

THE COMPLETE
GELITECH

VOLUME 2
1st SEASON – BOOK 2

BY SHETIRA ANWAE

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GONE SHOPPING

Old Mashiva wasn't the kind of place one made a point to visit unless one had some very specific reason to go there. There was nothing at all to recommend the drab old frontier boom-town. Unless one was looking for dirt cheap liquor, bawdy live entertainment, or barrel-bottom rent, that is. It was hardly a place to live, let alone conduct any particularly profitable business. Unless, of course, one was willing to delve into the dark business of old-world vice.

All that could really be said in Old Mashiva's defense was that it generally didn't flood nearly so badly as the new city to the east. During the worst storms, three or four inches

of water might accumulate for a time. The roads might become impassable. Public transportation might be shut down. But once the rain stopped, the flooding quickly subsided, mostly thanks to the old city's location on a forty-meter high prominence that loomed over the old former rail yards, and the river just beyond.

The densely packed new city of Mashiva was located down on the plain. Though still about twenty meters above the river, it took the brunt of the runoff from the mountains to the north. The northern and western portions of the new city were especially vulnerable. As a result, the streets there were little more than a grid of granite-clad concrete canyons, dotted with colorful signs and ramps leading up into each block's elevated parking garage. There was little else to be found at ground level, unless one was fond of delving into the nuances of modern infrastructure and flood control.

Certain critical blocks around the Northwest Residential District were protected by lifting sections of roadbed that acted as temporary dams. Backed up by pumps to remove accumulated rain water, these kept the blocks largely dry during flooding. In this way, certain vital structures including emergency services and the engineering support and ventilation systems for those areas of the city's vast underground network of multi-level basements, subways, and other tunnels, could be kept largely dry. As to the rest of the district, they all had to make do with a more elevated sort of lifestyle.

The real city experience in Northwestie began five stories above street level. Above the streets, the garages, and the lower level support floors, was a vast network of skywalks, lobbies, and businesses that mimicked the layout and composition of a more typical city's ground level. Enclosed bridges connected all of the blocks and buildings together into a coherent whole who's

day-to-day life was largely unimpeded by the storms and the flooding that they caused. Each block had at least one set of public pathways that connected it to all of its immediate neighbors. In some buildings, there were multiple public floors with restaurants, shops, and various sundry entertainments. In others, the public services were less expansive. In many, these were limited to public lavatories, and little else.

A second network of skywalks was built at the tenth-floor level. Less expansive, these were more recreational in intent, and were designed to create a visually appealing, hyper-modern cityscape for residents and guests alike. In addition to connecting selected buildings and blocks, these also served as access to rooftop plazas and gardens. A number of higher class recreational and culinary establishments could also be found at this level, mainly clustered near the major transit hubs where both monorail and subway access was close at hand.

The monorails ran in long, meandering loops which allowed citizens a reasonably rapid means of travel around Northwestie, and eastward into the new city center. These ran over the streets, with passenger platforms located every other other city megablock. Each of these megablocks consisted of nine large city blocks together, bordered on all sides by broad bi-level thoroughfares that were intended to help ease traffic congestion. Traffic on each level went in one direction only. North or west on the upper level. South or east on the lower.

While all this might have made sense to the long-time resident, navigating the Northwestie maze was nearly impossible for the residents of Mashiva's other, more conventionally composed districts, let alone for a total newcomer. 'Getting lost in Northwestie' wasn't a commentary on the districts outward romantic appeal. It was an excuse for tardiness, and generally a perfectly valid one at that. In fact, if you visited Northwestie and

didn't get lost, it was typically, albeit jokingly, regarded as a sign of being a bit 'off' by most. A bit odd. Even a bit crazy.

If being just a bit crazy was the sole qualification for successfully navigating the blocks of Northwestie in a timely fashion, Chyka should have had no trouble in finding her destination. She was a Gelitech model, after all. But even the little snow leopardess just couldn't make heads or tails of the place. Even with directions from her comm. In fact, she was starting to wonder if her destination actually existed at all.

"Are we lost?" Jumie inquired as the pair circled around the core of New Mashiva megablock three-four for the fifth time. This was the third megablock from the western edge of the new city, and forth down from the north. If they'd read the advertisement right, their destination should have been in block four, the middle block on the western side. But try as they might, the business was nowhere to

be found in the public spaces, or in the directories for the private floors either.

"No," Chyka replied with a shrug. "We know exactly where we are. It's this place that's lost, not us. It's absolutely nowhere around here!"

"Pardon me, if I might be so intrusive, but are you having difficulty in finding some specific location of particular interest?" came a thin, metallic sounding voice. "Perhaps I might be of some reasonable degree of assistance in that regard."

Chyka looked down to find herself confronted with a diminutive humanoid of rather unusual proportions. His skin was a dull, greenish-gray and his eyes were large black orbs on the front of his almost comically over-sized head. His hands and feet with proportioned in equally absurd measure. It was hard for her to imagine the poor creature being able to stand upright, let alone conduct himself so normally in Maria's ever-so-slightly

above average gravity.

The interloper wore nothing on his body save a short, shimmering golden kilt. He carried nothing else but a comm that was hanging from his silver belt. This was so big in proportion to his size that it would have certainly pulled the whole thing straight down were it not for his jutting, bony hips.

"Sure," Chyka said as Jumie took a pensive step back from the unusual little alien. "Do you know where High Tail is? They've got a really good sale going on, and the avert says its in three-four-four, but we can't seem to find it."

"High Tail?" the alien responded, tapping his fingers together as he looked up in a thoughtful manner. "I seem to recall hearing of a business with that name somewhere within this particular structural collective. A clothing establishment, perhaps? Specializing in feyli attire, I would assume? Yes. That is certainly it. I must, however, admit that I do know

personally know the location of this place. Perhaps my erstwhile assistant knows. Come! Let us go together and inquire of her!"

"Uh..." Jumie murmured with a very distinct tone of reluctance. She still wasn't nearly comfortable with being surrounded by so many people, let alone so many people who very much weren't feyli.

"Sure," Chyka replied, reaching back to give her wife a firm tug. It had been hard enough just to get her to come out in public wearing nothing but her glistening black coating of biogel. The last thing she wanted was for the appearance of this strange little alien to give her cold feet, especially so apparently close to their destination and the pleasant shopping distractions therein. "Asking for help is just part of life, right? Let's go and hope she knows where High Tail is hiding."

Jumie sighed with vocal apprehension as her wife pulled her forward.

"Come, come!" the alien said, leading them toward an escalator. He gestured upward, toward a broad storefront completely covered in brightly illuminated stained glass. "We have not far to go at all. Just up the moving stairs."

"That's pretty," Chyka remarked as she followed the alien onto the escalator, thankful temptation didn't lure her into commenting on his awkward gait. "You work there?"

"As it so happens to be, I am the proprietor of the establishment," the alien replied. "A mark of pride it is indeed, I must declare. You have heard of it before, quite possibly. It is called... The Bejeweled!"

Chyka couldn't help but stop and stare at the sheer, opulent magnificence of it all.

Everywhere, there were statues. Magnificent, gemstone statues, mounted upon platforms and plinths of stone, copper, silver, and gold. Sumptuous images that enshrined the nude physical form in poses ranging from the sublimely practical, to the imaginatively artistic, and all the way to the overtly erotic.

Many of the statues were single subjects in all manner of poses, alone upon their mounts, or ensconced within gemstone holders, or even little multi-colored gemstone scenes. Most of these were purely artistic in nature, though some had 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. There was even a complex fountain of sorts, the sapphire feyli subject issuing a constant stream of water from her upturned mouth. Water that entered through a gemstone passage beneath her tail, an image that carried with it slightly unsettling erotic implications. Erotic implications that were enhanced by the

nearby statues of subjects held captive in the loving embrace of gemstone tentacles.

The rest of the statues were multiple subjects in a variety of poses. Some were purely artistic in nature, but most of them had been composed purely for erotic appeal. Couples making love in various fashions. More gemstone tentacles. Even some gemstone monstrosities that invoked images in Chyka's mind of some of the most unpleasant looking of alien erotica that she'd ever come across.

"Come come!" the little alien beckoned as he headed straight toward the back of the establishment. "I am quite sure that my assistant can provide you with useful assistance. She is an assistant, after all!"

Chyka couldn't help but smirk at the alien's rather lame attempt at a joke. Working up the courage to follow him was another matter entirely. She'd heard all about places like this before. Places where alien technology as just

as strange as biogel could be found... and sometimes encountered in very intimate fashion. Where the line between guests and merchandise was fuzzy even by Gelitech standards. Where the rules of the game were all too often bent and twisted well beyond recognition. Where people went in... and only objects of living stone came out.

"What is this place?" Jumie asked as she was gently pulled along behind her reluctant companion.

"The Bejeweled!" the alien replied with a giddy, overly-enthusiastic tone. "Mashiva's one and only creator and purveyor of supremely artistic, life-sized gemstone exotica and erotica! And I, in addition to being this establishments proud owner and proprietor, am also its jeweler! My work is quite splendid, is it not? Magnificent, even! Perhaps you would like to see how I go about in creating such beauties?"

"Maybe some other time," Chyka replied. There wasn't a doubt in her mind where the little alien was headed with that proposal. It wasn't someplace she was willing to go, let alone take her new wife along with her.

"Of course," the alien chuckled. "But I can assure you that you are missing quite an intimately inspiring treat. My digital gorgon is quite as astonishing to behold as its produce."

"I'm sure it is," Chyka noted as the alien led them through the maze of statuary, toward a service desk crafted of swirly, rainbow stone.

"Sakie! Sakie! Where are you?" the alien called out as they approached the counter. "We have guests in considerable need of your very personal assistance!"

Chyka had certainly heard of digital gorgons before. They were strange devices which could somehow use light itself to transform living beings into inanimate statues of elemental or mineral nature. They could produce both

accurate, life-like conversions and highly modified shapes, standing alone and pure, mounted upon freshly generated pedestals, or embedded in partial or complete encasements. There seemed to be no limits to the variety of the potential results, save the imagination of the jeweler, and the cooperation of his subject.

"Coming! Coming!" a light, girly voice called out from a sliding, stained glass door behind the counter. It whooshed open, and a pretty, brown-haired cougaress burst out. "What'd'you need? Buying? Selling? A demonstration? I'd love to give you a demonstration? No? Yes? Please!"

Chyka hardly heard the cougaress' words. She was too focused on the woman's ample, and very naked breasts. They bounced up and down like sacks of jelly with every step, almost in perfect time with her long, braided ponytail. Whether or not the rest of her was as bare as her chest, the little snow leopardess wasn't quite tall enough to see, though definitely not

for lack of wanting.

Public nudity was nothing strange to the feyli. They came equipped with one layer of clothing already. Their silky-soft fur was typically thick enough to conceal their more intimate details. That was one major reason feyli seemed to take to biogel a bit more readily than most others. They were already quite comfortable running around one step short of being totally naked.

"There she most definitely is!" the little alien declared, turning away to leave. "Now, if you shall excuse me, I must be off to drum up more business, acquire new merchandise, and other such sundry activities."

"Thank you," Chyka replied with a smile and a nod, though she wasn't entirely sure if she was going to be quite as thankful by the time their visit to his establishment was over.

"Come this way and I'll demonstrate the gorgon for you!" Sakie bubbled, pointing

toward another stained glass door toward the back of the store. "Once you've seen how it works, I can absolutely guarantee you'll want to try it for yourselves! Don't worry! It's one hundred percent compatible with that shiny black biogel of yours and..."

"Well, actually... we were just looking for directions," Chyka interjected. "Your boss thought you might know where the store we're looking for is located."

"Oh," Sakie responded with a rather dejected looking expression. "Well... Okay. I guess I could help. Maybe?"

"I really hope so," Chyka replied with a sympathetic smile. "We've been looking for High Tail forever... the adverts say its right around here, but for the life of us, we just can't find it."

"Oh! Uh... High Tail?" Sakie responded with a rather skeptical look, shortly followed by a brief chuckle. "Oh! Right. High Tail. *High Tail*."

The Empire's premier establishment specializing in stylish activewear for the sophisticated feyli. *That High Tail.*"

"Yeah," Chyka replied. "That High Tail."

"Well, there isn't one of those around in these parts," Sakie noted with a mischievous grin. "There's one down by the Resort District, on the ground floor of Meybi Tower. None here in Northwestie though."

"But the ad said..." Chyka responded.

"Didn't you read the whole thing?" Sakie asked, leaning on the counter and clasping her hands together.

"Uh... maybe... not?" Chyka answered.

"It's a game," Sakie said, pointing to a small sign on the counter. "A thing the Imperial XenoTrade Association runs in partnership with various local and interstellar businesses. They offer coupons and other tangible benefits

to those willing to visit their member businesses and learn about their various sundry and not-so-sundry offerings."

"Ah," Chyka responded with a nod and a slight frown. Given the sort of establishment she was currently standing in, it wasn't hard at all for her to see where the direction this little game was likely to take.

"Of course, you don't just get a coupon by walking in the door," Sakie continued. "You have to do something to earn it, generally. Sometimes it's accepting samples. Sometimes it's trying something on for size. Sometimes it's listening to a sales pitch."

"Okaaaaaaay," Chyka responded with an increasingly skeptical look.

"So, I might just be able to hook you up," Sakie purred, licking her lips like a lioness staring down a plate covered in thick, juicy steaks. "If..."

"If what?" Chyka grumbled. She could very well imagine just what the naked cougaress was going to insist upon. It definitely wasn't worth fifty percent off at High Tail, or any other store for that matter. Even if it was just for a few minutes.

"You have to watch me give a live demonstration of the digital gorgon using nothing but my own completely naked body," Sakie replied with her mischievous little smile. "That's all. No strings attached. Unless you want to attach some strings to it. I'm always happy to offer certain free upgrades. Among other things."

Chyka shook her head with considerable annoyance. On one hand, she didn't seem to expect either of her guests to get turned into stone. On the other hand, she almost certainly expected both of her guests to consent to being turned into stone. The big question was, how far would she go to convince them?

At Gelitech, temptation was just that. Temptation. But few ever dared to go beyond simply dangling the prospect of fascinating physical experience before a guest's eyes. In the end, it was always up to the guest. But other establishments dealing in xenomorph experience were often more lax about the rules. How lax The Bejeweled was, well, that was something yet to be seen. If she decided to take the risk. Or, rather, if *they* decided to take the risk.

Chyka was no longer just responsible for Chyka now. She had to think of Jumie, and often doubly so. The leopardess had only been introduced to modern civilization one short week ago, and in a gooey-black fashion that hardly lent itself to minimizing the effects of culture shock. Quite the opposite, in fact.

"Well?" Chyka asked, turning to her wide-eyed wife. The leopardess was thoroughly entranced by the nearby statuary, and it took a couple of gentile tugs on her hand in order to

get her attention. "Well? Should we watch her do her thing and get that coupon, or should we pass on it?"

Jumie bit her lower lip and shrugged in a very hesitant fashion. "I... I don't... know."

Jumie at least had the sense to be skittish about anything outside of her former life experience. She hardly dared to touch a perfectly benign vending machine, even though it's only real hazard was failing to dispense the selected snack in a timely fashion. However, unless it had to do with railroad things, or not going too close to the edge of a cliff, or sticking a finger in a pot of boiling water, she was completely clueless about what might actually be dangerous or not. It might take her more convincing than most that something was safe, but chances are she could be convinced that anything was safe by the right person.

Their other wife, the one residing who encased both of their bodies within her

glistening black biogel form, was a bit more enthused by the idea. The warm sense of approval that came over the little snow leopardess was to be expected, of course. That soul to which they were both captor and captive was always fascinated by the prospect of some interesting physical experience. At times, perhaps a bit too fascinated. But for now, at least, she was merely expressing her approval for her two captive bodies to proceed as they wished.

At least, she was expressing approval to Chyka. The more impressionable Jumie was far more susceptible to their biogel wife's suggestions. She seemed far less able to distinguish between her own feelings and those insinuated into her mind by their biogel mistress.

Jumie half-smiled and shrugged. "I... I guess... that would be... okay."

Chyka looked back at the smiling cougaress.

"No strings attached? Really?"

Sakie shook her head and smiled. "No strings attached! None at all! Just come with me. Watch the show. And that sweet, sweet High Tail discount will be all yours!"

Chyka shrugged. "Fine," she replied, even though she strongly suspected that this was going to be a decision she was going to regret in the very near future. "We'll watch your show."

"Great!" Sakie exclaimed, bouncing up and down for a moment before stepping out from behind the counter to lead her guests toward the door at the back of the shop. "Come on! This is going to be so much fun! I can hardly wait!"

For a device that could be fit into a standard comm sized package, the digital gorgon in the two-story back-room studio of The Bejeweled was a massive, and extremely complex looking machine.

More theatrical in form than practical, the jeweler's gorgon consisted of a large silver camera-like device mounted on the inner arm of a massive brass armillary sphere who's incredibly complex mechanism vanished into the floor and ceiling. At its center was the chamber's only source of light: the large, softly luminous circular stage upon which the gorgon did its insidious work. Where it made living beauty more intense and permanent, with only the price of that living beauty being transformed into an inanimate object of stone.

The digital gorgon shared one very significant feature with the biogel that clad the chamber's current pair of guests. As with those transformed into biogel objects, the digital gorgon's victims still retained the vital spark

of life. They were trapped in exactly the same sort of semi-conscious, dream-like state. Their only connection to the outside world was the same sort of vague, subtle sense of touch. It was exactly the same sort ethereal sort of existence, as far as anyone could tell. And, as the attendant had so politely pointed out, it was fully compatible with it's glistening black counterpart.

Chyka couldn't help but wonder if, somehow, the biogel and gorgon transformations were fundamentally the same thing. The only difference between the two was that, in the hands of an honest jeweler, that of the gorgon could be reversed, assuming not much time had passed. It was therefore one of the only transformational xeno-technologies that could be considered casually recreational. There were even beauty contests, where the participants would all be transformed into statues for a few days, and voted on by the viewing public.

All that required an honest jeweler, of course. The little snow leopardess couldn't recall ever having heard of such a contest taking place in Mashiva before. Or seeing advertisements for recreational gorgon use, even in the shadier of local xeno-mags. Hopefully that just meant that The Bejeweled was a new establishment without much in the way of local presence yet. Otherwise...

"How would you like me mounted?" Sakie asked as she led her guests into the ring of plush, dark gray couch seating that surrounded the gorgon. "You get to pick. I'm feeling pretty sexy today, so... how about a choice between crazy tentacles, total encasement, or... I dunno. A fountain or something. Your call."

Chyka was reminded of the configuration of the body-mod chamber back at Gelitech, where she'd almost been accidentally transformed into some half-bestial biogel shape. The purpose was no doubt the same. Get the audience comfortable. Show them something

amazing and highly titillating. And then... see if you can't get them to try it out for themselves.

"I mean, unless you have something less interesting in mind," Sakie added as she gestured for her guests to take a seat. "I'll get done up however you want. If you insist."

Chyka sat down alongside her wife on the surprisingly comfortable, heated cushions. She thought for a few moments about the cougaress' suggestions. She was particularly inclined toward the tentacle option, if for no other reason than the sheer inconvenience of the whole affair. On the other hand, she was also pretty curious about how the path for water to pass through the subject of a fountain was kept open. At the same time, she also didn't want to suggest something that might give a month of nightmares to her skittish and impressionable wife. Encasement seemed like the safest option among those offered.

"Encasement?" Chyka asked Jumie. "That sounds pretty sexy, don't you think?"

"I... I guess," Jumie replied with a soft, nervous tone. "What is that even?"

"In this context?" Chyka replied with a shrug as she placed an arm over her wife's shoulders and pulled her close. "Well, I guess we'll just have to see."

"Encasement, eh?" Sakie asked as she stepped through a convenient opening in the armillary structure. Her tone was giddy and full of excited anticipation, but something about it sounded just a bit... off. "Sounds like fun. You sure? Because you only get one choice. Once it's done, it's done."

"Yeah. Encasement," Chyka replied before her brain quite caught up with what the cougaress had said. "Wait... what do you mean, 'once it's done, it's done?'"

"Oh, never you mind that," Sakie replied as

she stepped up onto the stage. "It's all part of the fun. Part of the commitment. You just sit back and enjoy the show."

"Commitment to what?" Chyka insisted, half-rising from the couch with half a mind to stop the cougaresse.

"To art!" Sakie replied with a soft smile as she stopped at the center of the platform and turned to face her audience of two. She immediately began to rub at the soft, fluffy folds of her genitalia with both hands. The machine hummed to life, and the platform's glow intensified. She began to float, perfectly upright, off the floor.

"Uh..." Chyka murmured, unsure of exactly what she and her wife were actually witnessing. Was it just a demonstration? Was the cougaresse actually a volunteer? Or was something else going on here? A weird sales pitch maybe? Or was it something darker?

Jumie pulled Chyka back onto the cushions,

no doubt blithely unaware that anything might be wrong. Her eyes were fixed upon the floating feyli inside the massive machine. It was the first time she'd ever seen anything floating in invisible defiance of gravity. Anything that wasn't an aerospace craft of some sort or another, at least.

The whole of the digital gorgon machine began to throb with energy. So too did the seating. Brief pulses of intense vibration rose and fell with each audible thrum that came forth from the massive armillary.

Jumie gasped at the sudden vibratory stimulus, so firmly applied. "Oh! That feels so... oh... I... it's making me..."

"Hot?" Chyka responded, biting her lower lip and pulling her wife in tight. "Yeah. You and me both."

There was no mistaking the purpose of the stimulation. Nor was there any mistaking its form, and frequency. She'd been a librarian at

MMU long enough to have wandered into *that* section of the collection. The one on physio-sexual theory and applications. The one the designer of this particular set of seating had obviously also spent a considerable amount of time perusing.

According to theory, there was an optimal range of frequencies which, when applied in the genital regions of various sapient species, generally resulted in completely involuntary arousal to one degree or another. Feyli of all sexes were among the most susceptible to this kind of tuned stimulus, to the point where certain rather mundane mechanical contrivances had to be carefully engineered to avoid the relevant frequency range. Otherwise one might wind up with something akin to the famously infamous Dinandi 3304 model tractor, who's unofficial motto among thoroughly unamused feyli farmers was 'The only reason to get on a Dinandi is to get off again'.

