’m not really sure I...” Sakie answered as she began to feel as if she’d been snared into

something very different than modeling for advertisements. Granted, the contract *had* been for an advertisement involving exotic artistic statuary, but still.

Mr. Q'zun chuckled as he began to enter something into a computer that was located below the desk top. "No worries, no worries," he mused. "Our client is not interested in that sort of imagery. Of course if *you* are, then perhaps we can make some different arrangements."

"No thank you!" Sakie exclaimed.

"There, done," Mr. Q'zun declared, stepping back out from behind the counter. He gestured toward a nearby doorway at the back of the shop. "We are ready to begin our work!"

"Okay," Sakie replied, biting her lower lip as she began to wonder exactly what sort of work this advertising contract was going to involve.

"Come come!" Mr. Q'zun instructed. "I must

confess that I am quite as anxious to finish this advertising material as you seem to be. Quite profitable, I must say. Quite profitable indeed. I am sure that once all is said and done, you will quite agree!”

“I... I guess,” Sakie replied as she looked at the sign that had been posted beside the door.

“Jeweling workshop,” the sign read. “Caution: Digital Gorgon In Use!”

“Behold!” Mr. Q’zun exclaimed as the door slid open with a soft hiss. “My workshop! My cherished tool! My *digital gorgon!*”

Sakie gasped as her jaw hit the floor. Her eyes grew wide, and not just because of the huge, round room’s darkness. She’d never seen anything like it before. Not even the strange mining equipment that had been left behind on the north end of the family farm, by the rabid gold miners of yore, could come anywhere close to matching the strangeness of what she was now seeing.

The gigantic machine consisted of a large silver camera-like device mounted on the inner arm of a massive brass armillary sphere. Its incredibly complex mechanism was so large that portions of it vanished into the floor and ceiling of the huge, dark round chamber. Sliding panels in the floor and ceiling no doubt opened to give the whole structure the freedom to move when it was activated.

At the very center of the giant armillary mechanism was a raised platform. Its surface gave off a soft white light that illuminated a low, broad block of beautiful pastel amethyst that was sitting upon its surface. The machine's camera device was pointed directly at this block. Given that the alien had called the machine a 'gorgon', the block was clearly meant as a plinth for the alien's newest work of 'art'. It was also pretty clear who was intended to be recast in solid gemstone upon its surface.

“There is definitely no need to be nervous!”

Mr. Q'zun declared as he led his new model through a space in the padded benches that surrounded the grand machine. "There is nothing that the digital gorgon can do that cannot be undone with the utmost expediency!"

"You're... you're..." Sakie stammered in shock. This definitely wasn't what she'd signed up for. Or had she? She hadn't really read much of the fine print. She couldn't really remember the details of what she had. "You're really going to use this machine to turn me into... into stone!?!"

"Well, of course!" Mr. Q'zun laughed. "Just long enough to satisfy my client's desire for suitable imagery for their advertising campaign. Then I get paid. Then you get paid. And then, perhaps, once you've discovered just how wonderful being transformed into solid stone can feel, you'll consider a... longer term engagement."

“I... I just... don’t...” Sakie sputtered. Was this *really* what she’d signed up for? She just couldn’t remember. “I mean... it just can’t... it just has to feel awful. I really don’t... I really don’t think I’m going to like it at all!”

“Well then, don’t think,” Mr. Q’zun replied with a smile. “That is the advice I give all of the models I hire before their very first time stepping into the digital gorgon. It seems so much more intimidating in person than in the media, doesn’t it? It makes for many second thoughts. So just don’t think.”

“That’s... that’s easy for you to say,” Sakie responded with a deep frown.

“Well, yes,” Mr. Q’zun admitted. “I certainly is. That does not automatically make it incorrect. But if you must think, then think about all of the other beautiful models whom I have hired in the past for projects like this one. They were all just as skeptical of the machine as you are right now. But they just did it, and

they enjoyed every moment of it. Some of them so much that they decided to do it again, and again, and again. A few even decided to become artwork for life!”

Sakie didn’t quite know how to reply. Just the idea sent a sharp shudder down her spine. How could anyone in their right mind actually want to spend the rest of eternity as a statue?

“And have you any idea how many come to me seeking a brief time living in stone?” Mr. Q’zun went on. “Or how much they are willing to pay for the experience? Why, just a few short days ago, I had a group of six lovely tourists pay a whole thirty-six hundred credits for a day as beautiful jewels!”

“And then you changed them all back?” Sakie inquired with considerable skepticism. It seemed almost too good to be true.

“Of course!” Mr. Q’zun replied. “But the big moneymaker is the annual Bejeweled Beauty Contest that the Center for the Arts puts on. I

get paid two thousand credits per bejeweled beauty. Attendees pay to view the art, and they get to vote on the ones they like the most. Then at the end, everyone but the highest scoring beauties are restored. The winners become permanent pieces of art, eventually to be auctioned off to benefit the Center. I get a very amicable twenty percent commission. Very amicable indeed.”

Sakie nodded, but still didn't quite believe what the little alien was telling her. She'd never heard of such things before. Then again, her mother had always kept her and her siblings from getting into that kind of media. It was a futile effort, for sure, but it been effective enough in keeping her from getting too broad a view of what really went on in the xenoexperience capital of the Marian Drift Prefecture.

“Now, let us begin,” Mr. Q'zun stated with a smile as he gestured toward the amethyst block. “It will be over before you know it!”

“I... I guess...” Sakie murmured nervously as it became quite apparent that not only was she going to be turned into a stone statue, but that it was going to be happening right away. There was no time or her to prepare.

“That’s a good model!” Mr. Q’zun chuckled. “Just take off your dress and I shall instruct you on our client’s desired presentation.”

“Uh... I have to do it naked?” Sakie questioned.

Again, Mr. Q’zun chuckled. “Why, of course! Sex sells, as they so often say. Our clients are firm believers in this core principle of advertising.”

“Okay,” Sakie replied, reluctantly undoing her sash.

“Excellent!” Mr. Q’zun exclaimed with a broad smile as he waited for his new model to denude. “Just lay your clothing on the bench here. Then we can begin!”

DISPLAY

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## STONED

Sakie looked down on the big amethyst block with a sense of deep trepidation. The nervous cougaress had hoped a closer look at the block might soothe her nerves. Instead, it only made the butterflies in her stomach worse. *Goddess above, she thought, I can't believe I'm actually going to get on this thing. And... actually do this thing. It's all just so... so... insane!*

The amethyst block was longer than it was wide, roughly the size of a double sized mattress. The edges were rough and crystalline. The top was smooth and polished to a mirror finish. There were strange loops

rising up from its surface. Two small ones were located right at the front end. One broader one was located about two thirds of the way to the back. Exactly what purpose they might have had yet to be revealed.

What was revealed was the name of the client that was paying for all this. On the front end, cut deeply into the crystalline surface, was a name that sent a chill down Sakie's spine: Rowa Vale Adventures. Even the ignorant and naive cougaress knew who the rowa were. She'd been warned about their terrible games. About how they'd kidnap her and take her to their hive to be transformed into a horrible monster. And now... had she really sold her image to be used as advertising for them?

"Yes, yes, I know," Mr. Q'zun said, no doubt noting the look of considerable displeasure on his new model's face. "They are not the most pleasant of clientele, that is quite for sure. I would not normally engage with such

monstrous creatures and their rather addled fans. But... we live in a place that is dependent on all sorts of bizarre draws for suitably inclined tourists. A rising tide lifts all boats and all that.”

“I... I guess,” Sakie replied. Nothing the little alien said was going to soothe her nerves. “So... what am I supposed to do for this?”

“Ah, yes! It is quite simple, actually,” Mr. Q’zun instructed. “Your wrists go in the holes at the head end. Both of your ankles go in the hole further down. This will hold you down on your elbows while you lift your most lovely posterior held high. As high as you can, with your tail up over your back.”

“Okay,” Sakie responded with an anxious cringe.

“Then, all you need to do is lift your head up and smile,” Mr. Q’zun continued. “Smile and stay in that position no matter what happens. It will be a bit of a complex composition with

multiple stages, so it is absolutely essential that you hold your position and smile. *No matter what happens.* And if you can do it with a particularly suitable level of outward enthusiasm, then I shall add a five hundred credit bonus to your base pay.”

“Okay,” Sakie replied.

“Very good,” Mr. Q’zun said, gesturing toward the surface of the block. “Mount yourself and we shall begin.”

As hesitant as Sakie might have been, the quicker she got it all over with, the better. She took a deep breath and knelt down on the amethyst block. It was pleasantly warm to the touch, and she found it oddly easy to slide to its center and slip her hands and feet into the provided rings. Or were they restraints? Did it really matter?

The cougaress gripped the front edge of the amethyst block and struggled to lift her rump up into the air. The pose couldn’t possibly have

been more awkward. She couldn't let her knees rest on the block. She had to keep her chest up as well. Despite her long years on the farm, it was taking all of her strength. There was no way she could hold the pose for long.

Mr. Q'zun smiled at the quivering cougaress. He reached down to pull her long ponytail off her shoulder so that it would dangle down in front of the block. "Much better," he remarked as he backed out from the interior of the machine. "All you need to do now is relax."

Sakie wanted to reply about how difficult the pose was, but she was afraid that losing her smile for even a moment might mess things up. Or worse, cost her that nice extra bonus. Thankfully, though, her employer had already thought of matters.

A force field of some sort was forming around the cougaress' body. Her weight seemed to lessen. All pressure on her strained muscles faded away. At the same time, it

seemed to hug her tightly, holding her still and locking her into her current pose.

Mr. Q'zun sat down on a bench off to one side of his subject. The armillary rings began move. They whirled around the platform and its anxious subject for several long moment before settling into a position where the camera was held directly above. There was a sizzle. A snap. A flash. The rings that had helped give Sakie her pose vanished.

Sakie kept smiling. That was all she had to do. No matter what happened. All she had to do was smile and wait. But what was she waiting for?

A loud buzzing filled the chamber. It was coming from above and behind the completely restrained cougaress. It was getting louder. Closer. And it came along with a very strange smell.

A soapy, briny odor filled Sakie's nose. It was sharp. Heady. Organic. Very, very organic.

The captive cougaress could feel a breeze upon her legs. Upon her upraised ass. Little drips of warm something were falling on her thighs. She could only imagine what was hovering over her. What sort of monstrosity was waiting for its moment to strike.

It didn't take long for the realization to hit her. She was to be the centerpiece for an advertisement for a business that brought tourists into the grasp of the rowa. Clearly that meant placing *her* into the grasp of the rowa!

Sakie's heart raced. She stared straight ahead and smiled as best as she could. What else could she do?

Something jabbed the horrified cougaress right in the tailhole. It didn't penetrate too deeply. It just poked inside for a moment and gave her a brief squirt of fresh hot bug semen.

Sakie held in a sharp gasp and kept smiling. That was all she could do. It was all she had to do. No matter what happened.

*Oh... oh no! It... it... it actually spooaged right in my ass! Sakie thought without really knowing what that meant. Stay calm, Sakie. It's too late to do anything about it. Just stay calm and don't ruin the statue. Keep smiling. Keep smiling!*

Before she even knew what was happening, the fur around Sakie's midriff was starting to fall out. In its place, she began to feel smooth and stiff and... leathery. *Oh... no! No! It can't... I can't... I'm... I'm turning into a bug!*

Sakie still kept smiling. Surely the little alien wasn't going to do anything to her that couldn't be undone. She just had to keep smiling. Let it all happen.

The transformation of the cougaress' body was astonishingly rapid. Dull, insensitive segments wrapped around her hips and waist. These were separated by more sensitive, flexible seams. Her midriff began to flex in strange ways that left her feeling deeply

unsettled.

Still, Sakie kept smiling, even as the leathery feeling spread down to her tailbone. As it crawled around her hips. As it advanced inexorably toward that precious virgin place between her legs.

Again, the cougaress was compelled to stifle a gasp as the transformation pulled upon her luscious vulva. As it spread downward within, erasing her womanly organs as it went. There was a pull upon her clit. A tug that drew her glistening pink labia apart, exposing her vagina just as its tender flesh completely fused together. A sudden burst of sexual arousal surged through what remained of her tender flesh.

In an instant, it was all gone. Her virgin pussy had become a perfectly flat surface between her legs. So too had her anus. The cheeks of her rump now pulled together. They fused into one flat surface, just as her legs

began to join together as one.

Sakie's transformation now seemed to accelerate. It spread upward over the base of her ribcage. It spread down toward her ankles. Eight long black insect legs pushed out from the sides of her ribcage. The lower three pairs were splayed out below her arms. The other pair had grown from her shoulder blades, coming to a rest over her arms, near the front edge of the amethyst block.

*Oh shit! Oh shit!* the horrified cougaress thought as she waited for the little alien to do something before she'd completely turned into an insectoid monstrosity. *My pussy! It's... it's gone! My legs... they're fusing together! Come on! Turn me into a statue! Don't let me turn all the way into a bug! Come on! What are you waiting for?!?*

Again, and with perfect timing, the giant brass armillary began to move. It wheeled about as the transformation reached the

Sakie's ankles. It slowed to a stop as it began to pull on the underside of her warm, soft breasts.