Deliberately applying optimal frequency stimulus without foreknowledge and consent was quite illegal of course. Knowingly entering a pre-consent environment was a notable exception, however. Some of the Feyli Empire's constituent cultures had more open attitudes toward such encounters, and xenoexperience law created additional exceptions to the rules which only applied in specifically defined xenoexperience environments. Exceptions that applied to places like the Gelarium and, of course, the studio of The Bejeweled, where such stimulus was considered a part of the overall xenoexperience on offer.

Visitors to xenoexperience environments were expected to educate themselves before entry. Signs were posted by all possible public access points defining the potential hazards, both voluntary and involuntary, within. There had been such signs posted at the entrance of The Bejeweled, of course. Chyka had paid them no mind. Perhaps that had been a mistake.

Of course, the little snow leopardess could still have ended the stimulus, assuming it was actual, deliberate sexual arousal and not some innate side effect of the massive gorgon's operation itself. Only a few words were necessary to suspend the vibration. The process was supposed to be automatic, and couldn't be overridden by the proprietor of the establishment. It could only be reset after the one who'd stopped it broke physical contact with the offending device.

Despite this, Chyka just bit her lip and allowed the vibrations to continue. Her wife seemed to be enjoying it, just as she seemed to enjoy the innumerable manners in which biogel could stimulate her body and bring her to the heights of euphoric bliss. Years of sexual repression in a community of domineering prudes were coming out in the wash, and it seemed like the leopardess was set on a perpetual spin cycle. A very fun spin cycle, for all involved.

Indeed, even the little snow leopardess couldn't help but enjoy the feelings that the vibrations were causing to bloom between her legs. Whether or not that was her own opinion, the opinion of Jumie, the opinion of their mutual biogel wife, or some combination of the above was impossible for her to tell. It didn't matter, of course. They were all just components of a single organism, after all. If that organism was enjoying itself, far be it for any one of its lesser parts to object.

Chyka quickly became so caught up by the arousing vibrations that she hardly paid attention to the floating cougaress. The woman was vigorously trying to bring her own body to the heights of pleasure before the machine could work its potent magic upon her. As floor panels opened up to give the massive armillary freedom to move, she toked at herself even harder. She began to moan and huff as the machine rumbled to life.

Brass wheels within wheels within wheels,

spinning in mind bending patterns. At first it was all just a blur of golden metal. Then, slowly, an opening began to take shape amid the whirl. A fuzzy window to the hovering cougaress as she desperately tried to obtain orgasmic release.

A more solid shape formed directly opposite the opening in the seating that allowed access to the seats and the machine. This was the arm that held the gorgon itself, first spinning, then wobbling, then slowly coming to a halt. The focus of the mechanical beast fell upon the floating subject. A sizzling sound filled the air.

Sakie furiously attempted to fulfill her orgasmic wish, but to no avail. An intense flash of light filled the interior of the armillary sphere. The cougaress was instantly transformed into a beautiful floating statue of vivid blue sapphire, her pose and expression frozen at the cusp of masturbatory climax. It was an amazing sight to behold in and of itself, but the machine was not quite finished with its

subject.

Again, the gorgon sizzled. Again, there was a flash of light.

Chyka couldn't help but gasp as she faced the beauty of the magnificent jewel coupled with her own approach to physical climax. The sapphire cougaress had been encased in an eight sided, perfectly clear crystal. This flawless gemstone encasement was perfectly parallel along the full height of her body, but formed sharp points over her head and beneath her feet. All it was missing was a proper mounting. A mounting that, no doubt, would also involve similarly treated companions.

Jumia huffed as a final, particularly intense vibration buzzed through the seat cushions. "That's... she's... so... beautiful!" she murmured. "So *beautiful!*"

"She is," Chyka agreed, somewhat annoyed that the vibration had stopped so close to

fulfilling its apparent purpose. She could have finished the job herself, of course, but she'd never been one for sexual activity in strange places, where strangers might be watching, and waiting to take advantage.

"Do you really think so?" Sakie asked. Or, rather, some unseen computer asked, in Sakie's voice. "Am I really, truly beautiful? More beautiful than I was before? Tell me! Am I?"

Chyka wasn't impressed in the least. She'd seen the trick before. That time it had been the geldancer in the body mod chamber, imitating Sey'li so well that she'd convinced the genuine article to mod herself into a mostly-biogel rowaform nasty. The only question here was whether not Sakie had actually been turned into a statue, and the computer was talking; or if it had been a projection and the real Sakie hadn't been with them at all. If there even was a real Sakie.

"You are!" Jumie replied, looking around

with a thoroughly confused look on her face.

"Thank you most kindly!" the invisible Sakie responded as the armillary rumbled to a halt. The floor panels closed and a concealed door at the back of the studio opened. A robotic arm reached out and plucked the encased statue from its place above the glowing platform. The door closed behind it, leaving the guests alone with the machine. "Now... you can either go back to the desk to get your coupon for High Tail right away, or you can accept the free upgrade I've arranged just for you. That's right. Just for you, I've convinced my wonderful employer to allow you a three hour jewelery. That's right. Three hours to feel what it's like to be a magnificent work of art, just like me! All you need to do is step onto the platform. The gorgon will do the rest!"

"Pft!" Chyka huffed as she stood up and shook off the last lingering feelings of sexual arousal. "Upgrade, my ass. Let's..."

"It's so beautiful," Jumie murmured, as she got up and quickly walked toward the opening in the armillary that gave access to the platform within. "I... I want to try it."

"What... wait!" Chyka stammered, reaching out to grab her wife before she could enter the machine. It was too late. By the time the little snow leopardess had reacted, her wife had entered the interior of the armillary and stepped up onto the platform. "What are you doing? Stop! Come back!"

Chyka found herself pushed back by a protective force field as her wife began to float above the platform. The floor panels opened and the armillary began to whirl. She could just see the leopardess as she began to masturbate just as the cougaress had done before her. It felt good. Very good. And their mutual biogel wife was making very sure that she knew it.

Chyka groaned as she felt her wife's fingers

between her own legs, the sensations duplicated by their biogel mistress. She couldn't help but stagger back and fall onto the cushions where the vibration amplified her arousal to the point where she just couldn't contain herself. She panted, huffed, and moaned as the tension within her body rose like a tsunami. Slow. Powerful. Unrelenting.

The little snow leopardess looked up as the window again formed, and the shape of the arm carrying the gorgon itself wobbled into clear focus. She knew what was coming, of course. As inexorably as the orgasm that was about to overtake her helpless body, her wife was about to feel the gorgon's power. And, want as she might to, there wasn't a thing she could do to stop it.

BARGAIN BASEMENT

There was something deeply unsettling about her expression of blissfully naive curiosity that sent an icy cold shudder down Chyka's spine. Something about her loose, almost angelic pose that made the little snow leopardess cringe. What could she possibly have felt as the digital gorgon unleashed its unholy power upon her helplessly floating body? What must she be feeling now, reduced to a mere object composed exclusively of disturbingly stunning green emerald, and having been so perfectly encased in her prison of crystal clear quartz? Or diamond? Or whatever sort of clear mineral it was that the machine had formed around her magnificently petrified body?

To the little snow leopardess, the vision of

pure, albeit not-quite-innocent beauty hovering there in at the center of the foul machine was gut-wrenchingly terrible to behold. This wasn't the attendant anymore. It wasn't just a random woman encountered by chance during the course of a day's activities. It was her wife. Her completely uneducated, barely civilized, periodically profoundly stupid, and now, apparently, hopelessly naive wife.

What the damned hell was she thinking? Chyka hissed to herself, and to that ever-present soul which resided within the glistening black biogel that coated her body from neck to toe. That unseen, voiceless being that had bound the two feyli lovers within its own perfectly polished, amorphous form, making the all together a single, unified living organism in almost every way imaginable. Almost. *Why did you let her do that? Why didn't you stop her? Why?!?*

The little snow leopardess knew well that there was really no use in expecting anything

resembling a satisfying reply from that 'other wife' within the biogel. It had long since become more than amply apparent that she had her own set of often quite deviant priorities for their relationship. Her own dark curiosities. Curiosities that were almost invariably of the sort that would lead to trouble. Physically transformative trouble, in particular. And she was clearly all too willing to try and use the captive bodies of her feyli 'spouses' in order to fulfill them.

Their biogel wife experienced everything that her captive spouses experienced. Every minuscule sensation. Every hint of emotion. Every fleeting thought. Everything. If she wanted to experience something specific, she was sure to make it known. Sometimes she would make it more than just known, periodically in very obvious and potentially embarrassing ways. But, in the end, she'd always let Chyka make the final decision, both for herself and, more recently, for Jumie as well. And she'd always kept things in check

until that decision could be made. But now... what could possibly have changed?

Chyka couldn't help but wonder if her biogel wife had come to regard Jumie as something of a disposable component of their mutual relationship. An extraneous warm body acquired solely to help facilitate the satisfaction of those dark curiosities. A gift to placate the faceless soul's so often expressed desire for the little snow leopardess to use her own body to acquire some desired physically transformative experience, for better or for worse.

The biogel soul didn't even attempt to reply to Chyka's frustrations. She didn't try to soothe her feelings and make it all seem so perfectly normal and acceptable to give up their new spouse for such a trivial purpose, and not without a second thought or care in the whole world. She certainly could have, of course. She could have forcibly wiped all negativity about the experience from Chyka's

mind as well. But she didn't. Instead...

No! Just... no! Chyka thought as tingles of involuntary desire flitted about at the edge of her mind. Desire to enter the machine. Desire join her wife as a work of gemstone art. Just so she could know what the leopardess had felt. Are you fucking crazy? Do you really want to spend the rest of forever like that? A fucking statue? No! We're not doing it! And we're going to get her back! Period! Stop trying to make me want it!

Her biogel wife didn't press the issue, but the rather halfhearted effort did make Chyka more convinced than ever that Jumie hadn't entered the machine entirely of her own accord. The pleasure offered by the seating during the shop attendant's demonstration might have opened her mind to the almost assuredly oversold possibilities, but there was no way that alone would have convinced the shy and generally skittish leopardess to throw fate and caution completely to the winds. That

idea had to have come from someplace else, and the only other 'person' in the room who could have given her that idea was their biogel companion.

"Jumie!" Chyka yelped as the robot again appeared, this time to snatch up Jumie's crystal prison and whisk away into that dark back room where the attendant had been taken. She gasped as she door thumped closed behind it, leaving her bereft of not merely her wife's warm, living presence, but of her now cold and inanimate emerald body as well. "Dammit! Give her back!"

A soothing, vaguely effeminate voice filled the chamber. "In accordance with the posted policies of this jewelery studio, the newly crafted artwork will be added to the establishment's inventory unless the temporary jewelery experience fee is paid within one hour. In the case of the aforementioned artwork, accounting for the form and mounting selected, the temporary

jeweling experience fee is... five-hundred and thirty-five Imperial credits."

"Five-hundred and thirty-five... oh... bugger-all!" Chyka huffed. "Well... I guess that isn't *too* bad, all things considered."

"Should the temporary jeweling experience fee be paid within the hour limit," the computer continued, "the aforementioned artwork will remain in its current state for a full four hours, beginning at the moment of jeweling, prior to restoration. You have... fifty-five minutes left before the payment period expires. Your ImperID has been detected and biomatch confirmed. If you wish to pay the temporary jeweling experience fee for the aforementioned artwork using your preferred payment account, please say 'yes' now. Otherwise, you may..."

"Yes," Chyka replied.

"You have stated that you wish to pay for the aforementioned artwork's temporary

jeweling experience fee," the computer replied. "To confirm, please say 'yes' again. Otherwise..."

"YES!" Chyka nearly shouted. The computer was almost as frustrating as a typical corporate phone answering system, and the little snow leopardess just didn't have the patience for it.

"Thank you!" the computer replied cheerily. "The leopardess, ImperID first name Jumie, shall be restored in... three hours and... twenty-eight minutes. Please take the intervening time to seriously consider your own jeweling experience within the studio's gorgon."

"Yeah, I'm sure I'll do that," Chyka huffed with considerable displeasure. Having to wait so long for Jumie to be given back was hard enough. Having to pay for it just plain got her fur all up in such a ruffle that not even the biogel could fully hide her irritation.

One one hand, it seemed an awful lot like a scam. Your loved one got into the gorgon? Pay up or you're never getting her back!

On the other hand, it seemed just as much like the proprietor and his happily naked assistant just didn't quite know how to play the game. They were aiming to add to their inventory, for sure. That was just part of the business. But the best way to do that was to let potential artworks toy with it first. Buy a temporary experience or two. Tell all their friends how much fun it was. That was the way to get an unending line of hot asses willingly offering themselves up for the chance to become magnificent, gemstone art.

"Ah! There you are!" the voice of the alien proprietor called out as the door leading back out to the showroom slid open. "Oh. Hmm. I see. Your rather nervous looking friend has decided to include herself in my wonderful new project. What a wonderful surprise! I cannot even begin to express my absolute

delight! Perhaps you would like to join her? I can assure you that you most certainly would not be disappointed with the experience!"

"Don't count your chickens before they hatch," Chyka sighed, crossing her arms and eyeing the alien with considerable suspicion. "She's only on the four hour trial run. Assuming your computer wasn't lying when it charged me for it."

"Oh. I see," the alien replied rather dejectedly. "That... is rather disappointing. But perhaps she will change her mind once she has had the opportunity to see what it is her wonderful body might become a part of! Perhaps *you* will change your mind as well! Come! Let me show you!"

Chyka wasn't quite sure whether or not to follow the little alien through that door from which the robot had come. Just standing next to the gorgon seemed enough of a risky venture for the time being. Who really knew

what the alien might be hiding in that back room? Was it really some amazing artwork, or was it another gorgon, unconstrained in its movements by a giant framework, waiting for the moment some unwitting victim came into sight?

"Come, come!" the alien called over his shoulder. "Don't be shy! It really is the most supremely magnificent thing!"

Chyka reluctantly followed the alien as the door again snapped open to reveal a dark chamber beyond. This time, no robot came out. Rather, she could just make out a strange, shimmering, sparkly shape in the darkness. It seemed to rise up several stories. Before she could make out much more, the door snapped shut, leaving her, the alien, and the strange shape in complete darkness.

"Behold!" the alien called out as lights rose throughout the massive cylindrical chamber. "Behold my finest creation!"

Chyka's jaw dropped. She'd certainly been expecting something strange. Something alien. Something so brazenly titillating that it would hardly be worthy of the word 'art', let alone justify placement in any manner of public setting. And that was by the notoriously liberal feyli standards. But this... this was something altogether different!

The gigantic, gemstone tree was so magnificently exquisite in form and detail that the little snow leopardess could hardly believe her eyes. The astonishing work was made entirely of transparent gemstone of varying color, stretching upward at least five stories in a form so perfectly reproducing that of a real deciduous tree that it was hard for her to believe that it was actually a thing of purely mineral substance. Everything about its smoky,

grayish-brown trunk and branches; it's broad emerald leaves, replete with dark veins and stems; and its many bright, ruby flowers with their golden yellow interiors was perfect. Almost too perfect. Just a tad surreal, in fact. Whether or not that was a result of the exotic material from which the tree was made, or the fruit which hung from its thick limbs was something the little snow leopardess couldn't quite pick out.

So that's where she went! Chyka thought to herself with half a sigh of relief as she immediately recognized one of the four dangling, crystal encased women as Jumie. Seeing the emerald leopardess merely transformed and encased had been amazing enough. Now, properly mounted in such an incredible setting, she seemed positively exquisite. Almost... natural, even. *Goddess, she looks so perfect like that. So... so fucking hot! But... no. Just no. I can't even... dammit... I wish I knew what she was feeling all done up like that. I wish I knew... but... no. Just... just*

no.

The little snow leopardess' eyes turned to her emerald wife's equally exquisite companions. Right next to her hung a beautifully lithe, sapphire elf-ear who's permanently preserved expression of sheer wonder seemed to suggest that she'd been totally enthralled by her experience within the gorgon. A bit further around the tree was a muscular, ram-horned, amethyst mitanni who's peaceful, airy expression made her seem as if she'd fallen asleep just before the machine had petrified her. And then there was the attendant, Sakie. She was higher up in the tree, looking just as yearning for orgasmic pleasure as she had the moment the machine had transformed her.

Chyka couldn't help but notice how many more such fruit the tree could accommodate. There were at least a dozen empty stems visible from where she was standing. There were likely at least half a dozen more hidden

from view on the other side of the tree. There was little doubt in her mind that the alien fully expected her to be occupying one of these in very short order. What he was going to do to get her there was an open question.

"A magnificent expression, is it not?" the alien said, waving his arms upward as he gazed with an expression of mixed satisfaction and disappointment at the tree's latest addition. "A perfect rendition of the natural form, a mounting which so perfectly displays each of its eternal fruit. Each fruit expressing its own individual response, completely free of outside influence in that last, supreme moment when its body is saturated by the gorgon's incredible power. Preserved for an eternity, blithely detached from the outside world, never again experiencing an existence outside of that final instant when they were transformed. A captive, forever imprisoned within the artwork it has become. A concept. An idea. A temptation for the next. And so on."

Chyka had never really been one to appreciate the sorts of overblown, over-analytic art babble that so many artsy types used to place a firm wedge in between themselves and their audience. She could never quite understand why so many people were attracted to buying things that, it seemed, they just were never supposed to actually understand, if the artists interpretation of their own work was to be believed. If it made any sense at all. All too often, it just didn't.

This time, however, the artist's intention seemed to match the work of art that had been produced. Or was in the process of being produced, as the case happened to be. And she really couldn't argue with the concept. It was quite visually striking and, as chance happened, was rather similar in idea to one of her favorite sorts of biogel décor: a glistening black gummy, permanently encased in crystal biogel. Sometimes more than one, and in poses just as titillating as some of those she'd seen in this particular alien establishment's own

showroom.

Such items were no less visually appealing than the alien's gemstone creations, though they did tend to be starkly monochromatic. One major disadvantage was their lack of suitability as a construction material. Proposals to built some sort of structure from crystal biogel blocks containing gummies always ran into the issue of their lack of structural strength and stability. They would inevitably squish and bend to some degree, no matter what shape they were cast in, and only so many could be stacked upon one another before the whole structure began to deform. These gemstone creations, however...

Chyka began to get all sorts of ideas in her head. Ideas that were both astonishingly beautiful and impossibly grandiose. What she could do if it were *her* in charge of this place...

"Tell me! What *do* you think?" the alien inquired. "Do you think this worthy to display

in a public place? A public garden, perhaps? A gemstone garden full of trees, and fountains, and statuary that will both amaze and bring in much lucrative business?"

"I think that would be quite splendid," the little snow leopardess replied with a faint smile. It was exactly the sort of thing she'd been thinking of, and it would certainly be just the kind of thing to draw plenty of tourists to do something they were almost certainly going to regret for a very long time.

"Splendid enough to entice you to into becoming this wonderful work's newest fruit?" the alien inquired.

"Uh... no," Chyka replied, shaking her head. "Not a chance."

"Bother!" the alien huffed. "Not even... not even for a little while? A few hours? Until your friend is restored? Come now! You simply *must* try it! I will absolutely guarantee it will be the most amazing thing that your body has

ever experienced!"

The little snow leopardess began to shake her head again, but something gave her pause. Someone gave her pause. *No! We're not...*

A sudden sense of deep curiosity filled Chyka's mind. Deep, blissfully naive curiosity. Airy, floating wonder. Nervous anticipation. Bright light. Cracking glass. And then...

The little snow leopardess had to stifle a sharp gasp. *You... bitch!* she swore in silence as the final, foggy impression of distant, dull, and impossibly tight encasement got stuck in her mind. A harsh, yet strangely comfortable thing, so icy cold that it felt warm and inviting. *You... you fucking bitch!*

The little snow leopardess knew full well that the misty, almost unreal impressions weren't something born of her own so often wild imagination. Now were they the product of her biogel wife's own imagination. Each impression was a soft, ethereal memory of

what her biogel wife had felt, directly absorbed from Jumie's mind as it had all taken place.

This wasn't the first time that Chyka had been force-fed someone else's thoughts and memories, of course. That had taken place when her grandmother had given her such a vivid image of what was going to take place in Dari if no one from the outside intervened. This was, however, the first time that her biogel wife had taken it upon herself to do such a thing. It was also the first time that she'd connected the little snow leopardess and her feyli wife together beyond the sharing of pheromones, hormones, and the occasional emotion.

Chyka couldn't help herself. Her imagination ran wild, fueled by the foggy, uncertain sensations that had come from her wife's own mind. Sensations that she could never truly understand unless she entered the gorgon herself. Allowed it to levitate her body and

saturate it with its foul, alien energies. Transform it into stone, and encase it for mounting alongside her gemstone lover.

The little snow leopardess was helpless to resist, no matter how much her biogel wife made it seem that she could still choose. The choice was just an illusion. There was only one actual option. One path that she could take. One way out of the jeweler's studio.

"How much will it cost?" Chyka finally asked, her mind filled with imagined sensations as she looked back up at her crystal encased emerald wife. It didn't really matter how much it would cost, of course. She simply *had* to do it at this point. There was only one real consideration on her mind, and that was keeping Jumie from just going back into the gorgon and doing it again, for keeps. "How much will it cost... as long as you let me out before her? I... I... promised her I wouldn't... and... and I don't want her to know that I did. So I've got to come out before her."

"Let me see," the alien pondered. "She has three hours or so... so if you enter the gorgon right now... two should suffice? Yes! Yes, it should. As to the price... well..."

"If it actually feels good, I promise to tell everyone I know!" Chyka said. Even in her current state, she still couldn't help but try and snag a discount.

"I suppose I could let you have a complementary taste of the experience," the alien replied. "In hopes that you will seriously consider permanently adding your body to my masterpiece at a later date."

"Deal!" Chyka replied, turning toward the door without another moment's hesitation. The quicker she got into the gorgon, the better. It wasn't so much about her having second thoughts. Her biogel wife simply wasn't going to let her change her mind. It was her biogel wife having second thoughts that worried her. At any moment she might decide that

becoming a permanent part of the tree was a much better idea than having just a taste. "I can go right in?"