Through all this, Sakie continued to stare straight ahead and smile. It was all she had to do and everything else would turn out alright.

A loud sizzle filled Sakie's ears. There was a snap. A flash. And then... there was nothing. No bug. No digital gorgon. No amethyst block. And no Sakie either.

DISPLAY

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## THE FLOW

“Alright, smarty-pants,” Dr. Alluwa huffed with audible annoyance. “Since you seem to know everything there is to know about all this... where exactly did it all start to go so wrong?”

Dr. Kidan shook his head as he made an adjustment to the controls of a very different kind of armillary sphere, this one located in a secret chamber beneath the residential area of the old Vixanti Three facility. “I wish I could give you a definitive answer at this point. But... it’s proving a bit more difficult that I thought it would be.”

Dr. Alluwa scowled as she watched the massive silver rings begin to move. There were

twelve nested sets, the outermost being exactly forty-two meters in diameter. Inside each flowed an exotic blend of transdimensional substances suspended in an activated biogel matrix. “Are you sure you want to try that again? After what happened last time...”

“Well, that’s the problem, isn’t it?” Dr. Kidan quipped back. “We want to fix things, but that means breaking other things, doesn’t it?”

“Can’t we do the breaking things someplace else?” Dr. Alluwa huffed as the armillary rings began to move so fast that they all blurred together into a strangely ethereal moving mass. It wasn’t just a trick of the eye, however. Each ring was not simply moving in one direction at a time. It was moving in both, simultaneously. “Hmm. You’re getting to superposition a lot faster this time around.”

“Indeed,” Dr. Kidan replied. “That’s the key to controlling the instabilities. Ideally, we’d be using permanently superposed rings, but that’s

quite out of the question.”

“I swear, if you summon another dragille this time, I’m seriously going to kick your ass,” Dr. Alluwa remarked as a strange, golden glow began to form at the very center of the machine.

“Dammit!” Dr. Kidan swore as he watched the traces displayed on one of the large screens that had been set up to one side of the vast chamber. “I thought we were successful in pulling things back toward center when we got that Vixie mask on Nanya. Now look! The trace for Jumie is... she’s...”

“Gone rowa?” Dr. Alluwa noted with a wry smile. “Don’t you tell me for one moment that you didn’t expect that to happen.”

“Maybe if you’d let me pay her to come here to... I don’t know... whatever,” Dr. Kidan replied with a scowl.

“Given your track record with girlfriends?”

Dr. Alluwa replied with a thick layer of sarcasm. “She’s better off being a rowa.”

“For now, perhaps,” Dr. Kidan responded. “We’ll have to fix it later. Sakie is a whole different matter. She’s in some kind of transitional state. There a rowa imprint, but also a... petrification imprint? And it just happened within the past hour or so!”

“Looks like the rowa are quite keen on snaring the whole bundle of them,” Dr. Alluwa noted with a puzzled expression. “But... why?”

“Why indeed,” Dr. Kidan responded with an equally perplexed expression. “What do they think they can gain by trying to force the divergence to become the main timeline?”

“How do they even know about the divergence in the first place?” Dr. Alluwa asked. “Someone had to tell them. Someone *within* the divergence.”

“But who?” Dr. Kidan questioned. “Who

knows besides Omega, and anyone directly involved in events? That's who? You? Me? Chyka? Admiral Sarva? His vetted personal guard unit? General Riyalli? That's it."

"Only you, me, Chyka, Admiral Sarva and General Riyalli know about the actual characteristics and divergence, though," Dr. Alluwa observed. "That's a fairly short list that only includes people who's characters are quite unimpeachable."

"In the main timeline, yes," Dr. Kidan noted. "But only you and I are tied to that through Omega. The others... well, I *think* we can rule out Chyka. She may have caught herself a bad case of the rowa bug, but she hasn't had any personal contact with them."

"That leaves just the Admiral and the General," Dr. Alluwa responded with a deep frown. "You don't suppose..."

"Suppose what?" Dr. Kidan inquired with a raised eyebrow.

“You don’t suppose that Sarva is trying to tie up loose ends using Chyka’s favorite fetish, do you?” Dr. Alluwa asked.

“I mean... it’s possible,” Dr. Kidan replied looking back to the armillary as it slowly decelerated. “We’ve kept all this business from him, haven’t we? If he thinks he’s fixing the timeline and preventing Chyka from jumping around anymore by locking it all into its current state...”

“That’s something we’re going to have to keep in mind,” Dr. Alluwa noted. “The real question for us is what we do about the others. There’s still Chyka and Tachi, isn’t there? If we do anything to protect them, then we’ll expose all this to Sarva and then... well. I don’t want to think about how he’ll respond to finding out about your temporal flow experiments.”

“Agreed,” Dr. Kidan replied. “We can’t protect them. We’ll just have to fix things once we’ve got the clock tuned to bring everything

back to a point of relative sanity all at once.”

“And how long do you think that’s going to take?” Dr. Alluwa asked.

“I have no idea,” Dr. Kidan replied. “But I think I’m getting close. All I need to do is get the clock running over the hump without causing tremors and...”

“Speaking of tremors,” Dr. Alluwa interrupted. “I wonder what we broke this time.”

“Good question,” Dr. Kidan replied. “I’m sure Omega will figure it out soon enough. Then we can see what we need to do to mitigate it.”

“Right,” Dr. Alluwa responded as she turned to leave. “Now you’re going to do me that favor, right?”

“Yes,” Dr. Kidan answered with a deep sigh. “No turning the clock back on unless you’re

here and approve of it. I won't. Well... not unless its a real emergency.”

“A *real* emergency,” Dr. Alluwa replied with a harsh glance over her shoulder. “And nothing less!”

## DARKNESS

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## SIGNS

All of the right signs were clearly present. Countless clues that might mean nothing to the average wilderness hiker, but everything to someone who'd dedicated their life to identifying such things. A few unusual rocks stacked here in the undergrowth. A bit of exposed gravel there against the side of the steep hill. An ancient mark lightly scored into the surface of a rocky outcrop. There was a path here. A path so thoroughly lost to nature that no one but the most practiced eye could have found it.

According to the old maps, the overgrown mountain trail simply didn't exist. Nor was

there anything up the little valley that might justify its presence. There were only densely packed trees, thorny undergrowth, and a little bubbling brook that ran alongside the mystery path. According to the surveys, that was all there had ever been.

“Look at that stacked rock,” Tachi said, gesturing toward a bit of exposed retaining wall. It had been built of roughly cut chunks of rock in order to shore up the low side of the trail. “Rough stacked rock and gravel fill. Someone definitely put an awful lot of effort into this. So... why isn’t it on any of the surveys? Kind of makes you curious, doesn’t it?”

It certainly wouldn’t be the first time that the tigress had found things that weren’t on the old maps. Or even the new maps. The mountains to the north and northeast of Mashiva were so full of ancient key’vin’ta sites and the detritus of long abandoned colonial mining activity that a dedicated explorer

almost had to actively try to not find anything new or interesting.

Along with the more natural perils to be associated with mountain hiking, the old mines made wandering off the marked roads and trails a positively perilous affair. You never knew when you might suddenly come across a terrifyingly deep hole in the ground. A terrifyingly deep hole concealed by undergrowth and surrounded by loose ground just waiting to give way. And, if the urban legends were true, there was far worse in the form of key'vin'ta spirits bound to ancient sites. Trapped in the mortal world, they were fated to hunt mortal souls in a vain effort to snare victims whose own soul energy might potentially free them from their fate.

Of course, a professional explorer like Tachi didn't believe a single of those crazy urban legends, no matter how much she enjoyed playing them up on video for her hundred thousand fans. She'd come across numerous

bits of ancient key'vin'ta civilization over the years. Village sites. Shrines. Even old 'shaman' caves full of raw purple slime formations. Never once had she encountered anything unusual, let alone found herself face to face with a key'vin'ta ghost.

The old mines, on the other hand, were invariably hazardous, even in the best of local geological circumstances. There might be loose rock overhead, looking for the slightest of excuses to come crashing down. Or bad ground waiting for just the right vibration to completely collapse entire sections of the mine. Dust covered false floors hovering over hundred meter drops, and all too often completely undetectable until the wood they were made of started to crack underfoot... or worse. Rotten ladders. Deep water. Bad air. And so many other perils that it was hard to imagine anyone willingly risking life and limb just to see what secrets the long dead miners might have left behind.

“Well from the looks of it, there’s not much further this trail can go,” Tachi said as she briefly checked the battery level on the fancy ‘intelligent’ camera drone that was hovering right over her left shoulder. It was an older model, and prone to sudden fits of high power draw for no particular reason. Still, it did the job well enough for the hundred thousand fans that routinely watched her exploration videos.

“If there’s actually a mine here, we’ll know pretty soon,” the tigress continued, satisfied that her drone was behaving, at least for now. “Given all that we’ve seen so far, I can’t imagine it being just a prospect, but you never really know until you have a look, do you?”

Tachi slowed her pace as she spied a squarish looking chunk of old rotten wood resting against the hillside, covered in moss and vines. “That’s the first piece of lumber we’ve seen here. That’s a good sign.”

“I’m not seeing any sign of structures

though,” the tigress added. “That’s a bit strange, but we’ve got at least a hundred meters to go until we run out of valley. Looking at it, I don’t think there’s enough room on this side of the brook. Maybe they built on the other side. I don’t see any sign of a footbridge, but I doubt anything would be left after so long. Then again, you never know. How many times have we found thousand year old wood out here that should have rotted away at least nine hundred years ago? They definitely don’t preserve wood the way they used to these days, do they?”

The further Tachi advanced along the overgrown trail, the denser the undergrowth became. The trail followed the curve of the valley to her left, toward the west, as it came toward an abrupt end in the form of a fifty meter tall cliff face. “Still no sign of any structures, but the trail is leading right up to the cliff. I’ll bet we’re going to find an adit there, but I’m not really confident it’s going to go in very far. There’s been no sign of a waste

rock pile so far, though I have to wonder if they used a portion of it to build the road I'm walking on."

The tigress looked up at the gray cliff, and the little cascade of water that splashed down its middle. "That's a pretty little waterfall, isn't it?" she mused as she pushed her way through the last of the vegetation. "Now... what will we find at the end of the trail here?"

Much to Tachi's considerable satisfaction, she found herself looking at a colonial era mine portal. The wooden shed that protected it from falling rocks had long since succumbed to nature. Its rotten, rough-hewn timbers were crushed and half buried by the very rocks it had been intended to shield against. This meant that only a small opening, roughly a meter square, was left exposed atop the mess.

"Well! It looks like we do indeed have a mine here!" the tigress exclaimed with deliberately exaggerated excitement. "That's

awesome! It looks like we can get through the collapse here too. Whether or not we can actually get inside the mine will depend on how much water there is. I don't see any running out of the mine, but whether or not that's a good sign... well, we'll just have to look and see."

Tachi took another look up the cliff, this time being careful to look for any sign of rocks that might be loose and ready to fall. There was likely only one entrance to this lost, abandoned mine. The last thing she wanted was to get trapped by an untimely rock fall. Thankfully, and much to her relief, the country rock looked solid as solid could be.

The tigress frowned. The rock was solid, yes. But it was also perfectly uniform in composition. That wasn't exactly the sort of exciting geology that got a minerals miner in the mood for some good old fashioned blasting. There were no veins. No faults. No sign of mineral bearing ore. So why did they decide

this was a good place to drive an adit?

One possibility was that the actual mining was being done higher up on the mountain. The might have driven the adit in beneath the existing workings to act as haulage for ore dropped down through ore chutes from stopes well above. Or, perhaps, it had been built as a drainage adit to help clear water from workings above. Perhaps it had been intended to serve as both.

“I’m not seeing any real evidence of what the miners were might have been chasing after here,” Tachi noted. “It’s definitely not the sort of geology that you’d typically find high value minerals associated with. If I had to hazard a guess at this point, I’d say that we’re looking at a haulage level for workings higher up on the mountain. That kind of just deepens the mystery, though, doesn’t it?”

“I can understand the surveys overlooking a small prospect,” the tigress continued as she

gingerly climbed over the rocks that were blocking most of the mine portal. “But a multi-level, ore bearing mine? That’s kind of hard to believe, honestly. Especially since this is just off the mine road leading up mine sites six thirty seven and six thirty eight.”

Much to Tachi’s surprise, a light, creosote steeped breeze greeted her sensitive feline nose as she peered into the opening with her trusty high intensity flashlight. “Oh! Well... this is interesting. We’ve got some nice cool air coming out of the portal. That means there’s another opening into the mine somewhere.”

Even more to Tachi’s surprise was the state of the adit beyond the collapsed portal. It was dry. Very dry, to the point of being positively dusty. She could see small animal prints all over the ground. A few meters in, the rusty rails began, though the wooden cross-ties that had held them in place were now so rotten that some of the rails had fallen over onto their side.

“Kind of weird, isn’t it?” Tachi noted. “Looks a lot more like a dry desert mine than a mountain forest mine, doesn’t it? But we’ve come across stranger things in the past, haven’t we?”