"Yes," the alien replied with a shallow nod as the door opened in front of the little snow leopardess. "The machine is as prepared for your body as it was for your companion's."

Chyka looked over her shoulder and smiled. "Great! I can't wait to feel what it's actually like!"

Well... isn't this the grandest of ideas? Chyka thought in silence as she began to float up off the floor in the middle of the gorgon's massive armillary structure. Why the hell did I agree to this again?

Stepping into the machine had brought with

it a sudden and frightening clarity. No longer burdened by her biogel wife's manipulations, the little snow leopardess' impending transition from warm, soft, living flesh into cold, hard, inanimate gemstone seemed an almost unthinkable terrifying thing. Anxiety gripped her heart, even as she found herself all too aware of the irony of her feelings about the situation.

Chyka had joined Gelitech knowing full well that her coating of biogel was very much a permanent thing. And she knew that one day, that permanent coating of biogel would subsume her, and make her into something almost as inanimate as the jeweler's statues. An object, to be acquired and used as such. She'd accepted that as a matter of course. It was one of the things that made biogel so enticingly kinky, after all.

But now that she was about to actually experience what becoming an object really meant, the idea seemed far less kinky that it

was horrifying. In a few short moments, she would stop having anything to say about her existence as a living, conscious soul trapped in an object that no one would ever regard as actually being a person. What if the jeweler was lying? What if he undo the transformation? What if he didn't undo both of their transformations?

Chyka couldn't help but feel a horrible sense of dread as the gorgon's eye whirled around along with the armillary before leveling with her quivering chest. She bit her lower lip, closed her eyes, and held her breath. Her arms stretched back and she clenched her fists in futile defiance of the unstoppable.

An impossibly bright light burst through the little snow leopardess' still firmly closed eyelids. Her whole body felt as if it had been struck by countless thousands of volts of electricity. But instead of painful convulsion, her body seemed to motionlessly 'twitch solid' amid a wave of strange, disorienting warmth.

This wave was almost immediately followed by a feeling of icy cold, so smooth and fluid that she felt almost as if her stone body might well become aroused.

Mere fleeting moment after the cold had taken hold, Chyka felt a sudden, crushing tightness that pressed inward upon every millimeter of her gemstone body. Cold and tight. It was all she could feel. And it was all she would ever feel if the alien failed to keep his world. But strangely, now that she'd become a statue, it just didn't seem to matter.

Chyka's new body simply couldn't feel anything besides a dull sense of touch. It didn't respond to thoughts or emotions because there was nothing there to respond. No matter what she thought about her own situation, or her wife, or the jeweler, or anything really, she was filled with a sense of calm, peaceful nothing. A dull, blank sort of euphoria that seemed to consume everything and leave her mind floating amid a sea of distant, fleeting

memories. A mind whose only bounds were the cold tightness that offered its only sense of physical form. Its only way to know that it still had some physical existence in the real world.

The little snow leopardess' mind melted away into a state that was commonly referred to as 'eurotic dissolution'. Still living. Still conscious. Still firmly bound to the mortal realm. No thoughts. No memories. Everything that had made her who she was seemingly erased. Feeling, without knowing. Each moment as if it were the only moment, and bereft as she was of any change to what little physical sensation she was experiencing, that one moment seemed to go on forever.

If one were to ask any exophysicist or hard core philosopher, they would say that Chyka had ceased to exist. What minuscule flicker of eternally looping energy existed in her transformed body was no actual mind. It was just a remnant of her soul's connection to its native realm in some higher order dimension,

an inconvenient anchor that held what little was left of her in a place that was neither here nor there. An anchor that could, under the right conditions, have its uses.

So long as such an anchor remained unstable, it could be used to extract energy from the soul's native realm. It was how the Vixanti-Gelitech biogel based power generation plants worked, dissolving individuals into pure, field-contained energy loops to draw forth and redirect energy for transformation into electricity, among numerous other useful purposes. That instability also held in its fluctuations the 'pattern' of the body that had been transformed in order to create the anchor. So long as the instability was maintained, that pattern could be restored.

In the biogel power systems, that instability was maintained at the desired level by force, using systems that would automatically restore the subject body in the event of a failure,

before the unbreakable state of full stability could occur. As was quite well known, the gorgon's transformation had no such protections. The anchor loop's undulations would fade over time. Effective instability would last for more than two days, but never more than five. After that, the loop would slowly become stable and, barring disruption and collapse caused by an external force, locking the soul into an eternal state of eurotic dissolution.

Of course, Chyka couldn't care about any of that anymore. She didn't exist. Only her singular thread of continued consciousness existed, and that only knew cold tightness. An unending eternity of impossibly cold, crushing tightness.

SNAP!

Chyka could see the spinning armillary. She could feel the cool air washing over her warm, glistening black, biogel coated body. She could

even smell the presence of the little alien proprietor's lovely, naked assistant. The sensations, however, fell into an empty pit where her mind had once been. And then they bounced back as the dissociated stream of consciousness began to thread itself back into its physical home.

The little snow leopardess was held aloft for an impossibly long ten minutes as her brain returned to a state of passable functionality, and her sense of balance returned. It was as if she was waking up from a long night's sleep filled with sweet, sexy, biogel dreams and kept hitting the snooze button. Eventually, however, the cold of the gorgon's central platform on her toes woke her up enough to allow her to stumble out of the machine without falling. She collapsed onto one of the chamber's seats and stared up at the ceiling in slack-jawed befuddlement, trying, and failing, to comprehend what had just happened to her body.

"Wow! You look like you have fun!" Sakie giggled, sitting down right next to the little snow leopardess' head, rubbing her warm, soft, and very naked thigh into her hair. "It was awesome wasn't it? So... dreamy and nothing and... like... so pure and perfect. Right?"

"Y... eah?" Chyka responded without really knowing if she agreed or not. There didn't seem to be any real knowing. It was all so cold and tight and, in hindsight with a functioning mind, rather metaphysically comfortable, in a completely dissociated way. None of which made sense. Or did it? She had no way to tell.

Maybe if I tried it again, I could figure it out, the little snow leopardess thought as she pondered it all. What... no. What the hell am I thinking. I'm not doing that again. Well... I mean. Not today. Definitely not today. Not ever... well... maybe not ever. Possibly. I... augh! Stop thinking about it!

"Oh! Here. Before I forget," Sakie said, reaching down to scritch Chyka's chin as she put a coupon in her hand. "That's the coupon for High Tail that you came for. Don't lose it!"

"Thank you," Chyka replied softly. She'd pretty much forgotten about the original objective of she and Jumie's outing at this point. It was a convenient reminder, and just the thing to take her mind off what she'd just experienced.

"So. What do you want to do while we wait for your friend?" Sakie asked with a silly, rather mischievous grin. "I'm technically off work now. So... what do you think about some social cuddling? Maybe tell me all about that shiny black goo you're covered in? It looks really sexy and I'm not going to lie, I've been thinking about buying a starter kit. I'd love to know what it actually feels like."

Chyka's eyes lit up. "Really?" she asked, sitting up and letting the naked cougaress pull

her in close. She'd never been much of a social cuddler by feyli standards, but the mention of biogel brought out the Gelitech model in her. Anything for a sale, and all that. "Because I'd be really happy to tell you all about that. And if you let me, I'll even talk you into getting into it yourself. Today. For free."

"Is that so," Sakie chuckled as she began to rub the little snow leopardess' shoulder. "Well then. Go ahead. Give it your best shot!"

GELIWARE

Chyka took a sip of her fruity, mildly nippy drink and stared off into space along with the rest of the girls. It was her first time out and about with both Jumie and Sakie together, and thus far it had been about as far from an eventful afternoon as it could possibly be. That was nothing short of a miracle considering that Sakie apparently couldn't move a millimeter in her new suit of glistening black biogel without getting positively horny. Perhaps the presence of a bunch of other Gelitech staff was helping temper her outward expressions of arousal.

Sakie couldn't keep hiding it forever, though. It was only a matter of time before they were going to have to duck into a hotel room for some private time. On the positive

side, they *were* the Grand Biogel Hotel Bar. Getting a room wouldn't be a problem.

The Grand Biogel Hotel was the Mashiva Resort District's newest tourist draw. Everything that could be made from biogel was. Furniture. Decor. Even some sections of the walls. It was shiny. Some might say almost *too* shiny. But if you wanted a taste of the biogel kink without any pressure to commit, this was definitely the place.

"I'm stuck in such a rut," Shyure Miyasha, Gelitech's infamous marketing cheetah remarked as she ran a finger around the rim of her tall glass. Clearly, whatever inspiration had come in it hadn't done its job very well. Chances are she was going to need another, and that never boded particularly well for those who had to her lightweight tail back to the Gelarium. "You know. Like... like... like something really crazy that you thought up but no one would ever try, but then once one person does it, then everyone wants to do it

because it must be fun! Like... yeah. That kind of thing.”

“You really do enjoy driving Dr. Mika up a wall with all the crazy ideas, don’t you?” Tashie remarked as she gazed into her comm with a smirk. “This mitanni camgirl is so fucked, it’s not even funny.”

“What’s she doing?” Chyka asked, leaning over to take a look. “Something really gross, I hope.”

Watching camgirls get into xeno stuff was always fun. The more permanent the results, the more fun it was. And if the results were so nasty you could practically smell it through the screen, well, those were the most fun to watch of all. Maybe not the most titillating, but definitely the most fun.

Granted, it was typically something of an acquired taste. It was sometimes quite hard to believe that the camgirls might actually be enjoying what was happening to their bodies.

Once you got over that hurdle, though, it was hard to stop watching the seemingly endless parade of absurdly disgusting transformations.

It hadn't taken Chyka very long to get over that hurdle. In fact, she'd gotten over it long before she'd arrived at Gelitech. But the longer the little snow leopardess spent at Gelitech, the more she started to enjoy the really crazy nasty stuff. At least as long as the participant was enjoying it. And they always seemed to be. Even when they obviously shouldn't.

“That’s not even real,” Tashi laughed as the two watched the sexy, violet mitanni toying with what looked like a hivewear mask. “She does this kind of crap all the time. Here she had three boxes. Said two have ultra realistic costumes, and the other is the real thing. They’re all gooey and nasty, and you can’t tell the difference on video. Well, except for the fact that there’s no hiding those big tits. Or those hips. Real hivewear would have gotten rid of them the moment it was put on.”

“Let me guess,” Chyka responded as she chuckled at the mitanni’s show of putting the mask’s unusually small oral protrusion into her mouth before sealing the whole thing onto her smiling face. “She lets her watchers vote on which box, and it’s never the real one.”

“Exactly!” Tashie replied as the mitanni began to flex her bug-mouth. “I’ve got to give it to her though. Those costumes are absolutely perfect. Look at that mouth... it looks and drools just like the real thing.”

“So... why is she so fucked?” Chyka asked. “Did the rowa find out and sue her for misleading people by faking it?”

“Ha! I wish,” Tashie replied. “But no. It’s waaaaay better than that. See, she’s gotten so popular that people are starting to push her to doing it for real. Like, for real, for real.”

“And you think she’s actually going to do it?” Chyka inquired.

“I know she is,” Tashie replied with a grin. “Because she took the bait and challenged me to go one-on-one in the Gelitech peril pit. Live!”

“Oh,” Shyure said with a smirk. “Is that what you’re up to tomorrow?”

“You know it!” Tashie laughed. “I can’t wait to see what the peril game team came up with for us. It’s gonna be awesome!”

“So, what about crazy kinks, huh?” Shyure asked. “You’ve gotta have some new ideas for me!”

“I don’t know,” Chyka replied with a shrug. “I think we hit maximum weird when you had Dr. Mika make that giant butthole wall hanging for Mikarri.”

“Exactly how many females has she gotten to stick their heads into that thing?” a silver skinned seviran called Alore inquired with a voice that sounded so completely artificial and

genderless that some actually found listening to her speak to be rather unsettling.

Chyka, for one, didn't find Alore's voice unsettling in the least. Granted, she'd gotten quite used to all sorts of unusual and unexpected voices during her time at the MMU Library. Sevians were no different in that regard.

What the little snow leopardess did find a bit off-putting about them was the fact that they were all artificially engineered, genderless clones. They were all perfectly identical, to the point that only a full fidelity DNA scan could tell them apart. Well, it wasn't so much their origin or genetics that bothered her. It was the fact that they just didn't smell real. At least not real compared to other humanoids. Of course, they *were* artificially engineered. Perhaps those who engineered him didn't want any scent related 'side effects'.

What *did* get Chyka feeling seriously

uncomfortable what the aforementioned wall hanging. That and the manner in which its extremely persuasive owner made use of it. Mikarri was Gelitech's mistress of shiny black punishments. She was the one primarily responsible for keeping staff from straying too far from the rules.

Technically, Mikarri was supposed to document and report problem staff to Matron T'myne. In reality, reports rarely made it to the Gelarium's chief. Transgressors were often convinced to try out one of Mikarri's creative punishments rather than face the ire of the Matron.

As far as Mikarri always seemed to be concerned, there were never enough transgressors for her liking. Granted, there were never many in the first place. As a result, she had taken it upon herself to start her own sort of game, convincing staff and guests alike that they were naughty, and deserving of punishment of one sort or another. To that end,

she'd requested several creative means of turning naughty souls into biogel. Most infamous was the sphincter-like wall hanging, which would suck in anyone who dared to stick their head into its opening.

No one was really sure how many unsuspecting subjects had dared to follow Mikarri's instructions to take a peep inside the glistening black orifice. No one really wanted to ask, lest she manage to charm her way into adding another girl to her tally. There were rumors about, however, though the numbers inevitably seemed exaggerated.

"A few dozen, at least," Tashie replied with a low chuckle. "At least that's what everyone says. Not the most graceful of ways to get turned into shiny black goo, but it's fun to watch, if nothing else."

"She lets you watch?" Alore inquired with a raised eyebrow. "I thought her rule of punishments is that if you want to watch, then

you're next."

"You've just gotta make the right excuse to be in the office when she's dealing with someone who's been particularly naughty," Tashie said with a mischievous wink. "You should try it sometime. I'm sure she'll be fine with it."

"Don't let Tash fool you," Chyka noted with a silly smirk. "She only gets to watch because she once threatened to pick Mikarri up and show her how the thing actually worked."

"Such strange people," Jumie said, directing the comment to no one in particular.

"They know how to have fun though," Sakie responded, biting her lip as she shifted a bit on the bar stool. A lowering of her voice made it clear that her movement had been accompanied by a wave of arousal between her legs. "I... I don't know how they can live a normal life in this stuff. Not... not that I'm complaining."

“Have you tried gel therapy for that?” Tashie inquired with a sly wink. “I hear it works wonders for relaxing all that tension and getting it out of your system.”

Chyka shook her head. “For the billionth time, I know its your favorite thing to watch, but none of us want to get dissolved in crystal biogel. Even if you guarantee we’ll wind up dressing someone else.”

“Are you sure?” Tashie laughed. “Ah. You’re no fun!”

“Come on,” Shyure begged as she continued to run a finger around the edge of her glass. “I need something really weird. Like... like... totally outside the box. You’ve gotta have some ideas!”

“What about... biogel glassware,” Sakie suggested, pointing at the marketing cheetah’s drink and regretting the shift of her hips that accompanied the raising of her arm almost immediately. “You know. Squishy plates and

cups and stuff.”

“Who would want to drink out of a squishy cup made of biogel with someone’s soul stuck inside?” Jumie asked softly as she sipped on her fruity, very much nip-free beverage.

“Spread those legs and find out,” Tashie chuckled as she flicked to the next of the mitanni camgirl’s faux-peril videos.

“Hmm,” Chyka hummed as she took another sip and contemplated the prospects of a biogel dinner service. “I can kind of imagine it. A biogel cup. But not just a biogel cup, if you know what I mean. It’s just made from the lady bits. Labia become the rim. There’s a clit there somewhere, but you can’t see it. You can only feel when the cup gets tense as you hold it in your mouth. And when it gulgasm... sploosh! You get your drink all over your face.”

Tashie laughed. “I’d buy one.”

“You must be jesting,” Alore said. “What a

strange idea. A carnal cup? A vaginal vessel? I suppose it... might be... a novelty? But I'm not really sure I understand how one would be convinced to become the object itself."

"Oral sex, transformed!" Tashie declared with a giggle. "Getting eaten out has never been so easy! Your owner will drink you dry every day!"

"Biogel cups," Shyure murmured as she gazed into the ice at the bottom of her glass. "It's definitely weird enough. I could kind of see someone wanting to give it a go. But... is it bizarre enough to get people feeling kinky enough to follow suit. Like... enough people to have enough cups to sell."

"Well, I guess it depends on how you compose the transformation more than the end result," Tashie replied. "What about the portable sex toy transformation? You could use that as the starting point."

"Mmm. Melt away into a crystal biogel

Portapuss and then morph into a cup?” Chyka questioned with a shake of her head. “That’s kind of nuts. But it could work, couldn’t it?”

“Ooh! What if you made a device to spin it like real glass?” Sakie exclaimed. “Like... someone could pick a model, watch their transformation into the rubber pussy on the screen, then choose what shape of glass they want! Kind of like a jeweler does it!”

“Kinky,” Tashie chuckled. “I told you you’d get into the groove eventually. When are you going to start as a model?”

“That’s... that’s a really good idea,” Shyure said as she tapped furiously on her comm screen. “I’m gonna order it!”

“Good luck with that,” Chyka chuckled, knowing full well that there was going to be two week’s back and forth before Dr. Mika reluctantly agreed to develop the idea. *If* she agreed to develop the idea. “Isn’t she still mad because the inflatogummies took off like...

well... balloons?”

Shyure’s comm beeped. “Oh! Wow! That was fast. Is she saying no? She’s saying no. Dammit. No. Been there, done that. Order a pink petal and stop bothering her with silly ideas.”

“What’s a pink petal?” Tashie asked, emptying her own drink as she started another of the mitanni camgirl’s videos. “Another one. Three boxes. Only one has a real purple odangi. And she’s going to stick whichever one the viewers vote for in her twat. So fucking fake!”

“I don’t know,” Shyure responded with a shrug. “Barkeep! One pink petal, please! Actually, how about one round for us Gelitech girls? Yeah. One for each of us!”

The four-armed cyborgirl bartender casually pulled out a six small tumblers and started adding a variety of very pink, very berry and nippy smelling liquids to them.

“So... who wants to volunteer to become a cup?” Sakie asked. “I’m never going to convince Mika to make it if I don’t have someone ready to do it. And... I mean, it was the group’s idea, after all, right? One of you has to be the first to try it!”

“Honey, that hasn’t been the rule since the Vxianti days around here,” Tashie replied. “If it were, well, what would you be right now? An inflatable sex doll?”

“Well, yeah. I guess,” Shyure replied with a shrug. “Come on though. We’ve got to show up with someone to do it and you girls all know that you’re getting glistened one of these days whether you like it or not? Why not become something special? Something unique?”

“Why don’t you?” Jumie inquired as the bartender added crushed ice to the mixes.

“I will!” Shyure replied. “Eventually. I mean, Matron T’myne put my name on a can of instant inflatogummy that she keeps in her

desk drawer after that oopsie with the refill tank. So...”

“I still cannot quite understand the potential attraction,” Alore said, shaking her head as she watched the bartender put lids on the tumblers and start to shake them.

“I guess you’d have to have some girl bits to be able to imagine how good it might feel,” Tashie replied. “But I can assure you, as the proud owner of a set of said bits, it’ll feel amazing. Like, really, really amazing.”

“Ooh! Ooh! Alore!” Shyure responded, bouncing up and down on her bar stool. “What about you? You know biogel can give you bits that nature didn’t, right? What am I saying? Of course you do! You’ve been asking about that body mod for weeks! Why haven’t you done it already?”

Alore shrugged her shoulders as she gazed down into her own nearly empty glass. “I don’t know. I just... I’m not sure about... feeling such

things. What if I can't stop wanting to feel them?"

"Then you'll be just like the rest of us," Tashie replied with a smirk. "And just like Sakie here in particular. She can't help but want to feel sexy all the time, can't she?"

"Nfff," was all that Sakie could manage to huff in reply.

"So, what do you way?" Shyure purred. "Get bits. Become bits. Enhance bits into drinking bits?"

"Shyure!" Chyka responded with a disapproving frown. "No one here wants to become a cup right now. And... oh... what are *those*?"

The cyborgirl bartender had just taken out six crystal clear cups and placed them next to the tumblers. Calling them cups might have been a bit misleading, however. They were actually biogel porta-pussies whose shafts had

been shortened and formed into the shape of a thick walled glass.

“Ooh!” Shyure muttered as the bartender used her robotic fingers to open each of the biogel pussies in turn so she could pour the contents of one tumbler inside.

“Looks like someone already had that ides,” Tashie chuckled. “How in the Hells are you supposed to drink out of it, though?”

“You want the sweets, you gotta lick it,” the bartender smirked as she placed one in front of each of the girls. “Lick it good. Be careful though. Some of them are squirters.”

“Is this... actually...” Jumie murmured as she looked at the glistening crystal pussy with an expression of mixed skepticism and disgust.

“Someone’s pussy?” Sakie finished the question. “They’re all different too, aren’t they? Does that mean they’re all... you know... just like the girls that they were made from?”

“They are,” the bartender replied with a chuckle. “Now get-a-licking before the ice all melts, would you? Wouldn’t want those sweet juices to get all watered down, would you?”

“Okaaaaay,” Sakie replied with a slightly nervous look on her face. Given just how impossibly horny she was, licking a biogel pussy probably wasn’t the best idea. Still, she was at least curious enough to pick it up and run her tongue along her vaginal vessel’s ripply inner folds. A thick, pink syrup oozed from within.

“What does it taste like?” Chyka asked as she finished off her first drink and contemplated the wisdom of the second. All things considered, she really didn’t have much choice. She had to at least try it.

“Ooh! Like... like... cherries and... and... sweet... and...” Sakie replied.

“Don’t overdo yourself!” Tashie giggled. “These things aren’t the only squirters here.

Don't want to add an extra layer of biogel to your seat, do you?"

"Wouldn't be the first time," Chyka mused. "Thank heavens all the furnishings back home are made of biogel."

"Wow! It's sooooo sweet!" Shyure exclaimed as she licked at the smooth inner folds of her own carnal cup.

"I feel as if this may be a very questionable idea," Alore remarked as she picked up her own, rather puffy looking biogel pussy and gave its lush inner folds a few tentative licks. Thick pink goo oozed out onto her tongue, forming long strands that hung between the cup and her mouth as she pulled back to look at the gooey little mess she'd made on its surface. "Oh. It is very... interesting. But... ah. I don't know. It's so... slimy and... and... sticky!"

"Just like the real thing," Tashie laughed as she pressed her tongue deep into the slender inner folds of her own cup. So deep, in fact,

that sticky pink goo bubbled out all over her lips and nose. “Mmm!”

Jumie bit her lip and picked up her own pink petal. She didn't seem very sure about trying it, however. She lifted it several times, but only sniffed at it.

“Go on,” Chyka said. “I'm sure it doesn't have too much nip in it.”

Jumie sighed and began to lick. Her expression of displeasure made it quite clear that the form of her cup definitely wasn't to her liking.

Chyka took up her own silky looking pussy and pondered just the sort of woman it had been made from. It was, of course, virtually impossible to tell just by looking at it. None of the six vaginal cups had any features that stood out as belonging to one species or another.

The little snow leopardess pressed her

tongue into the glistening biogel folds. Sweet, cherry goo oozed out. Cherry, and some other, far more subtle berry flavors. It was good. Very, very good. So good, in fact, that she just couldn't help herself but keep licking like it was some sort of pussy popsicle.

"I feel like I'm in a porno," Sakie murmured between licks.

"Mmm," Tashie responded with a grin. "A tasty one, though."

"I can't believe... I can't... that... that... I didn't think of this first!" Shyure sputtered between increasingly inebriated licks. "Why... why aren't we... selling these things? I've... I've gotta... gotta do... start... you know..."

"Working up a marketing plan?" Tashie replied.

"Yeah," Shyure replied. "That."

"I think we're going to need a room," Chyka

noted with a deep sigh at the lightweight marketing cheetah's rapidly deteriorating state. It was hard to believe that anyone could be so rapidly affected by nip, let alone in such a severe fashion. On the positive side, at least she wasn't the 'instantly horny, fuck the first remotely fuckable thing she comes across' type.

"Goddess," Sakie groaned as she stopped licking and tensed up. "So... sweet... and..."

"Two rooms," Chyka added with an even deeper sigh as she continued to lick at her pussy popsicle. Every lick made it feel a bit different. A bit less floppy around the folds. A bit tighter deeper inside.

"Might be too late," Tashie laughed as she took out her comm and reserved one of the group rooms set aside for visiting Gelitech models. "Good thing the seats here are biogel, right? It all just vanishes and on one's the wiser."

“Aaah,” Sakie moaned as she relaxed. “Peace... until the next one.”

“Have you thought about putting her in a conditioner for a few days?” Tashie inquired. “It’s not as good as gel therapy, mind you, but it might get her feeling a bit more stable between the legs.”

“A conditioner?” Chyka questioned. She’d knew about conditioners, of course, but they were for girls with both a biogel fetish and a thing for having their minds fucked with in various permanently altering ways. “I don’t know about that.”

“Well, if you aren’t sure, ask Dr. Miyan about it,” Tashie replied. “She can get it set up just right.”

“Jush... right,” Shyure murmured as she licked hard at her biogel pussy, trying to get every last sweet cherry drop from it.

Chyka didn’t see it coming. Or cumming, as

the case happened to be. She was mid-lick when the squirt of icy cherry slime burst out and straight into her mouth and all over her chin.

“Ah!” the little snow leopardess exclaimed as she grabbed a handful of napkins with one hand, while trying to steady the cup with the other. Another squirt. And then another. And another. She did her best to catch and swallow it all, but it was quite a drippy mess nonetheless.

“Oh, tank heavens for biogel,” Chyka muttered after the cup had emptied itself. For a fey’li, being able to just wipe herself clean instead of having to thoroughly bathe was a heaven-send in cases like this. All she really had to worry about was her chin. “What a sticky mess!”

“Want me to lick it up for you?” Tashie asked with such a silly grin that it was hard to tell if she was joking or not.

“I think I’m all set,” Chyka replied as the chuckling cyborgirl bartender offered her some damp dish rags.

“All... shet...” Shyure murmured.

“So, who’s going to carry her sorry ass up to the room?” Tashie asked, turning back to her comm and the mitanni camgirl’s fake xenoperils. “I did it the last time.”

Chyka sighed. “Do I look like I can carry those hips very far?”

“I’ll do it,” Jumie replied, no doubt taking what she saw as an easy way out of licking someone else’s biogel pussy in public.

“I’ll help,” Alore offered, no doubt for the very same reason.

“I’ll have your drink, if you don’t mind,” Sakie said, reaching over for Jumie’s barely touched pink petal.

“Suit yourself,” Jumie replied as she stood up and patted the drunk marketing cheetah on the arm.

“Wha? Where... where we... I’m not...” Shyure sputtered.

“They’re taking you upstairs so you can do marketing things for these biogel vagina cups,” Chyka said.

“Oh,” Shyure burbled. “Right. I... ah.... forgot about...”

“Alright,” Tashie said as Jumie and Alore took Shyure by either arm and began to lead her toward the elevators. “You girls have fun with that. Keep her out of trouble!”

“Easier said than done,” Chyka noted with a wry grin.

“So, are you all gonna come watch me take on this faker tomorrow, or what?” Tashie asked. “I’ve already reserved seats for you, you

know.”

“Yeah, we’ll be there,” Chyka replied.

“Awesome!” Tashie chirped as she finished her pink petal and turned to Alore’s. “I’m gonna beat her so bad. You just wait and see. It’s gonna be great!”

ON THE EDGE

Tashie had never been one to shy away from a certain class of fate tempting challenges. Everyone knew it. It wasn't like she tried to hide it. Nor did she seem to mind when her coworkers periodically tried to exploit it for their own titillating entertainment. It was all just part of the fun of working at Gelitech, and she seemed to relish every moment of it.

According to the lustrously raven haired tigress, the games of pure chance that seemed most popular among fate tempting visitors to the Gelarium were, to say the least, uninspiring. Of the social gambling style games that Gelitech staff seemed most inclined to toy with, she frequently expressed far dimmer views. In her view, it was one thing to roll a die and accept a result as fate. It was another

thing entirely to try and squeeze one's way out of said fate with petty bluff and bluster.

Tashie's preferred manner of tempting was a far different beast. It was a primal thing, of imminent peril, biting wit, strained willpower, and sheer physical endurance. Or at least that was the theory she liked to espouse. It was often anything but, though the casual viewer generally couldn't tell the difference. What the casual viewer could tell was the tigress' distinct preference for the strange, the sexy, and the highly visually appealing.

The only thing that the top rated temptress of all things shiny and black loved more putting on a performance was doing so in front of a camera. She'd long since given in to her exhibitionist tendencies. The more people who could watch her, the more she enjoyed herself. She had over two hundred videos on VixNet already, and a fan following as diverse as they were just itching to see what was going to happen the moment she took her performances

just a bit too far.

That was the point of VixNet cam-girling, after all, wasn't it? Build up the following. Get them hooked. Rake in the enthusiastically offered, and extraordinarily generous gratuities. Have lots of fun while it lasts. And then... at the peak of your popularity, try something different. Something transformative. Something permanent. Very, very permanent. Because there's nothing more fun fulfilling than offering them something truly unique. Something that can only ever happen once. Ever.

For all her ability to tempt others into choosing whatever glossy biogel encounter that happened to fit her own personal fancy at the moment, Tashie never seemed all that keen to join any of them. She always seemed quite interested in the idea, and often toyed with it in front of Gelarium staff and guests, but never went through with it. It was just too cliché, she said. Too pedestrian. After all, hadn't everyone

already just watched someone do the particular thing?

Nor was the tigress willing, as so many other liquid obsidian clad exhibitionists were, to let her fans have any say in her inevitable shiny black fate. No matter how many body mod programs she was gifted. No matter how many times they tried to coax and cajole her into one thing or another. No matter how many times they suggested she put it to a vote. Her reply was always cagey, and never even remotely committal. Her fans ate it up, and patiently waited for that moment when something particularly interesting 'caught her fancy'. And, of course, they continued to gift and suggest things, in hopes that their idea would turn out to be just that thing.

There was one, and only one, thing that the competitive tigress could be enticed into, and often quite easily at that. It was what had come to be called 'peril edging', a game where two or more rivals would commit their bodies

into various perilous positions, attempting to outdo their rivals by going as far as possible, as long as possible, and be the one to escape with their bodies, and lives, unaltered. The winners would claim their bragging rights. The losers would claim a very intimate encounter with biogel's physically transformative properties.

Each peril edging game was also recorded for all the world to watch and enjoy. Some were even broadcast live on VixNet, for all the participants' fans to enjoy in real time. All of the tigriss' fans. The smooth, sweet talking tigress that had yet to lose.

Despite getting snared into a game at least once a month, Tashie had thus far come through each perilous ordeal completely unscathed. More so, the videos resulting from each encounter were among her most popular on VixNet. With each successive game, the suspense only increased, and so did the interest of her many fans. Eventually she was

going to have to lose. It was really only a matter of time.

"Well?" the tall, violet skinned mitanni rumbled with a sly smirk as she looked over at the warmly smiling tigress. She reached up with one arm to untangle her long, deep blue ponytail from her large, ram-like horns. That left her with only one hand to hold back the crystalline biogel creature that was doing its level best to suck her beautiful, naked body into its nearly transparent, ever-so-slightly tan, earth-worm like form. It was a not-so-subtle show of physical strength, and one that was sure to get the competitive tigress in the mood for an even closer encounter with permanently transformative peril.

"Oh, come on, Ri'dae," Tashie replied with a low chuckle as she wiggled her thighs side to side within the sticky grip of the nearly form fitting creature's tight, sphincter-like maw. Her hands her clenched around the rim of this voracious orifice, resisting the pulsing, sucking

sensation that pulled with a considerable, and very visible degree of firmness upon her legs. "You think I'm not ready and willing?"

Ri'dae laughed. "Then perhaps you might be so generous as to further entertain us all with your physical enthusiasm for this special new creature creation."

"Sure," Tashie answered with a mischievous grin as she slipped her fingers from the rim of the worm's voracious, gummy maw. "You know I'm always game to go deeper. All the way, if that's what it takes to show everyone just who's shiny black ass looks better inside these things."

'These things' were clearly just as keen as the tigress to show everyone what the two women's extremely attractive posteriors would look like encased within their glistening crystalline bodies. More than twenty million viewers across the Empire and beyond were watching the live performance, after all. Far be

it for the creature so specifically crafted for just this sort of game to disappoint.

Tashie's worm spent no time at all in waiting to pull her legs deeper into its squirming, pulsating form. Each noisy, sticky suck drew her glistening black, biogel coated body across the finely polished studio floor, eliciting a series of subtle squitches and squeaks as she slipped further into the biogel monster's tight interior, a few short centimeters at a time. It's gooey insides were fluid, yet were specifically tuned to offer the strange sensation of moist flesh. The thick goo filled every space, crease, and crevice it could find. Between her toes. Between her legs. And, as her thighs slid into the beast, up between the cheeks of her shiny black rump as well.

Clearly, the sensation of fleshy feeling goo pressing up so firmly between her legs had taken the tigress by surprise. Her eyes opened wide and she let out an abrupt gasp of sensual uncertainty. She squeezed her legs together as

the worm continued to draw her within, though she did nothing else to impede her advance into its gooey interior.

Ri'dae laughed. "You make it look like such fun!" she mused as she toyed with her own worm's continuously flexing maw.

The mitanni's words seemed to jolt Tashie back to reality. She just managed to get a grip on the worm's gummy lips as the top of her hips slipped inside with a soft, subtle pop. "Oh!" she exclaimed as she struggled to find some way to comfortably hold the worm in its current position. "Wow. That was... yeah. That was fun. And it feels so... so... well, different. Strange, really."

Ri'dae chuckled. "Really?" she inquired with a grin as she finally slid her fingers from her own worm's sucking orifice. She didn't really have to, but it would have been quite unsporting not to go as far as the tigress. At least for now. When they got much closer to

the edge of catastrophe, it would be a very different matter. "What *does* it feel like?"

"So... so gooey and tight," Tashie replied with a deep, sonorous huff. "And heavy. Really, really heavy. Like... I just don't know. Being in a real monster's gut? And it's making me feel... you know... and... rubbing..."

"Well, it *is* based on the aphrodix orgasma worm," Ri'dae observed with silky delight as her own worm began to suck her within. "You know, the infamously pleasurable bane of unwary farmers all over the incomparably fertile Northlands of Entessia Three? A world where all besides the most certifiably mature of adults are permitted outside the domed colony cities. Where..."

"I knew *that*," Tashie replied as she struggled to maintain her awkward grip on the worm. It seemed more eager than ever to devour her, and sucked quite firmly on her hips in an effort to convince her that continued

resistance would be futile. "I just didn't expect the biogel version to..."

"Feel so good?" Ri'dae chuckled as she quite casually stopped her own wormy descent with one hand, just as its sucking sphincter crested her own broad hips. "Oh, yes... it feels so very snug, does it not? *Mmm*. I could *definitely* get used to this."

Tashie looked at the mitanni and her further display of sheer arm strength with an expression of deep consternation. She certainly knew that these contests never came down to raw strength. They were all about endurance. Mitanni were strong, far stronger than feyli, but what they gained in sheer relative muscle mass, they lost in the ability to keep pushing themselves for very long. As usual, all the tigress would have to do was get herself into a position she could easily hold, and then it would just be a matter of waiting.

To everyone watching the game, it was

obvious that there was only one sustainable position the two stunningly beautiful rivals could get themselves into. If they wanted to get comfortable, they were going to have to go deeper. Much deeper. All the way up to their armpits, in fact.

No doubt Tashie came to the conclusion just as quickly as the audience. She bit her lower lip and looked over at the softly smiling mitanni. "You know, I'll bet these things feel even better tits-in. What do you say?"

Ri'dae chuckled. "Well then, why do you not give that a try? I am sure you would look quite splendid so deeply entrenched inside your squirmy captor."

"I'm sure I would," Tashie replied with a slinky smirk. "And I'm sure I will."

"Oh!" Ri'dae responded with a raised eyebrow as the tigress again released her grip upon her worm's voracious maw. "You really *do* enjoy that biogel beast of yours, don't you?"

Tashie smiled as the creature sucked her deeper into its gooey interior. "I *do*," she answered with a wiggle of her worm-captive hips. "What about you? Are you enjoying that sucker of yours as much as I am mine?"

"Not enough to behave with such cavalier disregard to my future as a mitanni woman," Ri'dae replied with a snarky tone in her voice.

Tashie smirked as her worm's maw came up under her modestly proportioned chest. "Oh, come on. You know you want to feel what it's like to let that worm suck on those giant milk jugs of yours."

"Do I?" Ri'dae questioned with a skeptical glance at the tigress.

"Yes, you do," Tashie declared, licking her lips at the mitanni as the worm sucked her own soft breasts past its gummy lips. It looked quite uncomfortable, but if it was, the tigress showed no outward sign of it. "So come and join me. Hmm? Don't tell me you're too timid

to go this deep?"

"Timid? Pft!" Ri'dae quipped. "Fine. You want tits-in. I shall show you tits-in, then! Just you watch and see!"

Tashie smiled as the mitanni released her grip on her worm's gummy maw, and allowed it to continue its gooey, pleasure inducing feast. "That's the spirit!" she laughed as her own worm sucked her in until the rim of its hungry orifice finally came up firmly into her armpits. From there, it could proceed no further, despite its best efforts. Unless the tigress deliberately allowed it to, that is.

Ri'dae shook her head as she slid in along the floor in short little motions. If the worms had any particular preference between biogel clad and au-naturelle feasts, they certainly weren't showing it. It took the big mitanni's worm much longer to suck in her greater bulk, and that alone seemed to be an unfair advantage in her favor. So too was the fact that

the worm didn't seem to compensate in any way for her greater strength.

Peril edging games were supposed to have some modicum of balance to them. Some degree of fairness. But to the live viewers on VixNet, this contest seemed anything but fair at the moment. Indeed, it seemed to have been deliberately set up to force the tigress to lose.

Tashie chuckled as the mitanni's worm came up firmly underneath her more-than-ample breasts. "Isn't it fun?"

"I suppose," Ri'dae sighed as her worm began to push her chest upwards. "I have certainly had more stimulating experiences. Then again, I have also had much worse."

For a few moments, it seemed that the worm just couldn't get its tight maw over her two giant lumps of life sustaining sustenance. Pure, mindless persistence paid off, however. After a long, awkward minute, it finally sucked the two soft mounds into its interior with a

pair of soft 'thup' sounds. Another few sucks, and the big mitanni was in up to her armpits. As in the tigress' case, only a very deliberate act on the her part would allow it to advance any further.

"Oh! Well, that was, shall I say, a very *interesting* experience," Ri'dae noted rather unenthusiastically, rubbing her worm-mooshed breasts with her free hand. "And not at all comfortable. I was starting to think that I was going to have to push them in myself."

"Should have asked me to help you," Tashie giggled. "I definitely wouldn't have minded."

Ri'dae sighed deeply and shook her head, swishing her long ponytail across the floor. "In your dreams. Now... it seems we are at an impasse, are we not? We cannot go further into peril unless we place ourselves there. But what could possibly induce either of us to do that, hmm?"

"I have no clue," Tashie replied. No doubt

she saw the gaping hole in her 'plan' now. If she could comfortably lay there on the studio floor all day in this state, so could her opponent. It seemed to defeat the whole purpose of the game. Unless the worms had some unexpected trick to play, that is.

"I have to wonder what these things do when one lets them take one's body all the way?" Ri'dae pondered aloud. "They would not tell me that before we began. I do not suppose that you have any idea, hmm?"

Tashie shrugged her shoulders. "No idea."

"Well then, I suppose one of us is soon to find out," Ri'dae observed thoughtfully. "What do you think? Which one of us should sacrifice our body to reveal the nature of the fate these creatures were crafted to impart upon their captives? Because one of us has to."

"I think the answer to that question is pretty obvious, don't you?" Tashie chuckled.

"I do," Ri'dae replied with a sly grin.

"Then go ahead and show us," Tashie said with a mischievous smile.

"Now, here I was thinking that *you* would be kind enough to demonstrate," Ri'dae responded. "After all, you *did* say that you would go all the way to prove how much better that soft little rump of yours would look all the way inside your creature."

Tashie laughed. "Well, I'll need something to compare it too first, won't I? And your big butt is all there is right now. So..."

"Not a chance," Ri'dae replied, rolling her eyes. "But we can't just lay here all day, can we? All of those loyal fans of ours are expecting something to happen... and no doubt soon."

Both of the rivals had large fan followings. Tashie had tens of millions on VixNet, spread all across the Feyli Empire. Ri'dae was not far

behind in numbers thanks to her exotic xenophysical-interaction performances for XenoExotic. The former's performances were more social, and often involved third parties having various biogel induced experiences for her and her fans' mutual entertainment. The latter's were generally more intimate, sensual, pornographic, and very, very disgusting.

If the VixNet stats were accurate, more than a sixty million were watching the pair as they lay on their backs, up to their armpits in biogel worm. Of their dedicated fans, no doubt as many were rooting for their favorite to win as there were rooting for their favorite to loose. And all were certainly waiting with considerable excitement to see just what sort of physically transformative fate was on store for the loser. The main question was how long they would willing to wait for the big finale?

The game was supposed to be about peril edging. Linger on the precipice of very personal bodily catastrophe, as close as one

dared, for as long as one could. If the participants could linger as long as they liked, not to mention quip at one another until it became less of an intensely physical game and more of a pointless verbal argument, no one was going to want to watch for long. One of them was going to have to go further. One of them was going to have to take the risk. But who would it be?

"Ah!" Ri'dae squealed as soft, subtle sucking motions began to flow down both worms' lengths from maw to tail. Tashie's worm was quite gentle, sucking once every six seconds or so. Ri'dae's, however, was a bit more aggressive. It sucked on it's captive's body every four seconds, and did so ever so slightly more firmly. Apparently there was some balancing between participants in this game after all.

"Ooh!" Tashie responded with a nervous chuckle. "I guess they're not going to let us forget what they want, are they? I'll bet this

looks amazing on camera. Can't wait to watch the highlights."

"Speak for yourself," Ri'dae quipped with audible displeasure. "This pulsing motion! It is making me feel so..."

"Horny?" Tashie laughed as she began to flex her legs and hips in time with each of her worm's pulsing swallows. "Well, I'm glad to know you're feeling as hot as I am... hot for it. And very specifically. Hot to let it have it's way with me. Wouldn't that be so much fun?"

"I wish I had a choice in my response to that insane idea," Ri'dae replied. "But this creature... it is compelling me to feel... I have no choice."

Tashie smirked. "Well, it is based on the aphrodix orgasma..."

"I know that!" Ri'dae snipped with a low huff. "I just... wasn't expecting..."

"To enjoy it so much?" Tashie responded with a broad grin. "It really feels *amazing*, doesn't it?"

Ri'dae half-grimaced, but couldn't completely hide the intensely pleased expression that threatened to expose just how much she was enjoying her worm's gentle sucking. Nor could she seem to stop herself from squirming and wiggling within its unrelenting grasp, amplifying the pleasing sensations offered by the worm with the motion of her own body.

"Well?" Tashie inquired. "Which one of us to going to do something we're almost sure to very pleasurably regret?"

Ri'dae responded with a deep sigh.

"Aw, come on," Tashie purred with a mischievous wink. "I went first the last two times. Don't you think it's your turn now?"

Ri'dae shook her head. "Fair was fair as long

as there was no real peril. Now... now let us see who shall endure the pleasure... who shall resist this damned yearning to give in... who... ah! Oh! Mmm!"

The mitanni squeezed her legs together and let out a long, sonorous moan. It was obvious that the creature's voracious pulsations were pushing her toward the heights of carnal pleasure. She didn't seem to be able to help herself but enjoy it.