“Alright,” the tigress continued, backing away from the portal to get her gear in order. “Let me just get things sorted and make sure the right people know where I am in case something goes wrong. I’ll be right back.”

Tachi tapped her wrist com to stop the drone from recording. From here on in, she’d rely on a hand-held camera in combination with an all-around view camera mounted atop her safety helmet. She also had plenty of lights with her, and enough extra batteries to last her a week if need be. She also had enough food and water for several days, and an advanced first aid kit just in case something went horribly wrong and she had to wait for help to arrive. Assuming help was able to. Or even willing.

Exploring abandoned mines was perilous at the best of times. Trying to rescue someone in an abandoned mine after something had gone horribly wrong was doubly so. No rescue services were obligated to provide aid in such circumstances. Not even the dedicated mine rescue services. A trapped or injured explorer might well find themselves on their own, obligated to rescue themselves, or at least get themselves to a place that was safe enough for others to help them.

Explorers who worked in groups could at least help each other. Solo explorers like Tachi were at much greater risk. It was something she always kept in mind whenever she entered an old mine. No matter how much she wanted to explore every nook and cranny, she had her limits. And, thankfully, she had the willpower to keep herself from second guessing them.

“Batteries, water, food, first aid” the tigress said to herself as she looked through her backpack. She then stood up and looked over

the gear she had attached to her ‘tactical’ vest.  
“Lights, air monitors, camera... all good.”

Tachi zipped up her backpack. She looked at the mine portal and took a deep breath.  
“Well... here goes nothing!”

## DARKNESS

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## TIME

Dr. Kidan frowned. “I can’t just turn my back on them. On her. To hell with Sarva. I’ve worked so hard on all this. If I don’t do something...”

The deeply unsettled scientist rested his forehead on the blinking control panel. “All I’ve ever wanted was a girlfriend that I didn’t have to worry about disappearing forever in one of my experiments. We were so close. So close! How in all the heavens and hells did I screw this up so badly?”

Dr. Kidan looked up at a set of four status indicators. One after another they changed from red, to yellow, and then finally to green.

He looked over his shoulder at the machine. The ultimate machine that collected together everything he knew about life essences and their mechanics. Everything he knew about biogel and its attunements. Everything he knew about space and time.

“She’s right though,” Dr. Kidan remarked with a deep sigh. “The clock is just too risky at this point. But... I think it’s given me enough data. Maybe... maybe I can just sidestep it all. Maybe.”

The biogel clad tiger adjusted his hologlasses and gave the machine one last good look over. The six exquisite quartz sarcophagi that sat to either side of the elevated walkway were full. The obsidian black biogel they contained had been extracted directly from the Omega Core overflow tanks. It was as timeline-transcendent a mass of biogel he had access to without getting caught. If any mass of biogel still had a strong imprint of Chyka and her intimate companions, that

was it.

At the end of the walkway, looming over the whole mass of interconnected machinery, was a large five meter circular portal, partially embedded in the walkway floor. Glowing pink coils of activated biogel wound around its perimeter. These were connected to similar coils that wrapped around and then entered each of the sarcophagi. For the moment, they were all empty. That was, however, about to change.

“New log entry,” Dr. Kidan said to his comm. “I have finished filling the sarcophagi with Omega Core biogel. I will now commence energizing the system. If all goes to plan, I will be able to resynthesize the four targets using the transgel portal. If not...”

The tiger sighed and shook his head. That wasn't something he wanted to think about. He'd done enough damage with the clock so far. Each divergence was further and further

from the correct timeline. One too many and it was entirely possible that there would be such a complete break that there wouldn't be any chance of fixing things. Ever.

“It *will* work,” Dr. Kidan said to himself as he reached for the lever that controlled the system's main activated biogel valve. “It *has to* work.”

The scientist took a deep breath. He pulled the lever.

## DARKNESS

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# STRANGE

“I honestly don’t think I’ve ever seen a mine quite like this one before,” Tachi remarked as she gingerly tiptoed over a seemingly unending stream of disintegrating wooden track ties. “It’s just so... strange!”

The tigress was already five hundred meters into the side of the mountain and there was still no sign of where the arrow-straight adit might be leading. At least there was no doubt in her mind that was is going to lead *somewhere*. The cool breeze and slowly intensifying odor of ancient creosote was more than enough evidence to make that quite clear.

Far less clear was why the adit had been

blasted into the mountain. Her assumption that it had been intended for ore haulage wasn't being borne out by what she was seeing as she advanced. Despite its remarkable length, the adit had no alcoves cut into its sides for miners to safely get out of the way of passing ore cars. There were no drifts. No ore chutes. No anything. Had it really been blasted out just for drainage?

“It's been a long dusty slog, but at least I've still got that cool breeze blowing into my face,” Tachi commented as she continued into the darkness. “How much further do you think this adit is going to go before we find the source of this oily creosote smell?”

Creosote meant wood, of course. And that meant timbers. Framing. Lagging. A shaft, perhaps? A winze? Some very rare intact square set? Wouldn't that make for an awesome video?

Tachi continued down the passage, looking

for anything that might hint at the purpose for all of the colonial era miners' hard work. There wasn't a single clue in the rock that she'd seen so far. It was all the same mottled, grayish country rock with little sign of faults or fissuring, let alone any veins of mineral right intrusion. It was disappointing, to say the least. It did, however, mean that the tunnel had survived long enough for her to explore it.

“No drill holes. No pick marks. Nothing, really,” Tachi commented as she advanced. “They were really careful to make this as neat and tidy as they could and honestly that really doesn't make much sense to me right now. Why go through all that effort? Were they expecting to be working here for a really long time?”

Slowly, the smell of old creosote became stronger. Shadows appeared at the limit of her flashlight. Objects intruding into the otherwise clear adit. A few glimmers of shiny metal. A squarish something to one side that looked like

it might be a sign of some sort. “Hey! Finally! It looks like we’ve got something up interesting up ahead!” Tachi said with considerable excitement in her voice. “Hopefully it isn’t a blockage. I’d hate to have brought you all this way for nothing. But... if I had to hazard a guess from what I can see right now, it might actually a shaft station of some sort. Let’s go have a look.”

The tigress took another step forward. Suddenly, the hair on the back of her neck stood up. Her helmet with its bright light was knocked clean off, clattering to the floor several meters down the tunnel. She was thrust forward by something big. Heavy. And hard.

All that Tachi could think as she fell forward was that the seemingly benign tunnel had collapsed on top of her. In a moment the full weight of the rock would be upon her. She would be crushed. Dead before she even had a chance to scream.

The tigress wasn't crushed. She didn't even have a chance to hit the floor. Hard chitinous claws grabbed her around the shoulder and waist. Before she even had a chance to curse in objection, she was flying forward over the rusty rails, deeper into the mine and its nearly pitch black darkness.

## DARKNESS

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## ENERGY

Luminous pink liquid biogel filled the coils that had been bored through the walls of the four quartz sarcophagi. It spread through the pipes that lead up onto the raised platform that had been constructed between them. It ran through the pencil-thin tubes that surrounded the perimeter of the four meter portal. Within, a thin sheet of obsidian black biogel began to spread inward from the edges.

“Portal formation proceeding as expected,” Dr. Kidan noted for his log. “Full alignment will take several minutes. If all goes well, I will proceed to signature locking.”

The scientist looked over the small portal

control panel. One screen in particular took most of his attention. It was there that he would have to answer the most difficult question before subject extraction and resynthesis could take place. “There are so many readings from the quantum clock. So many possible states to choose from. But... which? Do I take them as they are in this divergent timeline? Or do I choose them when they’re most suitable for...”

Dr. Kidan shook his head. “This. This is how you got into trouble in the first place, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Dr. Alluwa replied.

Dr. Kidan whirled around. “I thought you’d...”

“Gone off to find out what our most recent use of the clock had done to break the timeline even further?” Dr. Alluwa replied with a deep frown. “What’s the point if you’re just going to keep meddling with the natural order of things in my absence?”

Dr. Kidan sighed.

“We need to *fix* things,” Dr. Alluwa scolded. “And here you are trying to break things even more. And all for what? To engineer yourself the perfect girlfriend?”

“This isn’t going to break anything,” Dr. Kidan replied. “It’s just... sidestepping. Until we can figure out how to correct the whole timeline without using the clock. No one will ever know because the original bodies, or organic masses, or whatever you want to call them get left behind.”

“Ah,” Dr. Alluwa responded, shaking her head with visible displeasure. “And what makes you think that any of them are really necessary for the timeline to settle back into a normal progression? Hmm? How do you know that their actual individual progression wasn’t supposed to come to an end?”

Dr. Kidan shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t see how they couldn’t be. Omega exists across

all timelines as a single coherent entity. They're just as much a part of Omega as you are. So that means..."

"*Were,*" Dr. Alluwa sternly. "*Were* a part of Omega. Or have you forgotten that your attempt to save them from the dragille took them back before they became part of the Unity?"

"Why should that matter?" Dr. Kidan questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm telling you, they aren't a part of Omega," Dr. Alluwa responded with a scowl. "And I certainly should know. I *am* Omega after all, aren't I?"

"I think you're confusing yourself with Lady Anwae again," Dr. Kidan sighed.

"You really don't get it, do you?" Dr. Alluwa snipped.

"Oh, I get it," Dr. Kidan replied, rolling his

eyes. “I just find it funny that for all that’s happened, Lady Anwae hasn’t said one word to me about it despite ample opportunity. It’s always you.”

“We’re the same person,” Dr. Alluwa answered, crossing her arms. “Our minds are one. Our souls are one. Everything about us...”

“Is what she *allows* you to perceive about what you are,” Dr. Kidan answered with a wry smirk.

“Fuck you,” Dr. Alluwa snapped. “And that doesn’t change the fact that none of those girls are part of Omega anymore.”

“Exactly how sure of that are you?” Dr. Kidan inquired as he reached out to turn a dial and press the glowing red button right next to it. One of the lines on the screen became highlighted.

“Absolutely one hundred percent positive!” Dr. Alluwa responded with a hiss. “They *are*

*not part of Omega!*”

“Well then,” Dr. Kidan said as he flipped a switch. “Let’s find out which one of us is right!”

## DARKNESS

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# NIGHTMARE

Tachi struggled in vain as the rowa workers stripped off her exploring gear. “What the fuck!?! You’re... you’re not allowed to be all this way north of the city!” she sputtered as they turned their attention to shredding her tan hiking shirt and blue denim pants. “Let go of me! I’m not...”

A sticky bubbly sound drew the captive tigress’ eyes to a rowa worm of some sort that had been trapped in a vile, greenish tan pod hanging from the mine chamber’s ceiling. It was spitting out a mass of sticky mucous that contained a number of small, softly luminous spheres. They were eggs. Rowa eggs. There

were hundreds of them already laying about the cavern floor in piles of jelly-like, half dried mucous.

The eggs served as the only illumination in the chamber. They also served as the favored food source of the ‘true rowa’ who ruled over the hives. On a very rare occasion, one might actually be fertile enough to develop a new true rowa within.

There was a second pod hanging from the chamber ceiling. This one was empty. It wasn’t hard for Tachi to see exactly who was intended to occupy it.

*How have they spread so far without being caught?* Tachi thought as the last bits of her clothing were shredded to bits and scattered all over the floor by the handsy little workers. *How? It’s...*

Tachi’s thoughts were interrupted by a wet, squishy sound behind her. A sudden sharp jab delved deep into her tight little tailhole. “AH!”

she cried out as the prehensile tentacle wiggled about inside her. She cried out again as a second thrust into her equally tight little pussy.

*Ah! No! Both... oh... ah! It's not use! I'm done!* the tigress thought as she could feel the tentacles filling her with their foul transformative seed. There was nothing she could do now. Nothing to stave off the disgusting transformation that was already taking roots in her semen stuffed body. *Relax, Tachi. Relax. Just take it. It'll be done before you know it. Then you won't care anymore. All you're care about is laying bug eggs. Goddess... I...*

A strange, gooey snapping sound filled Tachi's ears. The world suddenly went dark and silent. She could feel herself changing. Changing into one of those reproductive worms. But she was also floating. Spinning. And then... she felt as if she were coated from head to toe in a skin-tight sheathe of tingling

oily wetness.

## DARKNESS

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# RESYNTHESIS

Tachi had been caught. Snared by some kind of alien spider even as she was being transformed by the rowa. Her body had been wrapped in an opaque, oily wet substance and left to hang in a rubbery, bouncy web until the time came for it to consume her. But she wasn't just hanging, was she? She was being pushed through the web. Pushed out into the open, even as her wrapping began to shrink and pull taut around her helpless body.

For a moment, the terrified tigress was dangling helpless upon an unseen precipice. A single thread held her to the web. A single thread held her weak, quivering body upright.

It was only a matter of time. The thread broke. She collapsed onto a surprisingly soft floor.

“It... it worked!” Dr. Kidan exclaimed with almost child-like excitement. “It actually worked! I told you!”

“I guess everyone gets lucky once in a while,” Dr. Alluwa huffed. “That still doesn’t mean she’s part of Omega.”

Tachi got up onto her knees as the bigoel withdrew from her head, leaving her coated from neck to toe just as she’d been before that final time shift. “Ah... oh... oh shit... oh shit,” she gasped as clarity returned and she locked eyes with a very familiar scientist. “Kidān! Thank... thank goddess! I... I don’t know what happened. I was... I don’t know what the hell I was doing. But all of a sudden there were rowa and they... they... is this... is this what she meant?”

“Is this what *who* meant?” Dr. Kidan asked as he helped the shaky tigress to her feet.

“Chyka,” Tachi replied as she looked around the chamber, at the transgel portal and all of its accessories. “When we escaped from the mine shaft over Dari, she said that she kept experiencing time jumps that let her fix mistakes. I didn’t believe her but now...”

“Wait,” Dr. Alluwa said, stepping up onto the platform to eye the tigress more closely. “If you remember that then...”

“Yeah, yeah,” Dr. Kidan responded with a sharp look at his fellow biogel scientist. “I know. But I had to. It’s the correct version of her, and if I’d gone any earlier, she never would have understood enough to actually help us.”

“Wait... what?” Tachi said, looking from one scientist to the other. “Correct version? What’s that supposed to mean? What’s happening? Did Shi win?”

“No, but... it’s a long story,” Dr. Kidan replied. “But let’s just say that me trying to

keep the world from ending may have had some...”

“Unintended consequences?” Dr. Alluwa snarled.

“Yeah, that,” Dr. Kidan responded. “We need to fix things, but the problem is that the versions of all of you in this divergent timeline aren’t... well... I’m not quite sure I can say that they aren’t *real*... but they aren’t who any of you are supposed to be. Some of you aren’t so bad. But others... well. They’re different.”

“I don’t understand,” Tachi replied. “There’s another me?”

“There was another you,” Dr. Kidan answered. “I mean... you’re both the same person. You remember what was happening to you just before I reeled you in. That was this timeline’s you. The rest of you is the real, correct timeline’s you. Which probably still doesn’t make much sense, but it’s really all I can do for the moment.”

“So, now what?” Dr. Alluwa huffed. “What’s your genius plan from here on in?”

“I’m going to grab Jumie and Sakie,” Dr. Kidan replied. “We need to leave Chyka for now, I think. The fact that the rowa seem to be going out of their way to snare everyone involved is... puzzling. Maybe we can find out who’s really pulling the strings.”

“And then?” Dr. Alluwa inquired.

“There’s Nenya, but I think she’ll be good as-is for the moment,” Dr. Kidan replied. “Once we have them all back together, maybe it will help suggest a path forward.”

“Aren’t you forgetting one of them?” Dr. Alluwa inquired. “Or do you not need that vile little creature for all this?”

“Dammit!” Dr. Kidan grunted. “I’d completely forgotten about her!”

“Do you really think the portal will work on

someone stuck between dimensions?” Dr. Alluwa asked.

“Well... we’ll just have to wait and see,” Dr. Kidan replied. “I’m hoping to avoid that, really. If it wasn’t for her influence on Chyka, everything wouldn’t have all gone spiraling out of control the way it did. We *really* can’t afford to have that happen again.”

## PAYMENT

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# RUDE AWAKENING

Chyka could feel something moving. Something was sliding downward, slowly bumping over her modest little breasts and repeatedly tweaking her highly sensitive nipples as it passed. She began to feel a warm wetness upon her rock hard teats. A subtle odor of fresh sweet milk wafted into her twitching nose.

The strange sensations cut sharply against the smoothly pleasing grain of the little snow leopardess' magnificently sensual biogel dream. It was a wonderful dream filled with glossy black cuddles. Intertwined limbs. Probing fingers toking at that perfectly smooth surface between her beloved Vixie personal

assistant's legs.

Chyka struggled to open her eyes as her wonderful dream faded into reality. The strange sensations became clearer and clearer as she began to wake up. Someone, it seemed, was pulling her shiny new rowa themed comforter down toward the foot of her bed. But... who could it possibly be?

The little snow leopardess rubbed her eyes and wondered if Vixie had decided that it was time for her to get out of bed. "What time is it?" she inquired. Her alarm hadn't gone off yet, but who knew what the cuddly biogel clad personal assistant might decide to do in the absence of specific instructions. "It is really time to get up already?"

"Yes," came a totally unexpected voice. "Yes, it is."

"Gra... grandma?" Chyka sputtered as she found herself staring up at her grandmother, who was now sitting atop the rolled down

comforter, near the end of the luxuriously large bed. “What... what are you doing here?”

“I’m just... finishing up some very important business in town and thought I’d pay a late night visit,” a very naked General Takka Riyalli replied with a disturbingly emotionless smile down at her surprised granddaughter. “You know. Get caught up with you on some things. Our mutual interest and such.”

“Our mutual interest?” Chyka asked as she gave her grandmother a very puzzled look. Something about the elder snow leopardess was different. Strange. Unfamiliar. Even... wrong. “I... I’m not quite sure what you’re talking about.”

“No?” Takka replied. “Well, I’m not surprised. I’ve never really talked about it with anyone before. Not even you.”

“What is it?” Chyka asked as she pulled her legs out from under the comforter and slid herself sideways across the bed. She would

have sat up next to her grandmother, but there was just something so unsettling about her look and tone that she felt almost compelled to move away. There was always the chance that she was wrong, though, and laying across the bed seemed like a fair compromise.

Takka responded by lifting up a large segmented dildo from among the comforter's rumples. "Such an exquisite replica of a male rowa worm's oral phallus, isn't it?"

"Grandma!" Chyka groaned. "Have you really been going through my toy drawer?"

Takka laughed. "Who says this one's yours?"

"Oh, so that it," Chyka sighed. "You're into rowa porn too?"

"You might say that," Takka responded with a smile that seemed quite warm in contrast to her prior iciness.

"It's not just because I am, is it?" Chyka

asked.

“Oh, no,” Takka replied. “Not at all. You know that I escorted the delegation to Fey’lin for the final peace... arrangements.”

“You never really told me about that,” Chyka responded with a shrug.

“It was quite an... interesting affair,” Takka answered. “Imagine being cooped up in a big liner with a few dozen rowa. A hive queen. A prince. And all their buggy entourage.”

“Must have smelled awful,” Chyka noted.

“Quite,” Takka replied. “But the most fascinating part of it was all of the other passengers who’d volunteered to come along. You see, no one had any illusions about what those rowa would do to anyone they could catch aboard the ship. So... we made sure they had plenty of people to catch who weren’t going to make a fuss about it.”

“And you?” Chyka asked.

“My job was to get the rowa to the Palace,” Takka responded. “And I did that. But that didn’t mean I couldn’t enjoy the show on the way, right?”

“I guess,” Chyka replied.

Takka chuckled. “It was a very big liner. A thousand other passengers. The rowa were more than happy to show me the full variety of their transformative ministrations. I have to admit... watching all those people transform was quite... stimulating.”

“I’d imagine so,” Chyka observed.

“I never forgot,” Takka went on. “I fulfilled one duty after another, but I never forgot how they made me feel. And now...”

Chyka responded with a raised eyebrow.

“Well now it’s time that I fulfilled my side of a bargain that I made with those rowa before I

left them to transformed our beloved Empress Maya into a practically mindless squirmy-worm,” Takka replied.

“And that was...” Chyka inquired, biting her lip nervously as an odd smell began to waft into the open bedroom windows along with the cool breeze.

“To do something special for the rowa,” Takka responded. “To do something that would ensure against challenges that might interfere with the success of an important hive.”

Chyka frowned. Again, her grandmother seemed disconcertingly emotionless. Her eyes had again gone cold. “That’s nice,” the little snow leopardess said, starting every so slowly so slide across the bed, away from her grandmother. “I need to get something to drink. Where’s Nenya? I mean Vixie?”

“Working through her existential crisis in the living room,” Takka replied with a wry smirk. “What a good thing that mask wound up

on her instead of you, wasn't it?"

"I... I guess," Chyka responded, sliding a bit further.

"You know, you may call it a fetish, but it's plainly obvious to me that you've really fallen in love with the rowa, haven't you?" Takka purred in the most disingenuous manner possible. "To be perfectly honest, so have I. So now let's be good little girls and follow Empress Maya's example together. Don't worry! It'll be fun. I promise!"

Chyka didn't even have time to blurt out a reply. Nor did she have a chance to make good her escape. There was a sudden slithering sound behind her that sent her back toward her grandmother. Deeply alarmed, she lifted her ass up and was about to propel herself clean off that side of the bed with both legs when the head of a male rowa worm popped up in front of her, its mucous slathered phallus already poking out of its 'mouth'.

“Wha... what? You! You...” the little snow leopardess stammered.

“That’s right,” Takka laughed as she watched her granddaughter start to wiggle herself backwards. “Tail up. Legs spread wide. I knew you were ready.”

“Ready? I... I’m... AAAH!” Chyka shrieked as the male worm that had been lurking behind her took good advantage of her welcoming pose. The feeling of warm goo being pressed into her soft feminine folds was all the warning she got. In an instant the worm’s big segmented mouth-cock had slipped deep into her completely unprepared body.

The creature’s whole chitinous head pressed hard between her legs, pushing her forward and down into one of her big gelatin pillows. This the horrified little snow leopardess grabbed with her right hand as the creature began to wiggle back and forth with wild abandon. “Oh... oh... ah!” she gasped as the

creature gave her helpless body just the same sort of treatment that she'd watched so many times in all those videos. Just like all those pretty girls she'd gotten of to as the bugs fill with their potent juices. As they transformed into new bugs. In body... and in mind.

Chyka didn't know what to think as the worm did its level best to tenderize her deeply filled pussy. Despite the shock, and despite the horror, it was quickly starting to arouse her. It was beginning to feel... not unpleasant. Perhaps even a bit nice.

The little snow leopardess grabbed at the edge of the bed with her left hand as she felt the creature's movements suddenly stiffen. She grasped the geltain sheet hard as it thumped its whole head hard up against her groin. It could mean only one thing.

“No! NO!” Chyka cried out as she felt sudden, dull pulses of pressure throbbing through her abdomen. Not only had the

creature had ejaculated a copious quantity of virulently transformative semen into her her helpless little pussy, it had somehow forced her to experience an orgasm in the process. A faint orgasm, but an orgasm nonetheless.

“Goddess! Oh... oh Goddess!” Chyka sputtered as her head spun about in a whirl of deeply mixed feelings. The worm sex might have actually been quite a bit of fun if she’d had long enough to get over the initial shock and horror of its sudden and forceful initiation. She could actually kind of understand why girls who did it more deliberately seemed to enjoy it so much. But... at what cost?

Takka giggled with darkly playful enthusiasm as little gobs of sticky bug spoo squirted from of her granddaughter’s tight body. They splattered all over the worm as it gave its helpless lover a few final spurts of buggy spoo. “That’s a good girl!”

Chyka panted and gasped as the creature withdrew almost as quickly as it had entered her. Bug spoo splattered all over legs and the bed in between them. “I... I... I don’t understand!” she moaned as she felt a strange numb tightness take hold inside her belly.

The countless sperm with which the creature had filled her tender little pussy were already hard at work corrupting her flesh. The fur of her abdomen and upper legs began to fall out all at once. The exposed skin pulled taut into firm leathery segments that felt... just plain wrong. Uncomfortable. Alien.

“Just tying up the final loose end that was getting in the way of my promise, sweetie,” Takka replied as she spread her own legs over the edge of the bed. The other worm had been patiently waiting for an orifice to fill. It took no time in taking full advantage of the newly available pussy.

“Why?” Chyka groaned as strange feeling of

dull flatness spread through her belly and into the place that cradled her womanly organs. In mere moments it had spread out from within. Nearly all sense of being physically female was consumed as her womanhood fused shut, leaving her groin as flat and plain as plain could be. But... it didn't stop there. It kept going, fusing her legs together as it spread rapidly down toward her feet. "Why? Why do you want us... to be... bugs? Why?!?"

"Don't worry about it," Takka replied as her wormy lover released its transformative load inside her own body. "I'm sure we'll both just love flopping around in stinky bug spoo and doing whatever it is that rowa worms do all day. The hive will thrive and never again be threatened by the power that... well. That's all quite moot now, isn't it?"

Chyka clenched her teeth as the transformation spread down over her ankles and up toward the base of her ribcage. As her soft mammaries were pulled sharply taut, all

she could think about was how the rowa in her precious videos had never filled their victims with so much spooage all at once. They'd been far more careful in their ministrations, treating their captives to only a few drips so that their transformations would take many minutes to complete. So that their victims could savor the alien sensations. So steep themselves in their fetish for as long as possible.

But not little Chyka. She wasn't even given the chance to really comprehend what was happening, let alone actually spend time just feeling it as it progressed. All she could do was huff and gasp. Struggle and write. Moan with quiet desperation as the final few seconds passed. As the transformation pulled in her arms. As it spread up her neck. As it...

## PAYMENT

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# CONFUSION

One moment, Chyka was wiggling her last wiggles as her genuine self. The very next, she was squirming about within impossibly tight and very rubbery cocoon. It was only now that she could really feel the shape of her rowaform body. Her weirdly moving segments. Her long, mucous gland tipped tail. Her round little head with its mucous spewing pussy-mouth.