Considering the slimy alien monstrosities that Ri'dae had offered herself to for XenoExotic in the past, this biogel worm must have seemed quite tame in her eyes. Comfortable, even. The more that she allowed it to please her, the more likely it was that she would forget the peril she was in. She might well do something untoward. Something careless. Something that would take her all the way, for better or for worse.

Tashie didn't seem at all phased by the

pleasure that coursed through her own body. Feyli were highly sexual creatures, after all. Far more so than the mitanni. They were built for it. They could go for hours and hours. And even longer with a good supply of food and drink.

The tigress wiggled and flexed and let her worm stimulate her body with what appeared to be total disregard for the potential consequences. Of course she knew that getting into a cycle of intensely pleasurable rise, followed by euphoric orgasmic descent, and then back to rise again, would probably have far less effect on her than it would her rival. No doubt she was betting on it.

All Tashie had to do was endure until the mitanni gave in. To the viewers on VixNet, it seemed like a risky bet. Feyli had the endurance, for sure. But at some point she would certainly 'go a bit feral', and largely forget that the world was more than her immediate environment, and the pleasure she

was obtaining therein. Sometimes that took hours. Sometimes that took days, even. But sometimes all it took was twenty or thirty minutes. The only cure was sleep, and this was certainly no place to take a nap.

"This feels so... so good," Ri'dae huffed as she and her worm squirmed in unison on the studio floor. Little beads of sweat formed on her forehead as the worm worked its magic between her legs. "So... oh! Oh! Ooooooh!"

Ri'dae moaned as the muscles of her abdomen contracted in rhythmic, orgasmic release. Thanks to the relative transparency of her voracious biogel prison, each little orgasmic twitch was clearly visible to all to see. Viewers could even zoom in, if they cared to. Or activate the VixNet GasmCam feature, a picture-in-picture mode that automatically brought attention to the most visually interesting events occurring on the studio floor.

Tashie clenched her teeth as her own worm worked as hard as it could to make her biogel covered womanhood sing its highest note. Being sealed up underneath a flat surface of glistening blackness was a definite advantage when it came to resisting unwanted physical stimulus, but even the most thickly clad biogel wearer could only hold out for so long. Ever so slowly, her tween-legs features began to emerge as the biogel gave way. Still coated in biogel, her soft, feyli outer folds became visible, and were immediately mashed half-apart by the worm's incessant rubbing.

It didn't take very long for the tigress to follow her rival to the absolute height of physical pleasure. She let out a sharp, yearning moan as she was thrown over the edge, her abdominal muscles thumping firmly underneath her biogel coating. Within the worm, the blackness still reflected enough of the studio lighting to make her orgasmic pulses quite visible to the camera, certainly much to the delight of the audience, and

especially her own loyal fans.

By the time Tashie had let loose with her first orgasm, her rival was at the precipice of a second. One might have thought the mitanni, so accustomed to absurdly long sessions of rough handling by alien monsters, would put on a show of considerable resistance to the biogel worm's efforts to pleasure her into submission. However, it seemed as if the lack of any genuinely disgusting aspect to the experience was working against her. With nothing nasty to keep her sharply focused on the world beyond the worm, she seemed to be falling into the same sort of pleasure-addled stupor so common to the species of her rival.

Ri'dae stopped holding her arms down by her sides, where they would best resist her worm's efforts to devour her. She let them spread out on the studio floor as a second orgasm took hold of her body. Practically limp, they slowly slid upwards as the worm applied pressure under her armpits. She closed her

eyes, clearly oblivious to the danger.

Tashie proved far more studious in keeping her own worm in check. She rubbed her belly with both hands and bit her lower lip. A second orgasm was inevitable. And a third. And a fourth. Unless the mitanni gave in before then. And it looked like she almost certainly would. Then all she would have to do was get out of the worm, and...

"Unh... oh..." Tashie huffed as a look of dawning realization came over her face. "Oh... how... how the hell... am I supposed to... oh... get out of... ah... this... this... fucking thing?"

One of peril edging's rules was that the winner, if there was one, had to escape from their mechanism of peril by themselves. Outside assistance, even the use of tools, was strictly prohibited. Some perils were easier to get oneself out of than others. And some were quite deceptive, easy to enter, and virtually impossible to escape after a certain point. If

Tashie's expression told any tale, this was almost certainly one of the latter.

"You... uh... oh... can... oh... not," Ri'dae huffed as her worm pressed her arms up until they were straight out at both sides. "Ah... aphrodisiac worms... oh... no... no getting out... ah... oh... if... if... you go... past..."

A visible shudder ran down Tashie's spine. "If... oh... you knew that... ah... they why did you..."

"I am... oh... more... ah... than... than... strong enough," Ri'dae panted as her arms were pressed upwards as the worm began to pull her deeper into its slimy interior. "I just... oh... did not... did not... think... this... ah... oh... this... artificial... thing... oh... oh... oh... would... feel... feel... so... much... so much... better... better than the real... ah! AH!"

A third wave of orgasmic pulses coursed through the mitanni's abdomen as her arms were pressed up and over her head by the

worm's gummy maw. In she went, bit by bit, until the creature's gummy outer surface pressed up against her chin. She closed her eyes and huffed deeply, apparently accepting her miscalculation, and the fate it was so soon to deliver.

"You've... you've been inside... oh... one of... these things... ah... oh... the real things... for real?" Tashie sputtered as a second orgasm took hold of her with its intense euphoric thumping.

"Yes," Ri'dae replied as she raised her chin in surrender to her voracious captor. "It is... ah... very... oh... fun..."

The mitanni looked toward her rival and offered a sensual lick of her lips as her worm began to pull her head within. "I may not... not have won," she cooed. "But... it is... oh... oh... so nice... ah... oh... to see... oh... you... lose..."

Ri'dae closed her eyes for the last time as her head vanished into her worm's gummy

maw. All her rival could do was watch as it pulled her in bit by bit, all the way up her outstretched arms, until there was nothing left but a tuft of her long, blue ponytail hanging out. For a moment it lingered, even as its owner wiggled and squirmed within her bestial, biogel prison, partaking freely of the intense pleasure that was certainly not going to be lasting very much longer.

"Shit," Tashie huffed as a last, sucking pop from her rivals worm made the lingering tuft of hair vanish along with the rest of the mitanni. "Oh... oh... shit."

If the tigress wanted to escape, there was no time like the present. The longer she waited, the less likely it would be that she could muster the willpower, let alone the strength, to give it a serious attempt. Her eyes were glued upon her rival, however. No doubt she was as entranced by the sight of the beautiful captive form as were the viewers on VixNet.

The beautiful mitanni, now fully encapsulated with her biogel worm, was certainly a sight to behold. So magnificently entrancing a figure, so tightly encased in a practically form-fitting creature, so completely consumed by pleasure, and so close to learning the fate which the worm had in store for her body. Whether or not she noticed the sheen of glistening blackness that was starting for form upon her feet was hard to tell. Perhaps she was too enthralled by the pleasure of it all. Or perhaps she just didn't care. There was no point in caring, after all. What was going to happen was going to happen, whether she cared or not.

The shimmering black sheen spread rapidly upward from Ri'dae's feet. It took mere seconds to reach her thighs. A few more to flow upward over her hips. And a few more to cover her chest. She did nothing to acknowledge it, not even when it spread up her neck and over her face. A few seconds more and it was all the way up her arms, closing

over her fingertips as it seemed to consume her ponytail, along with the rest of her lush head of hair.

Tashie squirmed as another orgasm took hold of her body. She gazed anxiously upon the glistening black mitanni, who might have been mistaken for a gummy were it not for the fact that her body hadn't changed to conform to a female gummy's singular, generic shape. Nor had the mitanni stopped moving. She still wiggled and flexed within her tight prison, no less animate a being as she'd been when she'd first allowed the worm to start sucking on her cloven hooves.

It was an entrancing sight for the tigress, and for the millions of VixNet viewers as well. What would come next, no one knew but those who'd created the worms. It soon became obvious was that it wasn't going to come quickly. The worm seemed to be waiting to inflict the final transfiguration upon its captive. Waiting for something to happen.

Perhaps waiting for it's captive's rival to join her.

Tashie moaned softly as another orgasm took hold and thumped her into a visible stupor of dreamy, euphoric bliss. Her arms relaxed, and her worm spared no time in taking advantage. As with her rival, she found her arms slowly spreading outward, pressed on by the pressure of her worm's gummy maw. Unlike her rival, however, she was apparently still possessed of enough awareness and self-control to comprehend the peril in which she lay.

The tigress grasped at the worm's sphincter-lips and tried to work the beast downward off her chest. First with her hands, and then with her elbows, she struggled to force the creature to relent. It was a futile effort, much too little, and much too late. All she managed to accomplish was to accidentally push one whole arm into the monster's maw with a loud, gooey pop when her grip inevitably

faltered.

"Fuck," Tashie muttered as the worm wasted no time in pulling her in until it threatened to crest her exposed shoulder. She wiggled and attempted to extract her captive arm. Again, her efforts proved futile. "I'm so... so... oh... so... fucked."

There was nothing the tigress could reasonably do to resist the worm any further. She could certainly try and hold it at bay for as long as she could with her one free arm, but there was no real point. Eventually she would succumb to the creature's pleasurable undulations no matter how much she might have wanted otherwise. All that she could accomplish by going that route was to be uncomfortable until her arm went limp.

Tashie sighed and took a deep breath. "Fuck it," she huffed, taking her free arm and pushing it deliberately down into the worm's maw. "You... you win... ah... you... you... sexy..."

oh... sexy... whore."

It took but a moment for the tigress' worm to even itself out, collapsing over her shoulders and around her neck with a loud, sucking pop. She cringed as it drew her in, pushing her chin upward with one suck, and the whole of her muzzle in with the next. Two more and it closed with another sucking pop over her head. Her long, raven black hair slowly followed as she passed deep into the creature's body. After a few long moment, it too was gone.

Being already coated in glistening black biogel meant that Tashie's complete coating took only a few short seconds, as it spread up over her face and consumed her much cherished hair. As with her rival, she was still left free to wiggle, squirm, and receive all the pleasure that her captor had to offer. And, as with her rival, it was quite the enthralling sight to behold.

For the viewers on VixNet, the next ten

minutes were the most exciting minutes of magnificent, sensual squirming that they'd likely ever before beheld. The two rivals lay side-by-side, their bodies captive and helpless, constantly moving as they were pressed to orgasm after orgasm, with naught but a minute or two in between. If they'd had words to speak, their wormy prisons ensured that they would never be heard. Their thoughts, and their pleasures, were rendered mute, only audible in the shuffling, and occasional rubbery squitch and snap, as they and their worms wiggled and writhed upon the studio floor.

For the two rivals' loyal fans, the ten minutes of squirming was far more than just exciting to watch. The suspense at not knowing what was about to happen to their favorite xeno-lifestyle cam-girls was immense. The worms offered no clue in either their shape or in their movements. Would they have some biogel body modification imparted upon them? Would they be fully transformed into some

specific, inanimate shape? Or would they be gooped and drained off for later use?

Perhaps fittingly, it would be Tashie who would be the first to discover what fate the worms had in store for their captives' bodies. She shuddered as a wave of intensely pink, crystalline clarity washed upward from her feet. Her body was becoming a thing of pure, fully transparent pink biogel. It was also morphing in a most bizarre, and incredible looking fashion.

The captive tigress began to squirm wildly as the transformation spread up between her legs, causing her womanly folds to fuse into a flat, featureless surface. She writhed as it washed up her belly and raced over her worm-mooshed breasts. These shrank into subtle, featureless mounds upon her crystalline pink chest. She wiggled with fury as the change continued to spread upward, over her shoulders and down her arms.

Tashie's head was not only spared, but freed from it's biogel coating. The goo melted down into a unified collar and muzzle-mask of glossy blackness. The mask completely covered her muzzle, sealing it shut, almost certainly quite permanently. The collar formed a thick ring around her neck, and from within which a vivid, pink glow diffused through her body, causing it to shimmer and sparkle with every little movement she made inside her wormy biogel captor.

The eyes too began to glow with a vivid, pink light. Her face took on a vapid, disinterested look as she ceased her sensual squirming and fell virtually limp. Her missing, much cherished hair was replaced by a mop of pencil thick, rubbery strands of pure, unadulterated blackness. This stretched out as the worm began to move forward, while simultaneously sucking her deeper into its mass.

Over the course of a few short minutes,

Tashie was drawn through the full length of the worm. It then expelled her from its tail-sphincter in a cacophony of rubbery squitches, squeaks, and snaps, before wiggling off through a special doorway in the studio wall. The glowing, pink biogel tigress lay prostrate and, it seemed, quite insensible. Her glowing pink eyes were open, but her body was completely limp from head to toe.

It was now the orgasmic mitanni's turn to experience the sensations of biogel transformation. Unlike the glowing biogel tigress, she had no experience with biogel outside of her entry into the worm. As the change took hold of her toes, her pleasure wracked body stiffened. Her back arched. Her expression, visible through the black biogel that covered her face, was one of total astonishment.

Unlike the tigress' vivid pinkness, Ri'dae was body was becoming a beautiful, crystalline, deep aqua in color. It certainly took

viewers no time at all to make the connection between the very specific colors, and the Biogel Games teams that represented each of the women's home prefectures: Team Pink of the Marian Drift, and Team Aqua of the Mitanni Drift. These teams were among the fiercest of rivals, and their contests were among the most watched of Biogel Games matches.

The captive mitanni seemed to hardly react as her transformation flowed up between her legs and made the lush folds therein vanish. She lay stiff, and seemed to be biting her lower lip in nervous anticipation. No doubt she thought the transformation would consume her whole body, rendering her an inanimate gummy toy for someone else's pleasure. She must have been waiting for that special moment when the transformation finished, and the abrupt transition from being of flesh and blood to inanimate, albeit still object, bereft of virtually all physical free will.

Ri'dae barely squirmed as the crystal aqua biogel subsumed her large breasts, rendering them far more modest in proportion, though not nearly as small as those imparted upon her rival. Nor did she move a bit as the transformation washed up her arms. The black biogel covering her head withdrew from her head until it had formed the same sort of collar and mask as that which had silenced the tigress.

A vivid, aqua glow diffused through through the captive mitanni's body, and her eyes began to glow brightly. Her hair was restored in the same fashion as that of her rival, though bound together in a ponytail of similar length to that which she'd had before she'd entered her worm. Only then, when her transformation was complete, did she again begin to move, flexing her legs and wiggling her hips from side to side as she began her descent toward the creature's tail orifice.

Less than a minute later, Ri'dae was laying

prostrate upon the studio floor. For a moment she continued to move and flex, and run her crystalline biogel hands over her transfigured body. Then she too fell completely limp and, apparently, completely oblivious to the world around her.

The two rivals stared blankly up at the ceiling. For fifteen long minutes they offered their astonished VixNet viewers not even the slightest visible signs of life. Then a door opened, and a giddy looking cheetah stepped into the studio.

"Well, don't you both look like the hottest things?" Shyure from marketing bubbled as she looked down at the pair with a big, silly grin. "I'll bet you'll both look even hotter out there escorting guests at the Arena. Come on! Let's go! Wouldn't want to miss the big game tonight!"

Neither of the women responded to the cheetah.

"Oh... right!" Shia giggled to herself. "I forgot about that part."

The cheetah raised one hand and concentrated on the prostrate, mostly biogel women. After a few moments, slender strands of shimmering blackness stretched out from their collars, toward the upraised hand. In a flash, they found their way to the open palm, melding with the cheetah's own biogel coating.

"Come on Pink and Aqua," Shia cooed. "Let's go!"

The two luminous women slowly got to their feet and followed their new captor toward the studio door. As it closed behind them, the live filming came to an end. The studio lights rose on the show's tiny live audience.

"Well... that was a thing, wasn't it?" Chyka remarked to her companions.

"That's what she gets for being so overconfident," Sakie replied with considerable

bemusement at the whole affair. “Now if that was me...”

“Volunteerin, lass?” Gorin chuckled. “Cuz I wouldn’t mind watchin that a second time.”

“Well... how about it, Jumie?” Sakie cooed. “Wanna give it a go? Because I think you’d look sooooo hot all glowy pink!”

“Is it... is it permanent?” Jumie asked with a deeply skeptical expression on her face.

“Very,” Chyka replied.

“Then no,” Jumie said, shaking her head.

“Aw,” Sakie laughed.

“I wonder what it does to males,” Alore mused. “Perhaps Dran would like to show us?”

“Not a chance!” Dran grunted.

“Right,” Chyka responded with a silly grin. “We need him to keep the mermaid tank

windows clean. He's the only one they won't get all touchy-feely with."

"Bit of a shame, though," Gorin observed with a deep sigh. "Such a fun lass she was. Mornin' coffee just isn' gonna be the same, is it?"

"That's life here at Gelitech," Alore responded. "At least she had fun, right?"

"Yeah," Chyka answered with a smile. "Lots, didn't she?"

"So, who'd'ye think is gonna take on 'er field work?" Gorin asked as he stood up from his chair. "Some'un's gotta go out there an show off the goods, eh?"

"Field work?" Sakie inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"Yeah," Dran huffed. "She was always going out and trying to drum up business. Not really sure what that entailed though. You know,

besides shaking her shiny black tail around all over the place.”

“People’d hire er’ te snare ‘special orders’,” Gorin noted. “Made quite a bit doin’ that. Maybe ye’d wan te try it out, Chyka, lass. I’ll bet ye’d get way more catches than ye do ‘ere at the Gelarium.”

“Hmm,” Chyka responded with a thoughtful look on her face. “You know... maybe I will!”

RITE OF PASSAGE

Key'von Rock. The massive precipice had guarded the entrance to the Yu'min valley for many millions of years. The imposing mass of nearly solid granite was heavily eroded, a veritable maze of knife-like peaks and deep crags by the region's infamously inclement weather. Here and there, black bubbles of volcanic glass could be seen, an obsidian reminder of the area's volcanic past.

In days long past, Key'von Rock had formed a natural choke point where the Yu'min valley met the Mashiva Plain. There, the long extinct key'vin'ta could control access to the lone natural pass which connected the plain and its numerous important religious sites with the heavily populated t'kin'to plateau far to the

north. It was this path along which pilgrims would travel to the myriad temples and conclaves in hope of enlightenment, favor of their darkly magnificent divinities, or perhaps even a deathless passage directly into the gloriously vile bowels of the Nine Heavenly Hells. It was also the route by which invading armies would pass on their way to the great interstellar portals at the Xinta and Xantu temples to the west. So too was it the path by which acquired slaves took on their way to the east, from the temples and toward whatever fate their new masters and mistresses had in store.

In more recent times, Key'von Rock served more as a proper fortress than a simple natural barrier. Along with the ruins of the old key'vin'ta walls, it became the central bastion on the front line of the infamous conflict that raged between the miners and mining communities of the valley, and the organized criminal syndicates that controlled what is now known as Old Mashiva, on the bluffs just

to the south of the Rock.

In service of the mines, numerous tunnels had been carved all throughout Key'von Rock, from a dozen meters below ground level, up a hundred meters toward its peak. Foremost among these was the Yu'min Industrial Railway tunnel, a two kilometer, double tracked passage that once carried ore between the valley mines and the old rail yard beneath Mashiva Bluff, on the shores of the Yu'min river. There, the ore cars were transferred to the control of the Maria Main Railroad for their transit to the processing plants, to the east, far from the interference of the criminal elements in the old city.

It was this ore trade that would fuel the many battles that would be fought for control of Old Mashiva, both overt and covert. The mines and the railroad were compelled to pay bribes to get their produce and services safely through the city. Despite this easy money, the syndicates were determined to push their

control northward. The mines and railroad were equally determined to push the syndicates out of the city. For over a century, a deadly stalemate persisted, one that would only be broken when the Imperial Navy took an interest in the area.

The development of the secret, subterranean Macharri Naval Base beneath the new city of South Plains would bring matters to a head. The syndicates wanted control of the new city, but failed to quite comprehend that it was a useful cover for the vast construction work going on below. At first unable to respond effectively without blowing the cover on the operation, new 'South Plains Gangs' comprised of special forces units were deployed whenever the syndicates tried to assert themselves. After a few decades of this, and with the Naval Base complete and operational, the commanders at Macharri had decided that enough was enough, and sent their 'gangs' into Old Mashiva. A new stalemate resulted, now between the new 'gangs' who held the streets, and the

syndicates who shifted to less risky, more covert pursuits.

After two whole centuries, a misunderstanding would bring matters to a head yet again. A fight between drunken mine police and members of the Navy 'gang' got out of control. Believing they were on the side of law and order, the mines attempted to take over the city. By this time, Macharri Naval Base had become obsolete due to the expansion of Imperial borders. No longer secret, the 'gangs' were ordered to put on their uniforms, and the base's marine division was deployed to restore order. The mines, already struggling due to increasingly corrupt leadership, lack of demand for their raw materials, and the unfortunate presence of significant quantities of radioactive materials in the deeper parts of the region were shut down. Not one would reopen, save to accommodate a few specific special experimental military projects related to 'natural nuclear power'.

The economic vacuum caused by the closing of the mines, and a reduction in personnel at Macharri resulted in a resurgence of organized crime in the old city. Gambling, loan sharking, extortion, and blackmail were the new preferred methods, but the threat of violence always followed close behind.

In order to permanently stabilize the area, the Imperial Government would decide to build a new, modern city on the plains to the east of Old Mashiva, to become the capital of the new Marian Drift Prefecture. Simply called Mashiva, this new city would absorb both Old Mashiva and South Plain into a single, massive metropolis, stamping out most organized crime by the application of overwhelming government presence. This had the desired effect, and within two decades of construction's commencement, most organized criminal activity had ceased.

With development of the new Prefectural capital, the old rail yard and the Key'von Rock

tunnels became largely disused, with new tracks bypassing it to the west, and leading to a new, much larger rail yard to the south of the river. The main tunnel would eventually have its tracks removed and it would be converted into a part of the Northway Hiking Trail network. Several chambers along its side had been converted to display a selection of largely benign key'vin'ta artifacts as a tourist attraction, one which would become quite popular as xeno-experience tourism slowly transcended from being a fringe activity toward something a bit more socially acceptable.