By all rights, the little snow leopardess should have become a virtual beast. A creature, rather than a person. A barely self-aware monster who's only purpose was to wiggle around and spread smelly mucous all through her new hive. And maybe, just maybe she'd be

lucky enough to get a chance to suck on a non-rowa cock once in a very long while.

But... Chyka hadn't completely turned into a beast. Her mind was still intact. Somehow, somehow, the transformation had been stopped right at the moment she was about to be stripped of virtually everything that made her who she was.

Seconds ticked past. Ever so slowly, the little snow leopardess' captive rowaform body began to change. To her complete and utter astonishment, she was somehow morphing back into the pretty little snow leopardess that she'd been mere minutes before. It didn't make sense. Unless...

*It's... it's happening again isn't it? Chyka thought. I'm being sent back... back before this happened. But this time... it's going so... so slowly...*

“What’s happening?” came a strange female voice from beyond the little snow leopardess’

rubbery cocoon. “Why is the biogel sheen beginning to activate?”

“I don’t know!” came a strange male voice. “It’s... it’s not supposed to! Something’s going wrong!”

All of a sudden, Chyka’s mind began to whirl. *What the... I... who...* she thought as a deep, disturbing confusion took hold of her. Many different versions of herself were flashing through her mind. Vying for control. Desperate to take over and be the one who was allowed a new chance at living a real life.

“Then stop it!” the female voice replied. “Can’t you stop it? Freeze the process? Anything?!?”

“I can’t!” the male responded. “It’s some kind of runaway process! I don’t understand! It shouldn’t be possible!”

Only one Chyka could win the struggle. Only one Chyka could exit the portal. Would it be

the key'vin'ta demi-goddess? Would it be the innocent librarian? Or would it be one of the many versions in between?

“What’s it doing to her?” another female voice asked.

“Can’t you do something?” yet another snapped.

“You have to! Please! She’s...” a third cried out.

“If I knew what was happening, maybe I could but... this is just... impossible!” the male replied. “It’s impossible!!!”

“Here we go again,” the very first strange voice sighed. “How many times do I have to tell you...”

“Shut up! Dammit! It’s going to... we need to get out!” the male yelled. “Back into the clock chamber! Quickly! It’s the only way to stop this!”

“We can’t use the clock again!” the first female snapped as the voices began to fade into the distance. “We just can’t! The risk at this point is far too...”

“We don’t have a choice!” the male replied. “There’s absolutely no other...”

A loud thump cut off the rest of the male’s statement.

Moments of terrifying silence ticked past as the many Chykas began to tear each other apart. Bits and pieces of personality were warped or destroyed. Memories were rent asunder. Instincts and inclinations whipped back and forth between passive innocence and vile evil. As everything that she was, or had been, was twisted and corrupted into unrecognizable mockeries of who she should have, or could have been.

A whirlpool was forming within the very core of Chyka’s soul. A very familiar whirlpool. She knew exactly where it led. To the Nine

Heavenly Hells.

A cacophony of corrupted minds finally came together as one. The Hells were the one place where this new corrupted being could genuinely feel at home. There, she could become a vile purveyor of terrifying pleasure. Or she could become a helpless recipient thereof. There was no way to know which would be her eternal fate. She didn't care.

Chyka gleefully dove into the spiral of sensuous damnation. Strange threads of searing hot pleasure began to wend their way into her mind. Into the new immortal body that was being formed just for her to inhabit for the remainder of eternity. It felt so good. It felt so right. And, for the first time since she'd encountered that temptress Ki'su and her magnificent magics, it felt like she was about to find herself a truly perfect home.

## PAYMENT

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# STABILITY

“We did it! WE DID IT!!!” Dr. Kidan exclaimed, bouncing around the quantum clock chamber with childlike enthusiasm. “I can’t believe it, but we finally did it!”

“We did what, exactly?” Tachi asked with a raised eyebrow and crossed arms.

“We found a stable timeline!” Dr. Kidan replied, pointing at various indicators and displays on the quantum clock’s control panel. “Look! There are plenty of minor variances in the overall flow, but from past to present, all return to the center. Even better, this last activation of the clock is perfectly coincident with a centering point. That means we’re in

our correct timeline!”

“That could just be coincidence,” Dr. Alluwa noted. “How many times have you let yourself be fooled before?”

“True,” Dr. Kidan replied. “But... all of our individual flows also hit center at the same time! You. Me. The girls. Even Omega as a total entity. It can’t get any better than that!”

“Are you *sure* about that?” Dr. Alluwa inquired with a tone of deep skepticism.

“Are you arguing about the stability of the timeline?” Dr. Kidan asked with a deep sigh.

“No,” Dr. Alluwa replied. “It’s the other part I’m concerned with.”

“What do you mean?” Dr. Kidan questioned. “The timeline is stable. Shi’s been disposed of. You can see that right over here. And the dragille never got summoned. You don’t see that right over there. We’re all here. We’re all

fine. What's wrong?"

"Chyka?" Dr. Alluwa inquired.

"Chyka!!!" Jumie cried out, bolting for the door that led into the resynthesis portal chamber.

"Wait! Stop!" Dr. Kidan yelled as the door opened. "Come back! Everything in there is dangerous!"

The whole group chased after Jumie in an effort to stop her. There had been catastrophe enough for one day. The last thing anyone wanted was a new one to deal with.

As they entered the chamber, the group found Jumie standing in silence. She had stopped just short of climbing up onto the padded portal platform. Her eyes were locked on the petite figure who was standing upon the platform, just in front of the portal itself. The petite figure of a biogel clad snow leopardess who was as still as still could be, staring

blankly off into space.

“Chyka?” Sakie asked.

Dr. Kidan sighed in relief as he climbed the steps leading up onto the padded platform. “Thank the heavens! I didn’t think it was going to work for a moment. It would have been pretty awkward if you got stuck as a biogel worm with your intact mind stuck in it, wouldn’t it?”

“Intact mind?” Dr. Alluwa questioned, following her fellow scientist up onto the platform.

“Uh... Chyka?” Dr. Kidan questioned, waving his hand in front of the little snow leopardess’ face. “Chyka?”

The little snow leopardess didn’t respond to the waving hand. Her blank expression didn’t change in the slightest. She just continued to stare straight ahead, blinking occasionally but otherwise completely motionless.

“Walnut brain,” Dr. Alluwa noted with a sigh. “Just like the girls who put on those horrid hivewear masks. Shame but... well. We knew about the potential of this sort of thing happening, didn’t we?”

“Well? How do we fix it?” Sakie demanded.

“There has to be a way!” Jumie replied with tears in her eyes. “Say there’s a way!”

“Put a hivewear mask on her and call it a day?” Dr. Alluwa replied with a thoroughly disgusted look on her face.

“That’s... horrible!” Tachi snapped. “Fucking horrible! What is she to you? Just a tool? A toy? What is she?”

“Stop!” Dr. Kidan barked. “We’re never going to figure this out by fighting! We need to think. Think hard.”

“Do you want to know what I think?” Dr. Alluwa replied.

“Not really,” Tachi snarled.

“I think it’s kind of odd, isn’t it?” Dr. Alluwa responded.

“What’s odd?” Dr. Kidan asked, crossing his arms and scowling at the tigress.

“Kind of makes you wonder, doesn’t it?” Dr. Alluwa replied.

“Wonder *what?*” Dr. Kidan snapped. “We don’t have time for your... games!”

“Well... the timeline is ‘fixed’, isn’t it?” Dr. Alluwa replied with a contemplative expression on her face. “Everyone came to a center point. Even Chyka. And yet... there she is. Stuck with a rowa walnut brain and quite possibly no way to do anything about it. Kind of makes you wonder.”

“Are you suggesting that Chyka having a walnut brain is what was *supposed* to happen to her?” Dr. Kidan responded incredulously.

“You come up with a different theory and I’ll be happy to hear it,” Dr. Alluwa answered.

“Maybe I will,” Dr. Kidan replied.

“Good, now maybe we should be having a look at what sort of stable timeline we’re actually in,” Dr. Alluwa observed. “You girls come with me while I see what the rest of my extended self can tell me if everything really is... ‘normal’. If it’s ‘normal’, I’ll send Dr. Turi down to have a look at Chyka. She’ll know better than any of us if there’s more in there than a rowa worm brain having trouble understanding a humanoid body.”

“Do we have to?” Jumie asked.

“Yes,” Dr. Kidan replied with a shrug and a sigh. “I need to give Chyka a full scan to make sure there’s no lingering residual biogel activation effects on her body. There’s a chance of reactivation and it could be very dangerous if you were in here if that happened.”

“Let’s go,” Dr. Alluwa said, beckoning the three other women to follow. “And let’s hope all this temporal nonsense has finally come to an end.”

## PAYMENT

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# THE HELLS

“Oh... Goddess,” Chyka moaned as she opened her eyes and squinted into the bright beams of warm sunlight that were cascading into the giant windows of her luxurious Gelitech apartment. “What a crazy dream that was. What time is it? Oh, shit! Did I forget to go to work? Classes start... today?”

“Affirmative,” Vixie replied.

Chyka looked around the familiar room. Or at least it *seemed* familiar, on the face of it. There was the huge biogel bed fit for a small pride of biogel clad beauties. The dressers to either side. The cathedral ceiling. The massive windows. It was all just like she remembered

from that... previous life?

“This isn’t... wait... what is this place?” Chyka said as she found herself looking into the large circular living chamber, with its artwork covered walls, its four support columns and the sunken seating area within. Above was a glowing dome that cast the area in an eerie pinkish purple light. “Where’s the wall between the bedroom and the...”

The little snow leopardess sat up. “I never really liked that wall there,” she remarked as she eyed the living chamber with suspicion. “But... am I... am I in the future now or something? Because how would it be gone unless I’d asked so... yeah. This has to be the future.”

“Negative,” Vixie replied.

“Then where am I?” Chyka questioned, turning to her biogel clad personal assistant. Her pleasing shape was perfectly familiar. It was Nanya. Or... was it?

“Gelitech Gelarium, Mashiva, Maria IV, Marian Drift Prefecture, Fey’li Empire,” Vixie responded.

“Well, yeah, I know *that*,” Chyka muttered as she began to slide off the edge of the bed. It was only then that she realized that her body was now covered from neck to toe with glossy black biogel. “And apparently I’m all covered in this biogel shit again too. I thought I was supposed to be free from Omega!”

Chyka froze. She fully expected Omega to enter her mind, just like the being had done so many times before. Instead, there was only an eerie silence. Indeed, despite biogel’s powers of connection, there was nothing to be sensed beyond the edge of her own ability to perceive her immediate surroundings.

“Am I... am I in the Hells?” Chyka asked. That was what her strange dream had been all about. Throwing herself into the Hells, just to escape the insanity of her previous life. Or

lives. Or whatever they really were.

“Affirmative,” Vixie replied.

“Oh... *greeeeeat*,” Chyka replied, rolling her eyes as she got up from the edge of the bed. “No. Seriously. Where am I?”

Vixie laughed. Her mask melted away. Her body suddenly changed shape to that of a very familiar blue skinned mitanni. “Seriously. Where do *you* think that you are?”

“Ky’tin!” Chyka exclaimed as she found herself face to face with the tall mitanni that she’d once so casually cast into the Hells with her newfound key’vin’ta magic. “You... I... oh... oh goddess...”

“There is no goddess here,” Ky’tin replied with a deep dark laugh. “There is only terror and pleasure here. Horrific beasts who know no rules and who don’t care one bit what their helpless captives think about their... ministrations. And then there are the captives

who's bodies are just flesh to be stuffed with the effluents so pleasingly foul as to be so instantly addictive that one actually desires the terror. The corruption. The transformation into a mere meaty toy for dark angels of unending horror and glorious demons of heavenly pleasure.”

“Well, yeah,” Chyka replied as she took a pensive step back from the insidiously grinning mitanni. “I know that. That’s what all the stories say.”

“Now,” Ky’tin chuckled as she stepped forward and reached out to caress the nervously quivering little snow leopardess’ chin. “There is only one question left, isn’t there?”

“And that is?” Chyka asked, biting her lip.

“Which one of us here is the beast?”

## PAYMENT

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# THE PERFECT GIRLFRIEND

“I’m sorry,” Dr. Kidan murmured as he waved a specially attuned scanner wand around the silent little snow leopardess. “I’m sorry for everything. It really is all my fault. Trying to force you to follow the path that I wanted you to follow. Trying to make you my... well... we kind of wound up there for a bit, didn’t we?”

Chyka didn’t respond.

“You know what I should have done?” Dr. Kidan continued. “I should have asked you out when I first met you in the library. Or when I saw you’d become a model. Or before you ran off with Mika. Or at least after that whole thing at Dari. I should have stopped then. But I

didn't. And now... I really do regret it. I hope..."

Dr. Kidan shook his head. "How can you ever really forgive me? You can't. And you won't. And... and I really don't blame you."

Chyka still gave no sign of reply.

"There's still some residual energy floating around in you," Dr. Kidan noted as he reached out to touch the little snow leopardess' cheek. "Please tell me its your mind having trouble figuring out your body. Please. Yes?"

Without warning, Chyka dropped to her knees. Her blank gaze remained, but her face stretched forward until her nose was hovering just in front of the tiger's crotch. His genitalia were concealed by the substance of his biogel coating, though clearly the little snow leopardess was keenly aware of their presence.

"Uh..." Dr. Kidan murmured as the little snow leopardess began to rub her face against

the mound of biogel that contained his manhood. “What are you...”

Chyka continued to rub against the tiger’s biogel mound until it made him begin to feel aroused. Slowly, the biogel shrunk around his large penis and amply proportioned testicles. Just as slowly, his penis began to grow and harden. She opened her mouth and began to suck on it.

“Oh... uh... I don’t think this is...” Dr. Kidan muttered in disbelief as he looked down at his would-be lover. “Why... oh. Right. Look at you holding your arms at your side like they aren’t even there. You think you’re still a worm, don’t you?”

Chyka didn’t respond. She simply kept sucking on her lover’s still growing penis.

“You realize your girls are going to kill me, right?” Dr. Kidan noted with a deep frown. “Oh... dammit. If it keeps you still enough for me to finish the scans then I guess... well. It’s

an excuse, right?”

Chyka kept on sucking on the tiger’s penis as he adjusted his sensor wand for a more focused scan of her cranium.

“Goddess, I already feel so hard and tingly,” Dr. Kidan murmured as he began to scan her head. “If you keep doing that, I’m going to jizz in your mouth. I don’t know if the biogel is going to contain it. But... that’s what you’re after, isn’t it?”

The sensor wand beeped. Then it emitted a warbling alarm.

“Oh... shit!” Dr. Kidan exclaimed as he moved to pull away from the little snow leopardess. Her teeth dissuaded him. “Let go! Let go! If it activates it can spread into my suit and then we’ll both...”

The biogel coating Chyka’s body turned from black to bright luminous pink all at once. It began to liquefy and spread up her neck. In a

virtual instant, it had completely covered her head.

“Oh! No! No! Dammit! NO!” Dr. Kidan groaned as the little snow leopardess’ shape began to change. The mouth upon his firmly erect penis went soft and squishy, with a strange firmness around the edges. A sharp sizzling sound filled the air as the light within the shape became almost too bright to look at. “Let go! Let go! Come on... LET GO!”

There was a sudden sharp snap. The light faded. Chyka’s whole body was now made of pure glistening blackness. Her whole, and still quite animate, rowa worm body.

“What... what the...” Dr. Kidan sputtered as the biogel worm sucked on his penis even harder than it had when it had been a little biogel clad snow leopardess. “Oh... goddess... I’m gonna...”

“Ah!” the tiger gasped as he ejaculated into the biogel worm’s gummy pussy-mouth. The

biogel definitely failed to contain his seed, and the worm gulped it down just as fast as he could produce it. “Ah... oh... that feels so... so... amazing!”

The biogel worm pulled away from the spent tiger and began to slither away in search of another cock to help sate its bestial thirst.

“Oh, no. No you aren’t,” Dr. Kidan said, reaching down to lift the surprisingly light worm up off the platform. “You’re coming to the lab with me. And maybe... maybe once we’ve figured out why you turned into a worm like that your girlfriends will let me help keep you happy. I mean... after all I’ve done to you, it’s the least I can do, right? Yeah, that just sounds wrong, doesn’t it? But... well. We’ll see.”

## PAYMENT

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# A CHOICE

“Well?” Ky’tin asked as Chyka followed her through the hellish garden that surrounded the stony edifice that contained the faux Gelitech apartment. “What do you think of my gardening skills?”

The little snow leopardess genuinely didn’t know what to say. The monstrous shapes that surrounded her seemed far more like creatures made of corrupted green flesh than actual vegetation. True, they were all rooted firmly in the ground. They had stems, or trunks. Leaves. Quite a few even had what might pass for flowers from a distance.

There was, however, no beauty to Ky’tin’s

carefully composed garden. The corrupted plants clearly weren't there for their looks. They were there for what they did to the bodies of the captives whose eternal fate was to be subject to the mitanni's most deeply rooted personal fetish.

“Don't they all just make you feel so insanely horny?” Ky'tin mused as she caressed a nearby 'flower'. This particular example was attached to one of the many woody vines that were wrapped around the warped, half-dead looking trees that lined the garden path. “Aren't their scents so... wonderful? Come closer. Smell them. Trust me. It will help you feel comfortable with... well, here.”

Chyka bit her lip as she forced herself to look at the luxuriously tanned, legless and otherwise disembodied abdomen that had become fused into the end of one of the vine's many branches. It was a disturbing sight to behold. A woman, reduced to little more than a hips, rump, and pussy, anally penetrated by a

constantly wiggling bit of plant matter that stretched down its backside. A toy made eternally available for the use of the countless denizens of the Hells who were lucky enough to be counted among the givers of vile ministrations rather than the vast majority who were doomed to receive whatever the former might deign to impart upon them.

These demonic angels were lurking about the garden, always just out of the little snow leopard's view. No doubt the only thing dissuading them from approaching was the presence of the gardener. Had the helpless little fey'li been wandering alone... who knew what might happen. She might wind up being forced to become part of the garden... or worse. Far, far worse.

Then again, there really was no 'might' about it. Chyka knew that she was going to be taken. They were going to have their way with her, one way or another. On the positive side, whatever happened, it would feel absolutely

incredible. She was going to love it, no matter how much it terrified her, and whether she wanted it or not.

Ky'tin moved to another plant. This was actually more of a massive mound of fungus than a plant. The translucent, luminous violet mass occupied a bend in the path, accessible through a few narrow spaces between the trees. Dozens of feminine shapes could be seen squirming within.

It was difficult for Chyka to tell what the fungus was doing to its captives. It looked as if they were being slowly transformed into strangely shaped structures of disturbingly porous, even fibrous nature. These were then attached to other strangely shaped structures which stretched deeper into the fungal mass. What purpose they might serve in the organism was truly impossible to tell.

“Even fungus enjoys a woman’s pleasure,” Ky'tin commented as she poked at the surface

of the highly adhesive mass. As she pulled her finger away, the fungus tried to keep hold of her. She giggled at its vain attempt to pull her in. “This is one of my favorites. It takes its time. It warps its captive in ways that their minds just cannot even begin to comprehend. And when it is all finally done and she has become nothing but nutrients, then poof! She goes on to some other place in the Hells! Will she endure another such momentary horror? Or will she face something far more permanent? I do not know. It is not my place. But I cannot help but wonder.”

Chyka cringed as the fungus finally snapped away from the mitanni’s finger. It may have been powerless to restrain its mistress, but the little snow leopardess would be another matter entirely. She kept as far away from at as she could without blundering into some other horror.

“But I’m not so sure that would suit a beauty like you, hmm?” Ky’tin cooed. “You belong

here. With me. And to that end, I've been thinking about something a bit more... floral."

"You're really going to make me part of this garden, aren't you?" Chyka asked as the mitanni led her further down the path. "Why... why can't we... you know... just be together. We can do that here, right?"

"Such a naive little one, aren't you?" Ky'tin chuckled. "After all you owe the Mistress of the Hells, you think you deserve to become like me? To be a mistress and not a plaything? No. No. You owe and it's time for you to make payment."

"Owe?" Chyka questioned. "Since when do owe the Hells anything?"

"Since you accepted your role as a key'vin'ta priestess," Ky'tin answered with a smirk. "You promised to use your powers to return the glory days of the key'vin'ta and the endless stream of souls cast directly into the Hells. And what of Omega? What of helping to expand

that being to its limits and then casting all of its constituent souls into the Hells all at once?”

“It wasn’t my fault that didn’t happen!” Chyka exclaimed as the mitanni lead her toward a place where the path split in two. “I wasn’t the one pulling the strings. Someone else was! I didn’t even get to find out who!”

“The Mistress of the Hells doesn’t care,” Ky’tin answered with a deeply insidious smile as a strange scent of sweep pollen and highly aroused pussy began to fill the air. “All she cares about is that you make up for your failure to fulfill your end of the bargain. And I think this right here would be the perfect place for you to do it.”

Chyka gasped as she found herself presented with a copse of huge trees as beautiful as they were deeply unsettling. Dangling from the branches of each were dozens of huge, upside down tulip blossoms in a rainbow of colors that only seemed to exclude shades of green.

Each produced a nearly continuous drizzle of clear goo from some hidden place within its petals, though this was only a hint at their deeply unsettling nature. A look up at what the flowers were attached to, however...

The little snow leopardess' heat skipped a beat as she gazed in fascination and horror at the form the trees' many victims had taken. Each was a woody armless torso, connected to its knobby branch at the neck, and leaking pale golden sap from knotty nipples. A green abdomen followed, its shape so smoothed over that it was more of a vaguely feminine tube of plant matter. It was this that the outer leaves and eerily pretty tulip-like petals that took the place of her legs.

“Such a pretty thing, isn't it?” Ky'tin asked as she reached out to draw her newest acquisition in for a closer look.

“I... I don't know,” Chyka replied as the mitanni pulled her forward until she was

standing nearly beneath a bright pink bloom. It was only then that she could see inside, and gaze upon the mucous drizzling pussy up inside where a normal flower's female organs would have been. This was surrounded by six stamen, their bulbous tips covered in bright orange pollen. "Oh... that's..."

"Magnificent?" Ky'tin cooed as she pressed on the little snow leopardess' back until she was compelled to step into the flower's thick mucal shower.

"Oh! Nasty!" Chyka groaned as the clear mucous drizzled up her nose and onto her head. As of on cue, the flow of mucous increased quite sharply. It began to ooze downward on all sides. "Come on! This isn't..."

"What you had in mind when you sold your soul to the Mistress?" Ky'tin replied.

"No!" Chyka answered, pulling back from the stream of mucous and doing her best to shake the thick goo from her hair.

“Of course it isn’t,” Ky’tin responded with a thoroughly unsympathetic smile as she pushed her captive back into the stream of mucous. “It never is. But the Mistress doesn’t care. And neither do I. But...”

“But what?” Chyka snarled as she found herself compelled to let the sticky slime start to spread down over her shoulders, upper back and chest.

“It *would* be such a waste, wouldn’t it?” Ky’tin mused.

Chyka grimaced and spat as she tried, and failed, to prevent the mucous from completely covering her face. There was no way to keep it from getting into her mouth. It tasted slightly sweet, and slightly salty. It also tasted just a tad bit on the sharp side.

“What do you think, hmm?” Ky’tin cooed. “A second chance, perhaps?”

“I’m not serving your Mistress,” Chyka

replied as the events of her first time around flashed through her mind. “Not again. Ever.”

“Are you really sure about that?” Ky’tin asked as she watched the mucous spread down her captive’s abdomen and upper legs.

Chyka was silent as the mucous slipped down her lower legs and began to pool around her feet. She began to feel strange. She couldn’t move. Or, rather, she simply couldn’t force herself to move.

“Well, we shall see, won’t we?” Ky’tin chuckled as she picked up the now totally helpless little snow leopardess. “The Mistress may be ready to forgive your debt and give you a second chance. But for now, you owe *me* a bit of enjoyment. So, how about we see what color flower you make, hmm? I’m sure it will be quite... magnificent!”

## TURNABOUT

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## FAIR PLAY

*All's fair in love and war, Chyka thought as she pondered the famous mitanni saying. More like all's fair in lust and war. But which one is this?*

Ky'tin had always seemed to like the little snow leopardess. She was about the only one the mitanni truly got along with back at Gelitech. Now, however, she didn't seem to see Chyka as being anything more than an object. A trophy to be mounted upon her precious tree along with her other conquests. Was it out of lust for the possession of her body, transformed in a fashion that satisfied her most arousing fetish? Or was it a war of retribution against her soul, the victim turned

mistress determined to ensure that their relative status would never again be reversed?

Chyka wasn't sure. Nor was she really in any state to ask. Her strength was gone. So too was her willpower. All she could do was lay limp in her captor's grasp and await the inevitable.

The little snow leopardess shuddered as Ky'tin lifted her head toward an open space beneath one of the hellish tree's large branches. Soon she would be dangling in the air, dripping vaginal mucous all over the ground just like all the other upside down blooms. It was a terrifying prospect, one made even worse by the knowledge that there would be no reprieve. It would be her eternal fate. Her eternal damnation, one from which she could never, ever escape.

On the positive side of matters, at least the little snow leopardess could take some comfort in knowing that she wasn't going to be reduced to a helpless abdomen attached to the end of a

demonic vine. She wasn't going to be made available to be used by all demonkind, in whatever manner they might see fit. Assuming the Hells weren't home to something inclined to pollinate the blooms, that is. Granted, that at least *might* be a bit more interesting than the other alternatives she'd seen thus far. At least for a little while. But then... what? Would she just be left there to ooze intimate juices and maybe get pollinated every so often and little else?