The remainder of the old tunnel network, along with a new, isolated entrance for the branch line, was transformed into an examination and storage facility for more dangerous key'vin'ta artifacts. Foremost among these were a number of intact and potentially quite hazardous portal components extracted from the ruins of the old Ja'vok Temple, just to the north of modern day Runai.

This little temple had once served as a transit station for pilgrims heading for the larger temples around the Mashiva Plain, though from where these particular pilgrims originated was still quite the mystery. Ja'vok itself was in an odd location, too far from the main temples to the west to make for an easy final leg of a pilgrim's journey, but also too close for it to justify its cost of maintenance as a shortcut to the more desirable destinations down the plain.

What little evidence remained in the ruins suggesting that the Ja'vok temple had once housed about six portal-priestesses and an ever-changing population of slaves whose bodies and souls would have been used to keep the portal open. Such slaves were generally selected for their passive acceptance of their condition, and were treated as favored pets rather than laborers or beasts of burden as less compliant individuals typically were. Despite this treatment, the priestesses were perfectly happy to expend even their most favorite of

slaves, transforming them into the infamous 'purple slime' in order to extract their exotic soul energies in order to power the portal and keep it continuously open.

The purple slime that had been produced by so many slaves' expenditure was as long gone as the priestesses who had created it. What was left behind were the oval shaped wall depressions that served as 'soul capacitors', which could grab and dissolve slave's bodies into more purple slime while drawing energy from the captive souls as they were pleurably sucked, according to key'vin'ta mythology, directly into the Nine Heavenly Hells. Along with these were wall sections containing numerous, capsule shaped depression which once held captive souls who's sole purpose was to keep the portal properly tuned to its desired destination.

The portal itself was a finely carved, though largely featureless granite frame containing a swirled mass that had the appearance of

opaque, black glass. Icy cold to the touch, it defied all efforts to study its materials, behaving both as a very real, very solid object, and at the same time behaving very much as an object that simply didn't exist. There seemed to be no reconciling the contradiction without actually reactivating the portal and studying its properties in a more indirect fashion. The prospect that this might actually be possible had long been one which both excited and terrified scholars of key'vin'ta history. Though it certainly wouldn't be nearly as fraught with peril as attempting to reactivate the sole remaining intact interstellar portal at Xinta Temple, there was no real knowing what might happen, or where the portal might lead. However, absent the vital ability to control purple slime, there had never been a means to do so, making the whole issue entirely academic. Academic, that is, until now.

Many years ago, the wall sections containing the soul capacitors had been embedded on either side of a carefully selected chamber

within Key'von Rock. The installation was far from practical, put together more in anticipation that more of the archive might be opened to tourists than anything else. No one at the time could have imagined that someone would come up with the means to restore it all to operation, let alone so soon.

At the far end of the dark, granite block chamber was the portal. This covered an opening into a short, dead-end passage beyond. To either side were the banks of soul capsule holders. These were no longer completely empty. About half were filled with capsules recovered from other key'vin'ta temple ruins, each one glowing bright purple and filling the otherwise dark room with an eerie luminescence that seemed to energize the air itself.

The soul capsules themselves could do little to affect the portal without the activation of the eight soul capacitors. Activating these required some means to create new, fully

energized purple slime. A means like a certain, recently discovered staff. A highly singular staff, that was being currently being held in the firm grip of an equally singular little snow leopardess.

Chyka bit her lower lip and watched as the tall, slender tigress sat down upon her 'throne' of solidified, though still mildly glowing purple slime. Wherever the woman's stunningly lithe body touched the substance, the glow brightened a bit, creating a rather unsettling and distinctly unearthly aura around her tail and legs. Were the 'throne' composed of new, fully energized slime, the giddy tigress would have been absorbed into its mass in very short order. This slime, however, was far from new. It had been created long ago, back when the key'vin'ta ruled the world, and much beyond.

"It tingles," the tigress giggled nervously as she made herself comfortable on the shiny purple mass. "I kind of like it."

The 'enthroning' of the tigress seemed completely unnecessary to the little snow leopardess. It didn't seem to serve any purpose other than to provide the tigress with a more convenient perch on which to seat herself and await what was to come. All the same, it was considered a vital first part of the ritual, according to what little was known about the process.

Chyka couldn't help but wonder why she'd agreed to participate in what any rational person should have considered an exercise in pure insanity. Dr. Mika had strenuously advised against it. 'The Key'vin'ta Society is nothing but a bunch of crazies', she'd said. Now, having seen how completely happy their members were to do whatever she pleased, the little snow leopardess couldn't help but agree.

The Key'vin'ta Society were the trustees of many key'vin'ta sites in and around the Mashiva Plain. Best known for their occupation and maintenance of Xinta Temple in a 'living state', the Society had been founded purely for academic and educational purposes. Over the years, however, they had become more and more interested in restoring more than just the appearance of old sites. In the case of Xinta Temple in particular, the Society very much wanted to restore it to full operation. But that, of course, would require an actual key'vin'ta priestess, a fully empowered convert to the old faith, possessing the proper tools, and the completely, utterly uncaring attitude required to use them effectively.

It was that latter prospect that seemed to upend Dr. Mika's moral sensibilities the most. It was one thing to gently convince genuine volunteers to do things like get turned to biogel objects. That was fun for all involved, and the results were purposefully engineered to be pleasing to the subject's senses. It was a

bit of another thing to, say, talk subordinates into doing things like attempt to retrieve dangerous key'vin'ta artifacts. That was science. Dangerous science, of course, but given the rewards, such risks were acceptable at times.

It another thing entirely, however, to wield such alien powers in such an emotionally detached, arbitrary and capacious fashion as the ancient key'vin'ta ways seemed to demand. And that was why she'd staged her expedition to retrieve the staff. It wasn't to acquire it for research. It was to lock it up someplace where the Society wouldn't be able to access it. She'd never imagined that the staff would somehow 'choose' the little snow leopardess as it's rightful owner. Nor had she ever imagined that other, far less alien powers would insist that she be allowed to keep it.

The staff presented new opportunities, not merely for the Key'vin'ta Society in the advancement of their own goals, but for

science at large. Understanding exactly how the key'vin'ta had used purely non-technological means to achieve interstellar travel between habitable planets seemed to be the only way to replicate their achievements. The ability to open such portals could change the way people traveled. If portals the size of the one at Xinta could be established, whole trains filled with people could pass back and forth between worlds just as easily as they could between neighboring stations. It would be a revolutionary development, and all it seemed to require was for one little snow leopardess to cast her old self aside and embrace the cold, uncaring amorality that her new role as a priestess of the old faith seemed to demand.

Chyka waited patiently as the tigress slid her wrists into the ancient, vertically oriented metal cuffs that were mounted to either side of her, well within the soul capacitor depression. These were designed in the fashion of proper traps, closing over the tigress' wrists as she

pressed them into the open jaws, but unable to open back up so long as they were trapped within. Given the tigress' role in the ritual, that was hardly an inconvenience, of course. Now that she was in position, she would never be leaving the soul capacitor. If the ritual worked, that is.

Chyka wasn't at all clear as to what she was supposed to do next. She knew she had to convert more subjects into purple slime and cast them onto the captive within the capacitor. And that was all she knew. Surely there was some other aspect that had to come into play. Some other manipulation of the powers being unleashed that would be required to effect the desired result. What that might entail, however, was a total mystery.

"I'm ready," the tigress giggled, smiling at her glistening black priestess with such a genuinely pleased look that the little snow leopardess began to wonder if the woman actually understood what it was they were

trying to achieve.

An unpleasantly familiar, albeit not entirely unexpected voice prodded its way into Chyka's mind as another of the volunteers took her place between the priestess and her captive tigress. *Uchi'ni'bey'ni'mina'maki*, the key'vin'ta priestess' ghostly voice called out to her protege. *Your first mi'pa! Your first rite! Your first true possessions! How they bend to your will without the least of questions! Isn't it so perfectly splendid?*

The little snow leopardess did her best to stifle a frown. She'd been questioning her role in all this before. The only thing that had convinced her to agree were the pleas from prestigious institutions to facilitate the advancement of science. The reappearance of the ancient priestess' voice now made her feel far less inclined to proceed. Until, that is, she looked around at the waiting Key'vin'ta Society volunteers.

One would have thought that a group of chilly, naked women who were all quite certain that they were about to be cast straight into the Nine Heavenly Hells would have been a bit less pleased about the prospect. But these mi'ah, as the key'vin'ta once called them, they were more than just pleased with the idea. They were positively enthusiastic about it, and they seemed quite willing to show it.

Ki'pa'ni'mari'mu'ta, the priestess coaxed. Look at them all, so ready and willing. Just like the mi'ah of old, as they looked upon my staff. Upon your staff. You've never refused such mi'ah the blessings of your biogel, have you? No! Of course not! So you surely wouldn't disappoint these mi'ah who desire the blessings of your staff, would you?

Chyka looked at the excited leopardess who was now smiling warmly at her, patiently awaiting her priestess' blessing. She couldn't help herself but smile back. The ghostly key'vin'ta priestess had a point, didn't she?

The little snow leopardess had never refused anyone who'd sought her help in becoming a biogel object. Nor had she ever been disinclined to encourage others to participate in other, sometimes much less pleasant looking things as chance opportunity arose. Was there really anything different about this key'vin'ta purple slime stuff?

Chyka took a deep breath and raised the staff. *You're right*, she reluctantly admitted. There was nothing different about dissolving people into purple slime. It was just another xeno-experience, and quite a visually appealing one at that. Who cared what happened to them afterwards? *No one cares when anyone gets turned into a gummy. Or a nasty little rowa thing. Or lots worse. It's just a thing to do. And if they like it, then who cares?*

A'he'ah! the ancient priestess laughed. *You make me proud!*

The little snow leopardess concentrated.

Exactly what she was trying to do as she mentally directed the staff's alien energy toward the leopardess was a totally mystery to her. All she could really do was energize the little capsule of solidified slime that the leopardess had slipped into her vagina. That fundamental seed which would trigger the desired sort of transformation. Then she would have to just wait and hope for the best.

Dai'ami'ma'shuri! the ancient priestess exclaimed as the leopardess floated up off the ground amid an aura of purple luminescence. *Yes! YES! Feel the power! Concentrate it from the one, to the other!*

Chyka could indeed feel the power. It stretched from her chest, up her arm, and into the staff. It flowed out from the gem, and into the little capsule ensconced within the helpless mi'ah's floating body. And then...

"Oh! Oh! OH!" the leopardess moaned with such an empathically sensual tone that it made

the rest of the mi'ah visibly giddy. An instant later, the purple glow consumed her abdomen before rapidly spreading throughout her entire body. In another instant, her luminous purple shape began to waver and melt into a shapeless, floating blob.

Chi'va! the ancient priestess commanded.
Now! Now!

Chyka pushed the undulating blob away, toward the sitting tigress. She only had a few short moments before the soul within the slime spiraled away into the other-world. An odd whim came across her as the blob approached its target. She imagined it flowing into the existing mass of solidified slime upon which the tigress sat. Surrounding her legs and abdomen. Binding her in place, while letting her experience the feeling of the leopardess' soul as it parted ways with the mortal realm. It was just a bit of entertaining fun to precede the final, ultimate act. Pointless fun, for sure, but fun nonetheless.

The tigress gasped as the new mass of slime merged with the old, surrounding the tigress lower legs and filling up the space between her legs and around her rump. "Oh! That feels so, so... weird. So... so... I just can't. I... I kinda really like it, actually."

A'ma! the ancient priestess laughed as the slime solidified around the tigress' legs and rear. Yes! Wonderful! You understand perfectly! Make her body speak. Make her want it more. Make her want it so much that she will resist the descent, and become the tool that we desire!

As strange as feeling the leopardess' soul caress her flesh might have felt for the tigress, the much more tangible feeling that had come over the little snow leopardess was stranger still. Stranger, and very much intoxicating. She'd felt it before, of course, when she'd cast Kai'tyn into the unknowable beyond. It had felt so incredible. So perversely wonderful. But back then, the need to please the grumpy Dr. Mika had stopped her from going any further.

But now...

"You're going to like the next one even more," Chyka replied to the tigress as a tall, pale blue mitanni stepped forward. "And I'm sure she's going to enjoy it just as much."

The mitanni just smiled as Chyka again raised her staff. Again, she directed the staff's power toward the anxiously awaiting mi'ah. Again the mi'ah floated upwards, before being consumed by the slime. And again, she cast the resulting blob into the tigress' perch.

The tigress giggled as the slime more fully surrounded her thighs and abdomen. It solidified around her waist, making it virtually impossible for her to move anything save her neck and head. "Oh! That feels so amazing! It's like... like... your massaging my... my soul! Wow! Just... wow!"

Another mi'ah approached, this time a slender, tan-skinned, elf-eared ashiri. "Me next!" she chirped as she took her place before

her priestess. Her priestess was more than happy to oblige.

Di'a'ma'nur'a'ki, the ancient voice instructed. Do not make the mistake of surrounding the bound one, and crushing the life from her body. Finish the task, and move on to the next.

Chyka smiled as the ashiri melted into a blob. For a moment, she didn't quite understand what she was supposed to do to 'finish the task'. A distant, fleeting awareness of the tigress' soul came into her mind. A desire to project one into the other. The blob, not into the waiting body, but somehow into the waiting mind. The waiting soul. Into it, and through it, washing it clean of everything that was no longer required. Preparing it for its new role as a self-acting conduit for further souls and their exotic energies.

The little snow leopardess sent the blob into the soul capacitor, where it completely

surrounded the tigress. She focused on the tigress' increasingly luminous soul as the whole mass of purple slime crawled up into the capacitor depression, filling it completely, until only a shallow, domed surface extended beyond its rim.

As the ashiri's soul spiraled down into the beyond in a wobbly, whirly way that made Chyka's own soul feel blissfully liquid-like, the tigress' soul bounced to the top in a stretchy, bendy, snapping fashion. There, it was bound by the power within the slime, trapped in its place and knowing nothing but its duty to snatch up the bodies of other mi'ah, holding them captive and partially converted into slime until their energies were required by the captive souls in the soul capsules, in order to power and direct the portal itself.

Chyka stepped back as the astoundingly visceral sensation of having been in the two transformed mi'ahs' places faded. There was something so incomprehensibly revolting

about the way it tugged at the edges of her own soul's anchor to the moral realm that she almost didn't want to feel it again. But... it just felt so, so good. It was just like the first tingling arousal at the commencement of foreplay. A promise of greater pleasures to come, if only one cast aside their inhibitions and let it carry them away. A powerfully physical sensation, but not one of her world. Or even her body. She didn't understand it. She couldn't understand it. She also couldn't help herself. She wanted to feel it again.

Abi'aru'ina'mi'pa, the ancient priestess cooed. Superb! Now the remaining seven capacitors. But do not be stingy with the mi'ah! They enjoy it, after all. Let them all feel the caress of your power. Then... well. You shall just have to see what happens. I'm quite sure you'll find it... most amazing!

Chyka staggered back as the last, supremely intoxicating wave of absolutely revolting arousal stretched the boundaries of her soul nearly to their limit. She began to feel as if her own body was beginning to transform into purple slime. Indeed, her coating of glistening black biogel was glowing as brightly purple as the slime that now filled all eight of the fully activated soul capacitors. All it would take was one more tiny little playful toke, and she would join her mi'ah in the bowels of Nine Heavenly Hells, where the remainder of eternity would be steeped in such utterly vile pleasures as she couldn't even begin to imagine.

A strange, floral scent began to fill the chamber, as the little snow leopardess hung on the precipice between her current mortal life, and the horrid glories of the looming key'vin'ta afterlife. Her mind whirled, as the mere imagination of what it might be like to join her mi'ah seemed enough to send her following in

their footsteps. She could feel the whirlpool coming. She could see hints of the darkness beyond. It looked like hell. But it also looked like it might, possibly, feel like heaven.

"Ki'ta'ka!" a sharp, powerful voice called out as the staff fell from Chyka's melting hands. "Ma'ti'ka'mo'te! Mi'ko'da'sen'ta'ki!"

Chyka's wavering form solidified. She fell to the ground. She panted as her heart seemed to race circles around her chest. She looked at her reflection on the palm of her glistening black, biogel coated hand. Nothing seemed amiss. Had the melting away just been her overactive imagination?

"Ma'chi," the key'vin'ta priestess laughed. "Fey'li. Such perfect mi'ah. So willing to cast aside their bodies, just for the chance to feel something new."

Chyka yelped and scrambled away from the glossy-gray, two-toed feet that had come to rest only a half of a meter from her nose. The

creature to whom they belonged was diminutive by feyli standards, not quite a meter and a half tall, with big black eyes and a flat, barely existent nose. Its extremely thin lips were oddly shaped, following a line that resembled something vaguely feline, rather than the usual straight line of a typical furless humanoid.

The naked creature held in its three-fingered hands a staff. Chyka's staff. Or was it? Had it actually ever been?"

"Mo'ka'tu'ri," the key'vin'ta priestess chuckled. "What are you afraid of, sister-priestess? That I shall make you my mi'ah, and use your soul to power my own particular purposes?"

Chyka's voice failed her. She could only sit and stare. How could it even be possible? The key'vin'ta were extinct! Dead. Gone! Or... were they?

"Ti'ma'pu'ri," the key'vin'ta priestess went

on. "No. You have accepted the gift. Understood its power. You are a priestess now. You can only become a mi'ah if you wish to. Wouldn't that be fun?"

The little snow leopardess bit her lower lip as the key'vin'ta approached until their feet were nearly touching.

"Ka'mi'ma'ri'ta," the priestess continued. "It certainly would be, wouldn't it? How good it would feel for me to bask in your soul's descent! But no. No. That is not your purpose in this world, is it?"

"My... my purpose?" Chyka barely managed to choke out. If her occasionally prophetic dreams were to be believed, her purpose was to spread biogel all over everything and everyone. They'd never said anything about purple slime, or anything else for that matter. Even after she'd found the staff. "I thought... biogel was my... purpose..."

"Di'chu'ma'ti," the priestess responded. "I

did not think you could hear my blessings, many as they have been. Such a pleasant surprise to know that all my mental efforts were not in vain."

"That was you?" Chyka asked, her voice starting to return. "But... why? I don't understand!"

"Mi'ta'ru'a'pa'ki," the priestess answered with a low chuckle. "To be honest, because you pleased by whimsical fancy. Such a small, curious creature, so ready to learn and experience new things. And with a soul... ah. Such a luscious, ripe young soul. How I really would love to feel the pleasure of it swirling about and draining away! Ah... to have you as a mi'ah. That was *my* dream. But then... I thought... what if?"

"What do you mean, what if?" Chyka questioned. "What if... what?"

"Ki'ma'pa'ti'oh," the priestess replied. "What if I offered you the gift? What if I made

you my sister? A sister that could open the ethera-gate and make me real again!"

"Ethera-gate? Real again?" Chyka sputtered. "I'm so confused. What do you mean? You weren't real? But... how is that even possible? Didn't you all die or something?"

"Di'cho'ta'wa," the priestess chuckled. "Die? No. Of course not. Don't be silly! Isn't it obvious where my people all went?"

"Not really," Chyka replied.

"Sho'ri'ta!" the priestess exclaimed. "You have heard nothing of the Mi'ah'ta? The end of my people's keeping of time and days? What do you call it... a calendar? When all became mi'ah before the Empress of the Heavenly Hells, and offered themselves up in the temples to become her eternal servants?"

"No," Chyka replied with a shake of her head. In retrospect, the priestess' explanation really was quite obvious. If you believed that

the whole key'vin'ta mythology was real, that is. "That's... interesting and all. But it doesn't explain you, does it?"

"Chi'ma'ta'ma'ki," the priestess responded. "There were too many pilgrim mi'ah for the temples to handle. So some of us went up into the mountains along the pilgrim trails, and set ourselves up to convert them as they came. Like you, I enjoyed myself just a little too much, and found myself spiraling down into the glorious embrace of hellish pleasures untold. But just as I was about to enter into my new eternal existence as a toy to angels and demons... something stopped me. Some foolish act by the priestesses who once maintained this very portal. This portal which allowed priestesses such as ourselves to move between very special places."

Chyka listened and nodded. She was still having a very hard time believing that she was actually speaking to a real key'vin'ta priestess. It was hard not to think that she might actually

be dreaming it all up. Was she even in the chambers beneath Key'von Rock, or was she still at home cuddled up with her wives, all together within the warm embrace of their gelbed's thick mattress.

"Cho'ki'wa'ma," the priestess went on, gazing off into space as she continued her tale. "With utter idiocy, they forced the portal closed before the appointed time. As it happened, at the very moment that my soul was leaving this mortal realm on its way to the glorious nightmare beyond. It sucked the energy away from the liquid husk that had been my body, forever trapping me in a state between here and there."

Chyka nodded. Impossible as it sounded, it made sense.

"Ta'pa'ka," the priestess continued. "For countless generations, I simply was. Bound within the very mass from which you found my staff, it was the only thing I could sense and

focus upon. With it, and over the many dark years of my existence, I took countless new mi'ah who so naively entered my presence. Oh, how I toyed with them as you have just done! Binding them and simulating their bodies until they wanted nothing more than for me to cast them into the pleasurable abyss! It was fun. But never so much fun that I could collect the energy to break myself free."

"I can't even imagine what that must have been like," Chyka responded, sitting up and pulling her knees close up to her chest.

"Fi'na'ma'ra," the priestess replied. "You certainly cannot. It was so many years before I would start to sense new presences beyond the confines of my cavernous prison. New souls touching the barrier between this realm and those beyond. Souls who's bodies were encased in a new substance that was capable of bridging the divide. Blackness made material. The liquid essence of that place which hangs so perilously between life and afterlife. Yes. You

know what it is. Biogel!"

"Wait... are you suggesting that biogel is kind of like purple slime? Or something like that?" Chyka questioned.

"Ka'pi'ta'mo'ki," the priestess laughed with a broad smile and a sweeping nod. "It seems to be, doesn't it? Of course, certain souls held in the embrace of this biogel stood out over others. Yours. It was just like my most favorite mi'ah. A beautiful, tan lioness who called herself Kahure. Oh, how I savored the feel of her passage into the Heavenly Hells! Ah... so... so magnificent! I so badly wanted to feel it again. So I drew your Doctor Mika here, knowing that she would bring you. And she did indeed bring you, didn't she? And then you..."