“Here we go,” Ky'tin cooed as she lifted her captive up a bit higher. “Just a little bit more and you shall become an eternal part of my magnificent garden. Oh, how I shall enjoy gazing upon your beautiful petals. Tasting your sweet nectar. Mmm!”

There was a woody creaking just above Chyka's head. This was followed by a sharp cracking as a small cloud of woody dust cascaded downward along with numerous little bits of shattered bark. She looked up to find

herself mere centimeters from a deep, dark hole in the branch. She could only imagine what it was going to feel like as the wood pressed in and began to subsume her.

No matter how terrifying the prospect might have been, the little snow leopardess knew it was going to feel good. Intoxicatingly good, in fact. She would have no choice but to enjoy it. That was the way of the Nine Heavenly Hells. But even knowing that, the thought of being transformed into a demonic flower gave her an unexpected burst of energy.

“No,” the Chyka hissed as her newfound strength helped her come to a rather belated conclusion as to the proper course of action. That, of course, was to resist. She began to wiggle and squirm against the mitanni’s powerful grip. “Just... no!”

“Don’t struggle. It’ll only...” Ky’tin replied as she attempted to raise her captive up into the shallow opening in the underside of the

branch. In doing so, however, she was placed in a very awkward position. No matter how strong her grip was, it was no use in holding onto a mucous covered fey'li suddenly possessed of the will, the determination, and the leverage to take advantage of it. "Hey! No! Let me..."

Chyka slipped from Ky'tin's grip just as her head was about to enter the opening in the demonic tree branch. She fell to the ground in a splatter of mucous as the mitanni made a vain effort to regain a hold of her. The little snow leopardess was just too small and too dexterous a target, even if she found herself almost just as hampered by the mucous as her captor had been.

"And what do you think you're going to achieve?" Ky'tin laughed as she watched the little snow leopardess slip and slide about on her hands and knees, just out of easy reach. "Do you really think you can escape my domain? Do you really think you can escape my

demonic guests? No. There is no escape. If you run from me, then your little body will be adorning the seething giant cock of the first demon to find you. And they *will* find you. So, what would you prefer? To adorn my tree or spend the rest of your immortal existence as a demon's cock-sheathe? The choice is yours."

"I'll take eternal demon cock any day over your nasty plants," Chyka snapped in reply as a plan began to take shape in her mind. It was a risky plan, for sure. But it was certainly better than the alternative of being chased around the strange, maze like garden by the one who'd created it. She smiled. "But not before I've had a little fun of my own."

"Oh, really?" Ky'tin chuckled. "And how do you plan on achieving that, hmm?"

"It might be the Hells, but we're still playing by mitanni rules, aren't we?" Chyka replied with a broad grin. Without pausing to give her target time to figure out what she'd meant, the

little snow leopardess bolted straight for the mitanni's ankles. With a bit of luck, she might be able to hit with enough force to put her off of her hooves. With a bit more luck, she might knock the mitanni into one of the lower branches that were quite conveniently located at just about head height.

"You must be jesting," Ky'tin sighed as the little snow leopardess crashed into her powerful legs. "You really think you're strong enough to wrestle me down?"

Much to the little snow leopardess considerable consternation, the mitanni didn't budge.

"There," Ky'tin giggled, reaching down with both hands. "Are you done? Yes? Then let's get that silly little head of yours in its hole and..."

*All's fair in lust and war, Chyka thought as the mitanni seemed poised to grab her. And this is war!*

It was said that the Nine Heavenly Hells were as painless as they were terrifying. There was only horror and pleasure, and nothing else. It seemed like now was the perfect time for Chyka to find out if all that was actually true or not.

Ky'tin screeched as the little snow leopardess sunk her sharp teeth into her left ankle. Whether or not it was from pain or simply shock at her combative victim's temerity was impossible to tell. The mitanni staggered back. She tripped over a large root that jutted out from the base of the tree. In order to steady herself, she reached out to grab onto one of those low hanging branches. Her hand missed, and her horns struck the wood with a loud, empty sounding *thunk*. The branch creaked. It cracked. An opening began to form behind her head.

The mitanni gasped in horror as the demonic wood drew her head in by the horns. Before she could react, she was in up to her

ears. “No! No! You’re my creation! You aren’t... you can’t!...” she swore at the tree as it gave her the same treatment that it has given to so many of her captives. “Let me go! Let me go!”

Ky’tin began to struggle against the tree. She squirmed. She writhed. She flailed and kicked as her head was quickly pulled in until only her face was left exposed.

The terrified mitanni’s kicking did little to help her cause, but it did succeed in sending Chyka on a short flight down the garden path from which they’d come. That was perfectly fine by her, despite the painful tumble of a landing. She was now well out of reach and could watch without fear of being dragged in again.

“You... little... bitch!” Ky’tin swore as the wood began to close over her face, covering her cheeks, forehead and eyes.

“You asked me which one of us was the real demon here,” Chyka replied as she sat up with

a smirk on her face. “I’d have thought a mitanni like you would have been prepared to be challenged for that title. Your loss. My win.”

“Bitch!” Ky’tin hissed one last curse as the branch finally drew what was left of her head within.

Chyka couldn’t help but smile as she watched the mitanni shudder and writhe, her whole head now completely encased within the branch. Or was it? Bark was beginning to spread down from where her neck was held within the wood. It was no mere covering though. It was a transformation of the faux-biogel that coated her body. It was a transformation of her skin. No doubt it was also a transformation of the flesh beneath.

Only Ky’tin’s continued struggles suggested that her mind was still attached to her body. That was no surprise, of course. In a place like the Hells, one’s soul was always firmly attached to one’s body no matter what kind of

state it was in.

Chyka grinned as she watched the mitanni shudder and writhe. Despite her own personal aversion to the tree and its powers, she just couldn't help but find the sight of Ky'tin's transformation more than just a bit arousing. She could feel a brief, distant tingle between her legs as she watched the line of bark slither downward, fusing the mitanni's arms to her sides as it began to spread over her large breasts.

"She was right about one thing, wasn't she?" the little snow leopardess mused as she reached down to gently rub the turn of her pelvis with her left hand. The mitanni's legs were fusing together in a mass of glistening blackness as her rock hard nipples turned into woody knobs. "That is pretty sexy, isn't it?"

Ky'tin's legs now split into a set of six large black petals that hung from her hip line in a closed, upside down floral bloom. Above these,

her abdomen turned green and formed a bulbous base for the flower, while the bark spread down her upper belly to meet it. The whole shape gave one last twisting shudder as the transformation came to its conclusion. The petals then opened. A drizzle of mitanni vaginal juices began to issue forth, oozing over the big root and forming a little puddle to one side of it.

Chyka stood up and approached the new bloom. “I just *have* to taste her. Just to know... what could have been if she’d let us both be the demons.”

Chyka stopped and reached under the bloom with her left hand, still toking between her legs with her right. Fresh warm mucous soon displaced the old, and she lifted it up to take in its slightly briny, slightly piquant scent. Her fingers dug into her faux-biogel covered womanhood as a wave of arousal swept through her entire body. She opened her mouth. She stretched out her tongue. She

licked the goo from her fingers.

Before the little snow leopardess could even register what was happening, her body had risen to such a state of stimulation that a massive orgasm thumped through her abdomen. Amid the resulting wave of heady euphoria, a sense of belonging filled her mind. A sense of understanding. She was the demon now. The garden was hers. Or was it?

A loud laugh echoed through the garden. “Well, well, well,” the vaguely feminine voice remarked with thorough bemusement. “How utterly unexpected. Who would have thought the debtor would turn the debt collector into their payment?”

## TURNABOUT

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# DEMONIZED

“What... what?” Chyka called out in response to the strange voice. She looked around at the plants. The eerily greenish sky. No matter how hard she looked, however, there was no sign of its source.

“Who... who are you?” the little snow leopardess questioned after a long and awkward silence.

“Who am I?” the voice laughed in reply. “Who are you to dare ask? You fancy yourself brave? Not afraid of anything? Not even the Mistress of the Hells herself?”

“You... you’re...” Chyka sputtered as a

strange feeling came over her. It was a powerful feeling, not unlike what she had once felt when Omega exerted control. Whoever the being was, it clearly held the same sort of power over her. Could it really be the fabled Mistress herself? “Are you really...”

“The mortals who inhabit your native reality have decided, for some unfathomable reason, to call me Key’sha,” the voice replied. “These nine realms of immortal pleasure are my domain. All who reside within them prostrate their souls before my whim and will. None dare contest my power. None dare question me. None, save you, it seems.”

Chyka bit her lip and waited for bad news. Given how badly she’d held up her side of the bargain before falling into the Hells, it was almost inevitable, wasn’t it? And it was almost sure to be far worse than getting turned into a flower on Ky’tin’s tree to boot.

“Curious, isn’t it?” the Mistress Key’sha

continued. “A creature so desperate to be in control of its own existence that it refuses to submit to those who have absolute control over it. Curious. Normally I would punish you for such a rebellious demeanor. But... I do not think that would serve my current interests at the moment. After all, you don’t really belong here, do you?”

“I... don’t?” Chyka questioned. She certainly felt like she belonged. She was the demon of the garden now, wasn’t she?

The Mistress Key’sha again laughed. “No, you don’t. You have a much more important place to be, and a much more important task to dedicate your immortal existence to. Don’t you?”

“I’m not going to help you,” Chyka responded with a deep frown. Going back to the mortal realm might be much nicer than staying in the Hells, but at what cost? She was tired of being forced to take those kinds of

risks, over and over again to no apparently good end. It was time to take a stand, even if it meant taking Ky'tin's place in the garden, and no doubt eventually sharing her fate in the process as well. "Not again. Not after all that happened to me. To everyone I love. No. I'm not going to do it. I'm going to stay here and I'm going to do whatever Ky'tin was doing and that's that. Period."

"Do you really think I'm giving you a choice?" the Mistress Key'sha replied. "No. There is no choice. But... no matter. You were never my true target. You were merely a catalyst for events. Expecting you to effect my ultimate purpose as well was, perhaps, a bit of unjustified optimism on my part."

"And who was your true target if it wasn't me?" Chyka questioned with considerable skepticism.

"And why should *you* be privy to such secrets?" the Mistress Key'sha answered. "No.

No. These are not things which you have even the slightest need to know. In fact, it would be most deleterious to the success of your new purpose if you understood.”

“New purpose?” Chyka hissed. “No. I am *not* going to be your puppet again! And besides, I’m a demon now, aren’t I? A demon of the Hells. I can’t just go back and live a mortal life again, right?”

“Indeed,” the Mistress Key’sha responded. “You are. Amusingly self-made, but a demon of the Hells nonetheless. But that just makes you even more perfectly suited for the task at hand.”

“You aren’t going to force me to...” Chyka snapped.

“I won’t be forcing you to do anything,” the Mistress Key’sha replied. “I won’t have to. You will do it all on your own. Because it is your nature. It is who you are. It is who you have always been.”

“Then just send me back and let me get on with my life,” Chyka responded with a snarl. “But I’m not doing your bidding no matter what. Ever!”

“Feisty!” the Mistress Key’sha chuckled. “As much as I would love to punish your insolence, I have to confess that it suits you quite well. Perhaps I shall. Omega is waiting, after all. It would be quite presumptuous of me to keep my successor waiting for her favorite little servant, wouldn’t it?”

“Your... your what?” Chyka replied with surprise at the suggestion of Omega somehow being the successor to the current Mistress of the Hells.

“Does it really surprise you?” the Mistress Key’sha asked. “No matter. All that matters is that she has the tools she needs to ascend into my place. Only then can I finish the journey that began with the sacrifice of my whole people and many more alongside them. Only

then can I know what it is to become a true divinity.”

“You... you’re... you’re key’vin’ta?” Chyka asked as the Mistress Key’sha’s story struck a very familiar tone.

“I once was,” the Mistress Key’sha replied. “But that is all quite irrelevant. I imagine she has something quite special in store for you. A reward for all you’ve been through thus far. And if you embrace it, perhaps she’ll give you a layer of the Hells to rule yourself one day, to reshape into a place fitting your own darkest inclinations. But... that is for the very distant future, isn’t it? For now...”

The glistening black faux-biogel that coated Chyka’s body suddenly transformed into the real thing. An instant later, the whole of her body had become biogel, just as it had been when she had been a part of Omega. A part of the Unity. Something about it, however, was... different. It had a strangely ethereal feel that

imbued her with a deep sense of angelic purity. At the same time it had a rather piquant feel that gave her an equally deep sense of demonic mischievousness.

The puzzled little snow leopardess watched the Ky'tin's garden dissolve into the familiar transdimensional whirlpool of damnation. Rather than falling into its depths, however, this time she was being sent soaring upward, out of the Hells, and toward a blindingly bright light. Toward the real world, whatever form that might take this time around.

Chyka entered the light. Then it all went dark. Then she opened her eyes.

## TURNABOUT

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# BACK TO GELITECH

“Oh... Goddess,” Chyka moaned as she opened her eyes and squinted into the bright beams of warm sunlight that were cascading into the giant windows of her luxurious Gelitech apartment. “What a crazy dream that was. It was a dream, wasn’t it? Yeah. It had to be. But... oh shit! What time is it? Did I forget to go to work? Classes start... today? They start today, don’t they?”

“Affirmative,” Vixie replied.

Chyka looked around the familiar room. Or at least it *seemed* familiar, on the face of it. There was the huge biogel bed fit for a small pride of biogel clad beauties. The dressers to

either side. The cathedral ceiling. The massive windows. It was all just like she remembered from that... previous life?

“This isn’t... wait... I’ve seen this place before,” Chyka said as she found herself looking into the large circular living chamber, with its artwork covered walls, its four support columns and the sunken seating area within. Above was a glowing dome that cast the area in an eerie pinkish purple light. “The wall between the bedroom and the... oh... oh Goddess... I’m still in the Hells!”

“Negative,” Vixie observed “You are in the Gelitech Gelarium, Mashiva, Maria IV, Marian Drift Prefecture, Fey’li Empire.”

“No,” Chyka muttered as she began to slide off the edge of the bed. “No. I may be stupid half the time, but I’m *not* that stupid! You are *not* going to trick me a second time.”

“I do not understand,” Vixie replied. “Please clarify your statement.”

Chyka was about to snap at her fake Vixie servant when one of the tall mirrors that lined the walls to either side of the bed caught her eye. She gasped in confused horror at the sight of her demonic reflection.

“Goddess,” Chyka murmured as she stared at her altered shape. There was no mistaking what she had become. “I... I really am a demon!”

The little snow leopardess body was no longer coated in glistening blackness. Instead, much of her body was coated in glossy, pure white biogel. Her boots, back, and much of her left side was coated patches and stringers of shiny black biogel that constantly shifted about in a deeply unsettling fashion. And, as if all that weren't enough to leave the little snow leopardess stunned silent, her back was adorned with black biogel versions of a slime-demon's quasi-skeletal wings. Between the bones were continuously shifting shapes of biogel sheen. The tips were adorned with

with glowing purple gobzite ‘gems’ which exuded a warm, fizzy transdimensional energy that she could manipulate with almost arbitrary ease.

“Oh... oh wow,” Chyka murmured as she flexed her wings and tested her innate purple slime power. She could feel the throbbing energy. It felt quite similar to the power she had once wielded through her key’vin’ta holy staff. Now, however, it felt far more potent. Far more visceral. And far more natural, as if it were something that she had known and wielded all her life.

The little snow leopardess looked to her strange biogel coating. The passive white felt pure. Warm. Wholesome. And sexy, in a positive, constructive sort of way.

The crawling, creeping black biogel felt very different. In many ways, it felt just like black biogel had always felt. Dark. All encompassing. All consuming, even. Sexy, as well, but in a

way that drew the mind toward things it would never otherwise contemplate.

Chyka wasn't sure if it was the black biogel itself, or the contrast against the pure feeling of the white that made it feel so sensually unpleasant. It felt tempting. Corrupting. Almost... voracious, as if it actively wanted to subsume anyone and everyone its host might come into contact with.

“It's... so...” the little snow leopardess murmured as she tried to make sense of what she was feeling.

“Exquisite?” Lady Anwae inquired as she stood up from one of the couches in the sunken seating area.

“Wha... you!” Chyka sputtered, spinning around to face the gently smiling cheetah with a distrustful scowl on her face. Whatever confidence she had once had in the being called Omega had been shattered by the revelation that she was heiress to the Mistress

of the Hells. It was hard not to see her as a beast now. A monster, using her sexy biogel to ensnare and corrupt in order to achieve transcendence into the likes of a sensually sadistic demigoddess.

“I was wondering when you’d finally turn up,” Lady Anwae chuckled as she approached her deeply uncertain servant. “The Hells are quite an inhospitable place, aren’t they?”

“You... you could say that,” Chyka replied with a raised eyebrow. How did Lady Anwae know she’d been to the Hells? Was it confirmation that she was a willing participant in the Mistress Key’sha’s plan?

“I have to imagine that it found you more quite a bit more inhospitable to it than it was to you,” Lady Anwae noted with a smirk. “You didn’t escape unchanged, though, did you?”

“I wasn’t just going to roll over and get fucked for all eternity,” Chyka answered with a frown. “But you can’t just be you unless you’re

a demon so...”

Lady Anwae laughed. “I figured as much. So, what do you think? Does it suit you?”

Chyka’s first inclination was to make a snide remark about Omega’s secret intentions. Then she would refuse to have any part of it all. But she didn’t. In fact, she couldn’t. Despite her being a demon of the Hells, the dominance of Omega was still just as powerful as ever. All she could do was say, “Yes, Mistress.”

Granted, it wasn’t entirely a lie. Despite the unsettling appearance, her demonic shape actually did feel quite comfortable. Even the strange contrasting sensations of the two colors of biogel felt natural to her. As to whether or not it actually pleased her... of that she wasn’t quite sure.

“Good,” Lady Anwae replied with an approving nod and a mischievous smile. “Now... I suppose you’re wondering why your demonically angelic transformation doesn’t

bother me in the least, aren't you?"

"Yes, Mistress," Chyka replied. She certainly did, even though the Mistress Key'sha's revelations already offered more than enough in the way of explanation.

Lady Anwae grinned. "Well, you see, even after all that's happened. After Shi. After Dr. Kidan's poorly thought out temporal meddling. After your excursion to rowa buggidom. I still haven't forgotten about the special role I'd always wanted you to fulfill."

"And that was?" Chyka questioned. After all that had happened, she could barely remember which event had taken place when, let alone anything Lady Anwae, Omega, had mentioned about a special role.

"I wanted you and your growing pride to go out an experience the bizarre and alien," Lady Anwae replied. "And to study those experiences so that Gelitech could craft biogel versions to help attract far more customers that we ever

otherwise could.”

“Oh, that,” Chyka responded with a roll of her eyes. She remembered Omega saying something along those lines in the past. She’d assumed it was just a passing idea that had almost immediately been forgotten.

“Just as important,” Lay Anwae continued, “you will help fulfill my own promise to the Empress to assist in the study of xenoexperiences in general. To provide a scientific basis for the identification and promotion of various positive experiences compatible with the government’s efforts to blunt population growth back to sustainable levels.”

“That’s not...” Chyka began as her mind turned toward the Mistress Key’sha’s stated intentions and the assumption that Lady Anwae was an aware and active participant.

“That’s not what the Mistress of the Hells wants you to do?” Lady Anwae chuckled. “Of

course it isn't. And why should we care? We have an eternity before us. Whatever her desires are, let her wait."

Chyka was confused. Shouldn't Lady Anwae actually *want* to take over the Hells?

"That confuses you?" Lady Anwae noted. "Yes, we defeated Shi. If Shi had achieved her goal, she would have taken over the Hells and reduced the Mistress to just another captive soul rather than allowing her to ascend to some higher state. Then she lured you into the Hells so you could become a pretty little demon girl in an effort to influence me into doing whatever it is she wants from me."

"Lured?" Chyka questioned with a sneer as she finally managed to find her own voice again. "You mean I was bounced around in time and turned into a rowa worm and then... I died and went to the Hells?"

Lady Anwae laughed. "Die? No. You never died. In fact, your old body is still present and

very much alive. Though... your premature abandonment *did* result in its reversion into a rowa worm. A biogel rowa worm. I imagine Dr. Kidan is going to be quite surprised to learn that he's only been 'dating' your lesser half. Surprised, and a bit embarrassed, I imagine."

Chyka bit her lip. The thought of Dr. Kidan getting sucked off by a biogel rowa worm was unsettling enough. That the worm had once been her own living body left her feeling quite conflicted. Should she be disturbed? Horrified? Embarrassed? Curious? Fascinated? Maybe even take it as a very personal compliment?

"Which brings me to just why your state as an actual demon girl is so perfect for the mission I have in mind," Lady Anwae said, reaching out to run a hand down the outer bone of Chyka's left wing. "Dr. Kidan has recently created the means to place any soul into a fully animate biogel body of virtually arbitrary form. A magnificent device which can fully restore anyone who has become a biogel

object, finally fulfilling the promise of biogel's military potential to create weapons which disable without fatalities, and who's innocent victims can be restored to some semblance of normal life. But..."

"But what?" Chyka questioned.

"It can also be used to allow *anyone* to experience *anything*, and then be restored into a biogel body to tell the tale," Lady Anwae replied. "I'm sure you can see just how drastically that changes how we can go about fulfilling our objective. We no longer have to rely on the subjective experiences of geldancers. Geldancers who are already quite accustomed to taking on drastically differing forms with all their drastically differing sensations. Now we can take anyone and throw them to the aliens and beasts and get their own honest assessment of the experience. We can take data from multiple subjects and use it to form conclusions which will inform the government's proposed xenoepereicne rating

system. Isn't that wonderful?"

Chyka didn't know quite what to think. It was certainly an interesting idea. Given how many people were more than happy to get into xenoexperiecnes already, there'd probably be no end to the supply of volunteers either. It would certainly be fun to observe the activities. It might even be just as much fun to hear what the volunteers had to say about it all afterwards. Would they be revolted? Would they find it fascinating? Would the be willing to do it again... perhaps even 'for real'? Or at least as 'for real' as a biogel person could?

"But... the technology is dangerous," Lady Anwae went on, shifting her caress to her little biogel demon's cheek. "It can become quite unpredictable. Your own randomly disjointed journey is more than enough evidence of that. Dr. Kidan never had the time to figure out why things always went off the rails. The matter of Shi was just far too pressing to allow for it. Until now."

“I don’t even know when now actually is,” Chyka replied as she began to wonder just who was actually manipulating who. Until she’d wound up in the Hells, she’d assumed it was the dragille. But... had it really been Dr. Kidan? Why hadn’t he ever said anything about it?

In retrospect, it seemed like knowing about Dr. Kidan’s ability to create time jumps might have been quite useful in defeating Shi without nearly as much trouble as she’d been forced to endure. Or was he just another pawn as well? Was he the real target the Mistress Key’sha had mentioned? Was his new technology the result of her influence? If what Lady Anwae had said about animating gummies to give them relatively normal lives then it might well be. After all, what better way to get even more people into biogel bodies than to take away the worst of the consequences?

“It was only when your restoration went awry that he realized that he needed to add some sort of transdimensional anchor to the

mix,” Lady Anwae went on. “Apparently, the only truly effective option that exists right now is an anchor crafted from purple gobzite. To make matters more complicated, a new one is required for every use of that particular portion of his invention, something only a key’vin’ta priestess can provide. Or... a pretty little biogel demon girl like you.”

“So that’s why me being a demon is so perfect?” Chyka asked. “So I make these transdimensional anchor things?”

“Yes,” Lady Anwae replied. “In a nutshell.”

“That doesn’t sound like any fun at all,” Chyka quipped as she began to feel a bit more on the piquant side. The black biogel spread further through the white on her body, squirming and wiggling so energetically that it began to burst out in the form of bumps and small tendrils on its surface. “What’s the point of being a literal demon if I can’t have have fun?”

“Oh, don’t you worry about having fun,” Lady Anwae replied with a laugh. “I’m sure you’ll soon acquire plenty of your own servants to make the anchors for you. A biogel demon can create more of her own kind, after all. Then you can spend your time engaged in more, shall we say, academic pursuits. After all, who better than a librarian to see to the collection of all that data, hmm?”

Chyka shrugged. Collecting data didn’t seem like much fun either. At least, not on the face of it. If she could use it as an excuse to directly observe... would she be able to do that? Could she actually participate in these experiences without consequence, just like the subjects? She could join them and encourage them and learn what was needed to help draw out all the little details from them once their experience was done. And if they were biogel beings afterwards... could she see into their minds? Relive what they had felt directly through their memories?

“*The Librarian*, in fact,” Lady Anwae mused as she drew her hand back from the little biogel demon’s face. “You shall become the centralized source of all things related to xenoexperience, biogel included. How does that sound, hmm?”

Chyka shrugged.

“Of course, seeking out any new and interesting xenoexperience will require a means to travel to its source,” Lady Anwae added with a grin. “And, it just so happens, I’ve come into possession of just the perfect starship. One of the Imperial Yachts, to be exact. A luxurious vessel that will be sure to draw in volunteers like bears to a beehive. And one that will, perhaps, provide some compensation for the trials you’ve been through. I call it... the *Destiny Explorer*.”

“I suppose that could be... kind of fun,” Chyka answered with a skeptical sigh. She had no idea how to run a starship, let alone any

real inclination to go adventuring in space. But... did she have any real choice?

“I’m sure you’ll make it quite fun for all involved,” Lady Anwae replied as she turned to leave. “For now, though, I’m going to leave you to you to think about how you’re going to present yourself to the world. What shape you want to take when you aren’t being so beautifully demonic. And perhaps to decide just who you want to tempt into joining you in demonhood first.”

Chyka nodded as she watched Lady Anwae depart. She was still more than a bit confused. Yet again, things were moving so quickly that she didn’t really have time to catch up. She didn’t even know what sort of world it was she’d returned to. Was it the same one in which she’d become a rowa worm? Was the previous world, sans Shi? Or was it a new one altogether? She had to find, but first she had to figure out how to change her shape into something more amenable to the eyes of those

who'd known her.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**