"If you want to feel me going to the Hells so badly, then why don't you send me there?" Chyka asked. "Surely you could have gotten someone else to open the gate for you and make you real again."

"Ta'pa'ni'ti," the priestess answered. "It was a whim. A flight of fancy. A dream that my favorite sort of soul might offer me more than just another mi'ah. And you have, haven't you?"

"I guess," Chyka replied with a shrug.

The key'vin'ta priestess chuckled and handed the staff to the little snow leopardess. "No'tai'da," she said. "Arise, my sister priestess. Take your well earned staff. It is truly yours now, and with it all of its many, myriad powers. Powers of which you have barely begun to discover."

Chyka stood and took the staff from the priestess. It felt oddly different now. Lighter. Less constrained. More at one with her mind. Her body. And, of course, her soul. It felt pleasant. Good. Right, even, as if it had always been part of her, in a perfectly natural way. Almost as right as her coating of biogel felt. Her coating of biogel, and the soul within who

seemed just as pleased with its newest acquisition.

"To'pa'ni'cho," the priestess mused with a smile. "Now. What a life shall we live, without all the old rules and ways to bind our freedom? What wonderful mischief shall we make together?"

"Uh... I... uh... well. This whole temple thing was just a side-gig for me," Chyka noted with a nervous smile toward the chamber's entrance. "I've got a job and a couple of wives to get home to at some point today. And we might be alone now, but at some point, someone's going to come to see if I've been successful in opening the portal. And..."

"Mi'ah'ta'pa'ki?" the priestess chuckled. "You mean you have two mi'ah, don't you? What do you call them?"

"Uh... Jumie and Sakie," Chyka replied with considerable hesitation. They were certainly no mi'ah. Perhaps the priestess didn't

understand the concept of marriage. She almost certainly wasn't aware that the biogel bound them together into a single unified organism either.

"Pa'nu'ni'ma," the priestess replied. "Favorites, no doubt. A ball of compulsively amorous fey'li, as one might say. Enjoyable to watch at play. So open about their carnal inclinations. I certainly never expected them to become the masters of my own people's former domain, let alone so much more. But, I digress. Do I sense the coming of others? How might they react to my presence? No. They mustn't see me. Not yet, at any rate! Come! Quickly!"

"Huh? What do you mean? There's no other way out..." Chyka began.

The priestess gestured toward the portal. "Ki'pa!" she replied. "You've made another way out. Only for sister priestesses. They can't follow. Come! Let me show you!"

"But..." the little snow leopardess sputtered as the key'vin'ta grabbed her hand and pulled her toward the swirling blackness."

"Ta'ti!" the priestess exclaimed as she pulled Chyka into the portal. "No buts!"

Chyka's body slid through the gelatinous membrane. The world vanished into pure, unbroken blackness. Forward. Forward. Forward, the key'vin'ta pulled her. But to where, she couldn't even begin to imagine.

THE LAND BEYOND

"Wha... where... where are we?" Chyka gasped as she followed the key'vin'ta priestess to the edge of the large and nearly overgrown stone plaza. To the little snow leopardess, there was something about the incredible scene which looked oddly familiar. No matter how much she tried to convince herself otherwise, she just couldn't shake the feeling that she'd been here before. "I... I feel like... like I know this place."

The ruined plaza stood high upon a solid granite plateau, overlooking the confluence of two raging mountain torrents. The greater of these rivers came down through a broad, wild looking valley to the north. The river itself was swift and, so far as she could tell, completely

untamed by the hands of civilization. Tall, deep green pine trees lined what she could see of the rocky shores, and great granite boulders jutted upwards from the water's surface.

A narrow, well traveled dirt road led up from the plaza, along the western shore of the mountain river, and vanished into the shadows among the trees. It was about as unremarkable as a dirt path could be, save for the oddly familiar course it took as it curved gently off into the trees. The low falls over which the river roared on its way into the rocks beneath the plateau seemed familiar as well, as did the particular way it churned with wild fury down there, before casting itself against the opposing valley wall. And how it vanished downward, and southward, around a sharp bend that hid whatever other hints of civilization might lay beyond.

The lesser of the two rivers was no less of a puzzle to the perplexed snow leopardess. It came down from the northwest, directly across

the valley from the plaza, before cascading down into the raging cauldron below to join its companion on their mutual journey down the valley. The final few meters of its course was blocked, not so much by a dam, as by a weir, it's upper surface crenelated to control the flow of water that passed over and down into the valley below. In the distance, in the very middle of the canyon, stood a high rocky precipice that parted the rushing river in two. An oddly familiar precipice, upon which stood a very unfamiliar edifice.

There was absolutely no mistaking the nature of the dark, foreboding shape that rose up from the masonry platform which capped the top of the precipice. The massive, squat obelisk so mind-bendingly black that it seemed to suck the very light out of the air that surrounded it. It was a temple. A key'vin'ta temple. An *intact* key'vin'ta temple. And it was certainly *not* one of the two known to have survived the ancient empire's fall.

Beyond the rocky precipice rose a modest stone dam. Water rushed over spillways to either side, feeding the streams to either side of the temple. The structure seemed to serve no practical purpose, other than perhaps controlling the amount of silt that might be carried downstream from the river. Why that would be important to a civilization with, so far as the little snow leopardess knew, no downstream settlements, was a mystery.

Chyka was so unsettled by her trip through the portal, and the sights that now surrounded her, that she hadn't even noticed that her body was no longer coated in that wonderful, glistening black substance in which she'd come to feel so perfectly at home. Nor was she still wearing the key'vin'ta ritual necklace and skirt that she'd been wearing before she'd been pulled into the black portal by the priestess. Her ritual staff was gone as well, leaving her as denuded of her ancient, arcane powers as she was of any sort of clothing.

A sharp, stomach turning shudder ran down the little snow leopardess' spine as it all came to her at once. "What... where... where's my staff?" she stammered, turning to look at the priestess in confused horror. "Where's the... and my biogel wife... and... and... what have you done? What have you done?!?"

"Mi'ta'ti!" the priestess giggled as she gestured toward the staff, which again resided in her own firm grasp. She was wearing the necklace and skirt as well. All of the purple slime 'gems' which adorned the regalia were aglow with a barely tamed power that seemed all too ready to work their foul magics on any mi'ah who might dare to expose herself to the one who controlled them. "That was a different time. A time where you had earned it. A time when the lovely liquid blackness had been created, and you had united with it. But this is a different time, and you are my mi'ah. And... as my mi'ah, *you will do whatever I please.*"

Chyka was totally taken aback. "I... I

don't..."

"Ma'chi'tay!" the priestess laughed. "You don't understand? Of course you don't understand. You are just a silly, silly mi'ah. You need not worry about a thing in this world but your proper place in this era's order of life. You will kneel at my feet whenever I stop. You will speak to no one besides myself, unless I demand it. No one! And you will address me by my proper title and name. High Priestess Ki'su. A'mi'ta Ki'su. Do not forget it!"

Chyka couldn't find words to respond.

"To'ta'si," the priestess went on. "And... you will submit to my every fleeting whim. No matter what it is I command. You will do it. Without thought. Without question. And with just as much willingness and enthusiasm as the mi'ah which fueled the portal by which we came to this place."

"Why? Why are you..." Chyka sputtered.

"Ta'cha!" A'mi'ta Ki'su hissed. "Who am I? Have you already forgotten? And why do you not kneel?"

"A... A... A'mi'ta Ki'su," Chyka sheepishly replied as she knelt down beside the little key'vin'ta. Everything had all happened so fast that she couldn't muster even a fleeting attempt to resist the priestess', her priestess', sudden demand for total, unquestioning submission.

"Ta'mo!" A'mi'ta Ki'su scolded. "Don't ever again forget your place! In this land, in this time, you will either be *my* mi'ah, or you *will* become someone else's mi'ah. And *that* would defeat the whole purpose of my bringing you here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, A'mi'ta Ki'su," Chyka replied softly. She didn't actually understand. How could she? The instant they had passed through that portal, everything had somehow changed. Everything she understood about the world

seemed to have been turned on its head. She didn't know where she was, or what the priestess' plans were, or if she could, or even should, trust the woman. Not that she had much choice, of course.

"Pa'ra," A'mi'ta Ki'su replied, smirking at her confused 'slave'. "Good. Now be silent and follow. And remember to kneel beside me when I stop! You would not want anyone to suspect that a High Priestess is up to some mischief, would you?"

"No... A'mi'ta Ki'su," Chyka replied, biting her lower lip as a sudden cacophony of sound from the back side of the plaza caught her ear. Mischief. It wasn't the first time she'd heard the priestess utter that word. Did it mean the same thing to her as it did to the little snow leopardess? And if it did, what possible mischief could she be up to?

"Ta'cha!" A'mi'ta Ki'su observed with a wry smile. "Ti'ka'ti'o'na'ma'se'na'ta'ru."

Chyka watched the particularly well adorned key'vin'ta priestess who was approaching the plaza from the path to the north. Unlike her own mistress, this one had shimmering silver bracelets and anklets in addition to her necklace and skirt. Was she a more senior priestess? Or was she just more wealthy? Or was there something else the jewelry signified?

The new priestess led her little group of naked mi'ah across the plaza, toward a place where there was an opening in the low wall which surrounded it. She cast a strange, skeptical glance at A'mi'ta Ki'su and her fuzzy mi'ah, almost as if she'd never seen a fey'li before. Surely they knew of the fey'li. Or hadn't they encountered the fey'li yet? Where in time were they?

"Cho'ka'mo," A'mi'ta Ki'su said softly as other priestess led the group of widely varied, furless humanoid women passed by, each gazing upon the little snow leopardess mi'ah

with equally skeptical curiosity. She gestured toward the end of the line. "We follow."

Chyka rose and followed her key'vin'ta mistress and wondered at the strange collection of people the likes of which she had never, save for a lone, aqua skinned mitanni, seen before. They all seemed quite happy to be following their priestess toward an almost certain encounter with purple slime in the temple. Just as happy, it seemed, as her own group of mi'ah had been while waiting their moment to help in the reactivation of the portal within Key'von Rock. Perhaps they didn't know what was to come. Or perhaps they did. Memories of Ky'tin flickered through her mind. Were they all the same way?

The little snow leopardess began to wonder if the whole modern phenomena of willing mass-participation in potentially quite unpleasant xenoexperiences wasn't nearly as modern as was generally assumed. Were these women slaves captured by forces, from distant

places... and perhaps even times? Or were they here because they wanted to be here? Because they wanted to see what it was like to become a mi'ah and participate in the key'vin'ta rituals? To become purple slime, and discover the horrific pleasures to which that transformation seemed to inevitably lead?

"Mi'no'mu're'na'ti," A'mi'ta Ki'su purred softly as she followed a dozen meters behind the last of the other priestess' mi'ah. "Your people are rare to catch, and much sought after, you know. No doubt I shall be offered considerable sums of gold for such a desirable prize. Such ritual potential. Mmm. How I *shall* enjoy you!"

Chyka again bit her lower lip and wondered exactly what Ki'su was really up to. Was she really going to the temple for some purpose related to their existence in the time and place from which they'd just come? Or had it all been for the sole purpose of catching what Ki'su had already described as a particularly

luscious fey'li soul?

The opening in the low wall led to a steep, narrow stone stair that descended into a dark, damp tunnel. The tunnel's only illumination came from a series of little holes near the roof, which had been bored through the rock into the cliff face above the river. A vague memory of such a stairway or, rather, the exposed remains of such a stairway, popped into the little snow leopardess' mind. A sense of deep, anxious uncertainty crept into her mind as she became increasingly convinced that she'd been to this place before, and not just for a quick, touristy look at the lovely scenery.

As Chyka's heart began to beat faster, the tunnel opened into a sharp cleft in the cliff face. She followed A'mi'ta Ki'su out onto a small landing, and from there onto a narrow, albeit rather solid looking rope and wood suspension bridge. The wood slat deck was suspended from four ropes on each side, each anchored to give it a unique curve and stabilize

the bridge against the winds which no doubt roared through the valley in times of particularly inclement weather. Under her naked feet, it felt about as solid as stone, neither flexing or swaying in the least, despite the number of people currently crossing it.

"Mi'sa'ru," A'mi'ta Ki'su cooed, looking over her shoulder at her nervous mi'ah. "I suppose you want to know where I am taking you, hmm? Tell me. Do you?"

"Yes, A'mi'ta Ki'su," Chyka replied with more than just a bit of hesitation. The picture that was forming in her mind was already falling under a cast of dark, foreboding clouds. She couldn't imagine having a clearer view of her situation would make it any brighter.

"Pa'ra'ni!" A'mi'ta Ki'su softly chuckled. "You are such a good mi'ah! Very well. I shall tell you. I am taking you to my one, incomparably exquisite home temple, the magnificent and ancient ancient women's

temple... of Da'ri!"

Chyka's mind was numb. Was it really possible? Was this darkly mystical place really the same Dari where she'd grown up a virtual prisoner of her totally dysfunctional, practically cultish family and neighbors? Was the plaza built upon the same granite plateau on which Dari would be built so distantly in the future? Was the dirt road really the same path that the Sky Line Bypass tracks had been built upon? Was the river really the Yu'min, descending down toward the place where Mashiva would one day rise? Where she would come to live, and love, and...

The little snow leopardess was so consumed in thought that she barely noticed the dozens of key'vin'ta, and hundred or so mi'ah who

were going about their routine amid the market stalls and two story residences that were built into the high temple walls. These walls, in turn were built into the vast, masonry plinth in which the massive, impossibly black obelisk was embedded. This plinth, no doubt, was just as filled with tunnels and chambers as that of the only other key'vin'ta temple that she'd ever visited, the Xinta Temple, which still loomed completely intact over Mashiva's South City, far away in the distant future from which she had come.

"To're'ka," A'mi'ta Ki'su said to a priestess who was clad in an armor-like dress made up entirely of thin purple slime plates, connected together by purple slime rings. "Ar'ma'to'chi'to'ra'mi'ka'mi'o' na'kai'ma'ti."

Chyka had no idea what the words meant. She didn't even bother to try and find some hint in their expression and body language. She was afraid to even look at either of them, lest she find herself facing some punishment.

The priestess in her purple slime dress seemed particularly unconcerned with keeping tight control upon the powers she commanded. The misty purple aura that surrounded her swirled about and flowed along the ground until it surrounded the little snow leopardess' legs and made them tingle in a delightfully terrifying way. Chyka could only imagine one possibly punishment this priestess might be inclined to met out of even the slightest of misbehaviors, and it wasn't something she was particularly excited about experiencing at this point.

"Ga'nu," A'mi'ta Ki'su commanded, gesturing for the little snow leopardess to rise and follow her towards the massive archway that led into the obelisk's hollowed out interior. "The Archon is very pleased with the particular qualities of your soul. She believes it will be quite useful in the service of Da'ri's particular purpose. And, I must admit, I very much agree."

Chyka's already heavy heart sank. Ki'su had

really hunted her down, tricking her into giving herself up for some special key'vin'ta ritual, hadn't she? It seemed like another disaster at Dari was in the offing, and this time there was no one to call for help.

"Pu'ke'rin'da," Ki'su commanded as they passed into the darkness of the obelisk's interior. "Come quickly. The sooner our business is complete, the better."

Chyka dared not contemplate what that business might be. Instead, she focused on what she could see, and hoped that her mistress had something in mind other than casting her straight into the Hells. Or whatever it was they did within such a strange temple as this.

The interior of the Da'ri obelisk was very different to the one at Xinta. There was no round depression in the floor, covered by what looked like a swirled black glass portal surface. There were no statues. No altars. Nothing at all

to suggest it had any particular ritual purpose. Instead, there was just a broad, spiral stairway leading downward into a glowing purple unknown.

Between the stark, utilitarian interior of the obelisk, and the plain, unadorned features of the courtyard and walls, it all struck the little snow leopardess as being far less a temple than it was something far more functional. It was very much a fortress, of a uniquely key'vin'ta sort. Imposing. Unapproachable. And steeped in arcane energies which might, if properly directed, spell glowing purple doom to any who would dare to assail it.

But what had this temple-fortress been built to protect? Was it just there to watch over the pilgrim road? It seemed plausible. It was a very important road, after all, leading through the only routinely traversable pass northward from the Mashiva Plain. Exactly what such a fortress might be protecting the road *from* was another question entirely.

"Cha'ru," Ki'su instructed, gesturing toward the top of the stairs. "It is time to delve deep, my pretty little mi'ah! You will do exactly as I tell you. Nothing more. Nothing less. And don't touch anything! You wouldn't want to ruin all the fun, now would you?"

"No A'mi'ta Ki'su," Chyka replied softly as she followed the darkly mischievous priestess down into the purple glow. The little snow leopardess had assumed the light to come from the same sort of purple slime orbs held in the hands of the statues which were located all throughout the Xinta temple. She certainly wasn't expecting to find it coming from the stone walls themselves.

Little specks in the particular granite forming the staircase walls were not mineral, but were purple slime instead. It was the so-called 'natural' purple slime, no doubt. A thing native to the world of Maria, and of Maria alone. A thing so rare that it might be found by chance once in a dozen years, and in quantity

perhaps once in a hundred.

If the little specks of natural purple slime weren't enough to amaze Chyka, their slow transition into little bubbles, threads, and webs as they delved ever deeper beneath the obelisk left her absolutely astonished. There was nothing like it in the museums, let alone in even the most esoteric text on the subject. During those long, mind numbingly boring nights at the MMU library, she had read more than her share of those.

All of this natural purple slime throbbed with the same alien energy that she'd felt as she'd sent souls spiraling down into the abyss with the staff. The same sort, but less refined. Fizzier, in a way. And far, far more primal.

Chyka couldn't help but want to reach out and touch the stone. But what would happen if she did? Would she merely feel the energy flowing through her body? Or would she be subsumed and sent on her way straight to the

Heavenly Hells?

The more she thought about the key'vin'ta belief that souls could be cast down into some permanent afterlife in a domain like the Heavenly Hells, the less it made sense to the little snow leopardess. The immortal soul was anchored to its own fundamental realm via an unbreakable thread. A passage. A tunnel. Whatever it was. Massage it, and you could draw immense amounts of energy from the fundamental realm, and direct it to useful purpose in the mortal one. But detach it from its mortal end, and the thread would just snap back to its eternal home, an act that would simply disconnect the soul from its mortal body. No amount of energy could alter the equation.

It was one of the few hard and fast laws of trans-dimensional physics. Ta'kay's Law, to be exact. There was no way around it. Period. Not that it kept nutters from trying, of course.

But... what if you could break Ta'kay's Law? What if you could somehow shift the connection point from the current mortal body to a new mortal body in some other domain? It would still be anchored to its fundamental realm, just as before. If that were the case, the Heavenly Hells would be a different mortal domain, and not the immortal afterlife that the key'vin'ta seemed to believe it to be. It would make more sense from a practical standpoint, though. At least it would in the mind of the little snow leopardess.

Steeped in her own wandering thoughts, Chyka barely noticed as they passed the stariway's first landing, and a side passage that lead off into darkness. It was certainly an odd time for her to be pondering theology, let alone the basic principles of soul oriented trans-dimensional physics. But ponder, the little snow leopardess did. It was a good way to distract herself from the ever-present prospect that she might be soon be on her way to discover the truth in a very personal and

intimate fashion.

"Mi'ra'shi'so," Ki'su murmured as they delved deeper, and deeper beneath the temple. Finely hewn blocks of stone gave way to exquisitely carved natural rock. Rock that was as full of purple slime as the blocks above. The air was starting to get warmer, and the energy that seemed to permeate everything began to feel closer. Heavier. More potent. "Just a bit further."

Chyka nodded as she followed the priestess down at least a hundred more feet before the staircase came to an end. A passage led inward into a circular chamber, directly beneath the obelisk.

The little snow leopardess gasped as she took in the sights of a space that was clearly meant to be forbidden in almost every sense of the word. The rock from which the chamber was made lacked the inclusion of purple slime that permeated the stone in the stairway walls.

It was roughly hewn, and its walls took the form of gear teeth, the inward facing teeth rising up to support the perimeter of the low, domed ceiling. In the ceiling between each of the teeth were holes that led upward, like vents or chimneys. And, in the face of each gear tooth, was mounted a single, glowing soul capacitor, identical to those that she herself had ritually activated within the chamber in Key'von Rock.

The centerpiece of the forbidden room was an open pit. A dull, orange glow shone up from this opening, periodically brightened by little flashes of yellow and white. There was nothing at all to prevent anyone from falling into the pit, though a pulley mounted in the ceiling above suggested that things were meant to be lowered into it for some unknown purpose.

"Ka'di'ra!" Ki'su chuckled softly as she gestured toward a pretty, elf-eared mi'ah who seemed to have been left alone in the chamber. "The most willing supplicants who's souls are

deemed most fit for this particular purpose are permitted to take their own time in this special place. And only the most willing supplicant are brought here, regardless of the quality of their souls. Because only they will do to keep the deadly sickness of the Forge at bay."

The lone mi'ah turned to look at the newcomers, and in doing so turned her back to the soul capacitor she'd been standing in front of. The slime within reached out and snatched her up. She let out a little yelp as it drew her into its mass until only her head and chest jutted out in a fashion that looked very much like some of the biogel 'wall art' pieces that Chyka had seen, and even helped create, back at Gelitech.

"Mawa nori! Mawa... mawa... mawa," the mi'ah huffed in her native tongue as the purple slime slowly subsumed the remainder of her exposed body, at first converting it into more of its own substance before letting it melt into its own mass. For a brief moment the

capacitor's slime glowed brighter, as the soul's latent energy was released. A soft, swirly gurgle could be heard. Then there was silence. The mi'ah was gone.

"To'va'ri," Ki'su remarked quite casually. "Good. No witnesses."

"What... what do you mean?" Chyka asked softly as she hesitated to follow the priestess toward the edge of the pit. "What are we doing here?"

"Cha'ni'k!" Ki'su snapped. "Did I say that you could speak? Come here! Come here and gaze into the heart of the Forge! And tell me... for you must know with your future knowledge. Tell me. Tell me its secret!"

Chyka bit her lip and slowly advanced until she could look down into the extremely deep pit. There, far past an ethereal shimmer of purple luminescence, was a boiling pool of molten rock. Red. Orange. Yellow. And with far too many bubbling rolls of searing hot white to

be natural magma. "What... the..."

A sudden, brief burst of blue light brought out a shriek from the little snow leopardess. She fell backwards, away from the pit and scrambled for the closest wall. How she managed to avoid getting within reach of one of the soul capacitors, not even she really knew. Avoid them she did, however, though in retrospect it was hard to justify the effort. She'd seen the light. There'd been nothing to shield her. It was too late.

"To'ka'n'ti'pa!" Ki'su scolded with a bemused sneer on her increasingly hostile looking face. "What are you afraid of, mi'ah? Is the supremely potent magic of the fundamental ooze too much for your delicate eyes?"

"Do you have any... fucking... idea what that is down there?" Chyka panted, half out of fear and half out of the disbelief that even the relatively primitive key'vin'ta would knowingly expose themselves to such a potent source of highly radioactive substances. There was no way that they could have built something capable of keeping the cocktail of hellishly radioactive reaction byproducts at bay, let alone the radiation itself. "Do you have any... fucking... *idea?!?*"

"Ca'ta!" Ki'su answered with a roll of her eyes. "Silly, silly mi'ah! Of course I know what it is. It is the fundamental slime, energized by the souls who are cast into the Hells in this very chamber! The Dark Power made substance, that burns and sickens all who dare to steep their bodies in its terrible energies! The Vile Beast that can barely be contained by the combined power of all this temple. The Supreme Magic! The..."

"It's not magic, you idiot!" Chyka hissed.

The key'vin'ta may have conquered a hundred planets, using their rather effective understanding of the trans-dimensional physical properties of a substance they encountered, no doubt, completely by chance. When it came to real physics, however, they'd clearly never advanced beyond the practical basics of physics typically known to a bronze, or even iron age society. "It's uranium! And other radioactive crap in the rock! It's deadly just to be near, let alone get close enough to look at!"

"Pa'te'ra!" Ki'su grunted as a dark smile spread across her face. "Of course it's deadly. No mortal can survive its powers for long. No mortal can control it. The fundamental slime..."

"Fundamental slime?" Chyka snapped. "It's just rock! Molten rock made of unstable elements that... that are... that are always breaking apart into tiny little bits that are so small you can't see them. And those little bits

are flying off so fast that they'll break little bits off your body. Enough of that and it'll kill you! And it doesn't take much!"

Ki'su smirked. "Mi'ta. So you *do* know the inner workings of the magic! Magic that *can* be controlled. Magic that your people *have* controlled. I have seen it in my dreamy visions of the great city on the plain. Such magnificent magical prowess! And you..."

"It's not magic!" Chyka growled. "It's called radiation! It's physics! Like... like water flowing downhill. It just happens all by itself, because that's how the world is built! You can't stop it from happening, and you sure as hell can't change what it does. You can't just wave a staff and make it do what you want. It's nothing like purple slime. It's not even trans-dimensional! "

"Cha'ka!" Ki'su scowled. "Then how do your people control it? How do they make the Vile Disease do their bidding?"

"We don't," Chyka replied with a sneer. "Because we can't. Sure, we can put a bunch of it in one place and get it to make heat, to make steam, to make electricity. You have to do some other things to keep it from melting. Inside a massively thick structure to keep the radiation from getting out and killing everyone. None of that is magic. It's just engineering!"

"Ki'ka'ru," Ki'su growled. "How dare you attempt to hide your truths from me! How dare you try to trick me into thinking this fundamental slime is just... rock! How dare you try to dissuade me from seeking it's power! It's power so much more potent than the purple slime! I have seen it with my vision. I have seen it taken and made into things that kill. Things that see the invisible. Things that destroy the invisible too. And... things that even heal the most dangerous diseases! Tell me! Tell me the secrets! *NOW!*"

Chyka was confused for considerably longer than she probably should have been. What

could the irate little priestess possibly be talking about? "Wait... are you... are you... you *have* to be kidding me! Right? Please tell me you're kidding me?"

Ki'su scowled. "Ti'ki'map! Stop playing games with me! Tell me the secret of the fundamental slime!"

"I can't," Chyka replied. "I'm not a physicist. You need a physicist to tell you all about that. Maybe a physics professor. You know, like at a University. Where you can learn all the ways they use radioactive stuff in medicine, in sensor systems, and even in sterilizing stuff to kill off other diseases."

"Ki'pa'te," Ki'su hissed. "Do I look like I desire to be lectured in the low arts by some unenlightened simpleton? Enough games! Tell me the secrets! Or... perhaps you'd like to join the other mi'ah in the Hells? I'm *sure* the Mistress would be most pleased to reward you for your failure to submit to a paragon of her

chosen people!"

"No!" Chyka replied, standing up to face the sneering key'vin'ta. No matter how preferable it might have been to dying of radiation poisoning, she wasn't going to do anything to please the traitorous priestess. Quite the opposite, in fact. "I don't think I'd like that at all. But I can't change what I know and don't know just to please your ridiculous desire to mess with shit that people in my world stay the fuck away from unless they can't."

"Da'ki'ra'ti," Ki'su snapped, raising her staff toward the little snow leopardess. "Then you have no further use to me."

Chyka contemplated rushing the priestess. Grabbing the staff. Knocking her into the pit. But she could already feel the energy starting to surround her. Lift her up. Push her toward one of the soul capacitors.

Even as the priestess worked her glowing purple magic, another power reached out to

surround the little snow leopardess. Whatever the priestess, or the portal, had done to remove the living liquid blackness from the outside of her body hadn't actually removed in from within her. It suddenly regrew, spreading out from her womanhood to coat her from neck to toe in perfectly polished obsidian wonder. But it didn't stop there. It spread over her head, forming a featureless 'helmet' of sorts. A helmet that conferred an extraordinary amplification of her senses.

Chyka could see all around her, all at once. She could smell every minuscule scent that was carried in the warm, subterranean air. She could even hear the particles of dust as each wafted its way onto the chamber floor. And, far more importantly, she could see the myriad fields of trans-dimensional interaction that surrounded her.

The sudden saturation of unfamiliar and amplified sensation should have completely overwhelmed the little snow leopardess' mind.

A dim, distant awareness crept into the back of her mind. An awareness that she was not alone. She was just one, in a vast, impossibly black mind-space that stretched out to touch a countless many, no matter how distant they were in space... and in time. Her senses were the senses of the whole. The Unity of all souls who were one with the biogel.

Chyka was no longer quite the same being as she was before the biogel fully surrounded her. She had become a greater organism, a higher life form in tune with not just the universe as it was observable by mortals, but with the whole of the united trans-dimensional interactive space. A whole different kind of vision surrounded her along with that which mortal eyes could see. A rainbow of force fields, energy threads, and even the ley lines that passed through time itself to connect her to the Unity.

Were the little snow leopardess merely an average biogel wearer, what she saw in the

ethereal rainbow might not have had meaning, let alone use. But, having learned what she did of the key'vin'ta purple slime magic, and having wielded it herself, manipulating it with her own mind, allowed her certain novel... liberties. If she could sense it, she could reach out to it. And if she could reach out to it, then she could touch it. And if she could touch it, then she could manipulate it. And if she could manipulate it...

Chyka yanked the staff from the priestess' hand purely by force of will, using it's own trans-dimensional power emanations to fuel the act. It flew through the air and into her own outstretched hand. "FINE! You want magic... then let me show you magic!" she said, her rubbery, artificial sounding voice vibrating its way through her gelatinous encasement.

"Ti'ta!" Ki'su yelped. "Give that back... give that back to me..."

"No!" Chyka replied as she floated a meter

off the floor in glistening black magnificence. "No. Not after you tried to betray me, your own sister-priestess. After you tried to sacrifice me, like some common mi'ah!"

"Pa'fo'ni!" Ki'su hissed, stepping forward, but not so far as to get within the darkly angelic figure's reach. "You... you..."

"Bitch?" Chyka completed the priestess' protest for her. "Yeah. I'm a bitch, aren't I? But after all I did for you... just to have you try and stab me in the back? Deal with it!"

Ki'su seethed in silence.

Chyka was tempted to cast the key'vin'ta into one of the soul capacitors. It seemed like the most logical course of action, at least until her thoughts turned to those of escape. How could she possibly get out of the temple without Ki'su leading her out? Surely, not even the biogel could fully protect her from the wrath of so many priestesses, all at once.

Rainbows within rainbows revealed the answer, though it didn't seem to be her own mind doing the analysis. Somewhere in the Unity, someone was trying to lead her back to her own time. Someone with a strange, deeply unsettling influence over the whole. Someone powerful. Someone... vaguely familiar.

Chyka had bigger problems than worrying about who was trying to guide her. Only the information provided was important for the time being. And the course that information suggested was surprisingly easy. Almost too easy, in fact. With the staff that had opened the portal in her hand, she merely had to will it. But... there was a catch.

Returning to the future meant bringing back everything that one had entered the portal with, and nothing more. The staff would have to come with her, of course. And the ritual accessories that Ki'su was still wearing. The problem was the key'vin'ta priestess herself. Everything had to go back. And everyone. And

there was no getting around it.

Chyka didn't have a choice. She had to return to the future, lest she be disposed of by the priestesses. Or, perhaps worse, be worshiped by them as a dark demigoddess, spreading her new living slime all over their bodies and starting a new, glistening black era for the Key'vin'ta Empire... and completely breaking the timeline in the process. Neither option was remotely palatable. She had to go home, and she was just going to have to bring Ki'su back with her. That too seemed like a really bad idea, but what could she do?

"I think it's time we went home, don't you?" Chyka asked with a wave of the staff. It was a rhetorical question, of course. The decision was already made.

"Da'ra!" Ki'su yelled. "What. Wait. No! No! I've waited so long to come back to this place. So long! So..."

"Tell me something," Chyka mused. Or

perhaps it was the Unity doing the musing, for the idea clearly hadn't come out of her own train of thought. "Have you considered what will happen when you finally encounter the *real* A'mi'ta Ki'su in this time? And in this very place, no doubt? Have you considered how you will be treated, as an impersonator, and rogue priestess, in this most holy of places?"

Ki'su fell to her knees in silence.

"You aren't the *real* A'mi'ta Ki'su anymore," Chyka, or the Unity, continued. "But you can still be Ki'su. Not here, but in *my* time, as *my* supplicant. And you will. Because you have no other choice."

The little snow leopardess called out to the portal. Together, she and Ki'su were surrounded by the blackness of the portal passage. A one-way blackness, that lead straight back to the time from which they'd come.

UNITY

"You wouldn't happen to have a Geiger counter, would you?" Chyka asked as she stood in the dimly lit portal chamber within Key'von Rock.

"No. Mine's in'ne shop," Gorin replied with a deep frown as he watched Ki'su struggle with a visible mix of amusement and concern. The grip of the olive skinned Vixanti Corporation intelligence officer was too firm for the irate little alien to free herself. That was just as well. Who knew what mischief the little creature might manage to perpetrate if she was able to escape? "Whad'ya need one o' them things for anyways, lass? Ye been runnin around in the ol mines er somethin?"

Chyka shook her head. "No. Well... not exactly. Technically."

"Eh," Gorin responded with a shrug and a worried glance at the little snow leopardess. "I ye were glowin' much more than background, me comm'd be screaming bloody murder, so no worries. I suppose."

Dr. Mika leaned in to take a closer look at Chyka, with a particular focus on her face. "Hmm. My eyes may be deceiving me, but I could swear that there's something... different about you," she remarked with her usual dry and almost disinterested tone. "I can't quite put my finger on it. Was there a spa on the other side of the portal? Your fur looks almost... sparkly. Or is that just a trick of the light?"

"A spa? Hell no," Chyka responded with a snort. "But there was a key'vin'ta temple. A very dangerous key'vin'ta temple.""

"A temple? Where?" Dr. Mika demanded.

"Where was it? Could you tell? Was it intact? Did it have a portal? Was it active? Was it..."

"The temple was at Dari," the little snow leopardess interrupted. "Yes. That Dari."

"Don' be silly, lass," Gorin said with a sharp glance at the frustrated little alien. "The only thing up that ways is... well. Ye know what it is."

"Not now," Chyka replied with as serious a tone as she could manage. She was still rather shaken by what had happened on the other side of the portal. The strange change that had come over her at the last moment, the strange power she felt within her, had left her feeling extremely strange. So strange, in fact, that she was starting to question reality. Again.

"What do you mean, 'not now'?" Lieutenant Commander Nax questioned as he held Ki'su firmly at arms' length.

"Listen. I know this is going to sound crazy,

but the portal led way back into the past," Chyka replied. "Before the key'vin'ta were extinct. To Dari. And there was a path to a temple up in the west branch of the valley, up on that massive rock in the middle of the river."

"That *is* crazy," Dr. Mika replied with a low harrumph.

"Not any crazier than this little runt," Lt. Cdr. Nax noted as she pulled and yanked against his grasp to no avail. "I've never seen anything quite like her before. Do you know where she came from? Or what she is?"

"Well," Chyka began. "I... I'm pretty much one hundred percent positive that she's..."

"Key'vin'ta," Dr. Anshi Alluwa observed as she stepped into the portal chamber. Vixanti's chief science officer glanced down at Ki'su with a wry smile on her face. "A full fledged key'vin'ta high priestess, in fact. You didn't really think your little game would escape our

notice, did you?"

"Ch't'ck'a!" Ki'su swore. "You whores and your fake goddess! Your fake synthetic bitch!"

Dr. Alluwa laughed. "You're a feisty little one, aren't you? No matter. You served your purpose and provided me with the data I was looking for. Now... what to do with you..."

"Wait," Nax said with a puzzled expression on his face. "You *knew* there was an actual, honest-to-goodness key'vin'ta still alive around here? And that she was involved in... time travel? And..."

"Yes," Dr. Alluwa chuckled. "Well, more or less. The details are irrelevant. I have the data I need, and no one is worse for the wear in the getting of it."

"What data?" Nax questioned. "Didn't Admiral..."

"Tell us that there were to be no further

unapproved high order experiments?" Dr. Alluwa replied with a smirk. "The portal experiment was fully approved, wasn't it? All I did was... shall we say... piggyback my own observation work on top of that. And, you know, keep it all from going horribly wrong."

Nax looked completely unconvinced. "And what was going to go so wrong about it?"

Chyka bit her lower lip. "Well... this priestess was..."

"T'sa'va't'ik!" Ki'su snapped. "You don't dare to speak of..."

"You shut up!" Chyka snapped right back. "I'm done with your mind games, and as far as I'm concerned, after what you tried to do to me, I own your little ass!"

"Ta'pa'mak!" Ki'su hissed. "Get back in your place you damned mi'ah! Get..."

"SHUT UP!" Nax barked. "Can someone get

me some cuffs small enough for this whelp?"

"On it," Gorin replied, stepping out into the corridor where the rest of the security team was gathered.

"As I was trying to say," Chyka said, looking directly at Nax, "the temple at Dari was built over a shaft that led deep down into what's now Brightstone mine. Right into one of the natural uranium reactors that caused the mine's abandonment. Except..."

"Except what?" Nax inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"Except there's more than just ore down there," Chyka continued. "There's tons of natural purple slime. *Tons*. And I think something's going on between that and the uranium. At the very least, the molten uranium is activating the purple slime, or vice-versa. That much I could see it with my own two eyes. It was..."

"Oh, is that why you wanted the counter?" Dr. Mika asked with a somewhat confused expression. "But if you were close enough to see it..."

"I should be dead," Chyka agreed. "But they were using these soul capacitors to power some kind of shield that was keeping the radiation in the pit. But..."

Gorin returned to the chamber and moved to help Nax get the furious key'vin'ta in handcuffs. "But what, lass?"

"They had a rope and pulley right over the pit," Chyka explained. "And she called it a forge. I have no idea what they were doing with it... but she was obsessed with learning the secrets of the 'sickness' in the pit. She knew all about our uses of radioactives in science, and medicine, and all that. She was absolutely convinced it was some kind of trans-dimensional 'magic' just like purple slime. And... she was convinced that I could somehow

teach her how to control it... and use it... for... Goddess knows what."

"Looovely," Nax replied as they finally got the cuffs snapped in place.

"Not like it's a problem now, is it lad?" Gorin asked with a chuckle. "T'sall done an gone, innit?"

"Except for the fact that it's spread, or migrated under modern Dari," Dr. Mika noted. "Though the hazard seems to be well contained at the current time, I suppose it would behoove us to inform the nuclear authorities."

"Sound's like a plan," Gorin responded.

Dr. Alluwa nodded. "Quite. And then there's the matter of this portal, isn't there? If she could use it to go back their with modern knowledge once, she could do it again, couldn't she?"

Chyka frowned. "I think she could, though

whether or not she requires this staff to do it, I don't know," she replied, looking at the priestess' staff with considerable reluctance. "I also don't know if that's the only place this portal leads. It might be able to go anywhere in the past."

"Fortunately, I don't think it's quite that arbitrary," Dr. Alluwa replied. "From what I now understand of this particular setup, it can only go to places that the most powerful priestess passing into it had personally been to before. In space, and in time."

"So she could still go back and try to make a radioactive mess of the whole Yu'min valley?" Nax questioned.

"Not for us," Dr. Alluwa remarked. "Or else we'd already have that mess on our hands, wouldn't we?"

"I suppose," Nax replied. "But still. She's dangerous. And if Admiral Sarva finds out about her... well, you know how he is. He's not

going to let us keep her locked up, is he?"

"Mmm," Dr. Alluwa replied. The tigress thought to herself for a moment before turning to Chyka. "Well? As you said, you have particular rights to that little ass of hers. What do *you* think we should do with her?"

Chyka shrugged her shoulders. It wasn't a question she really wanted to have to answer. One side of her wanted to just shove her into one of the nearby soul capacitors and be done with it. Another wanted to add the angry little key'vin'ta to her growing harem, to put her under the firm thumb of her own biogel wife. Still another imagined more exotic biogel possibilities. Things at the Gelarium that might serve as suitable, if potentially quite pleasurable, punishments.

The former possibility seemed to be the most appropriate, given that the sneering little priestess had tried to do the same to Chyka. At the same time, sending Ki'su straight to the

Nine Heavenly Hells wasn't going to be much of a punishment. It was exactly the sort of mortal ending that every key'vin'ta priestess seemed to quite thoroughly desire. It was a very convenient way to dispose of the whole problem, though. A very, very permanent way as well.

The latter possibility certainly piqued the little snow leopardess' imagination. She could imagine the biogel muzzled priestess compelled to live life in a biogel modified body no longer suitable for any sort of dangerous troublemaking. There were so many options to choose from. And that wasn't even starting to consider the sorts of pure objects she might be made into. A plant? A sculpture? A piece of furniture? The possibilities were truly endless!

The final option, adding the key'vin'ta to her own biogel-clad harem had certain rather less abstract and far more carnal enticements. It was also the most dangerous. Though she would be sure to find herself under the thumb

of the biogel wife who surrounded all of them, she would also add some of her own personality into the whole of the mix. And who knew what she might get up to if she was let out of sight for too long. Given the biogel's own inclinations, that might end up being quite a bit. But still, the prospect of making the angry little priestess feel the full measure of biogel's most intimate powers was almost too hard a thing to pass up.

"I don't know," Chyka finally responded, in hopes that someone else in the room would just go ahead and make the decision for her. "After what she tried to do... I just don't know."

I think you do know, Dr. Alluwa's voice came straight into Chyka's mind.

Chyka bit her lip and looked straight into the tigress' almost luminous pink eyes.

I think you do know, she repeated with a sly, all-knowing smile. *And why not? Why not bring her into the fold. Into the family. Your*

family. Our family. Yes. Our family. That's what we are now. Haven't you felt it? Felt us? The unity? Omega?

Chyka stood in stunned silence as Dr. Alluwa turned to leave and beckoned everyone to follow.

Come, little one! Dr. Alluwa's words trailed off into another, familiar voice. A voice that the little snow leopardess had only heard once before. A voice that carried such power that it was virtually impossible to resist. *Come, little one! Let us go someplace private. And there, together, let us enjoy our newest prize!*

Chyka watched in silence as Dr. Alluwa examined the bound key'vin'ta priestess in the small, damp and long abandoned chamber

deep beneath Key'von rock. It was located alongside a small, three track subway yard that once served as a secret staging point for military trains moving troops and material to and from the similarly abandoned subterranean Macharri Naval Base well off to the southeast. There, surrounded by darkness, a three car train was waiting. Disguised as a Mashitran Special, it was actually one of three such trains belonging to Vixanti Corporation, and largely operating within the city's 'old subway'.

The old subway system had been built to serve the Old City of Mashiva, and had been extended over time to serve other districts of the city as it expanded to the south and east. Long since replaced by the far more modern system, the old tunnels were kept in service for freight, postal, government, and certain other special trains, such as those operated by Vixanti.

"Well?" Dr. Alluwa said softly as she gave

the little priestess a last look over. "Why don't you show me how you're going to add her to our Unity."

Chyka bit her lip. "I still don't understand what you mean by *our* Unity. I'm married to Jumie and Sakie. And... whoever this person in our biogel is. It's just us."

Dr. Alluwa chuckled. "Ah, sweet little sister, it never was just you," she cooed with a warm smile at the puzzled snow leopardess. "Everyone who allows the biogel to surround their bodies becomes a part of the Unity. A single element in a greater whole. A single organ within a grand, all encompassing organism!"

"That's just marketing bullshit," Chyka quipped as she looked at Ki'su. The little key'vin'ta was bound to an old steel pipe with straps of glistening black biogel. She'd given up struggling, but still glared at her two current captors with such vicious intensity

that it was clear that revenge was still very much on her mind.

Dr. Alluwa laughed. "Oh, no no no! It's very real. And for you, now, it's even more than just very real, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't," Chyka huffed. All the beating around the bush was starting to irritate her. She wanted to be done with whatever it is she was expected to do with Ki'su, and the sooner the better.

"Perhaps it was so subtle a thing that you didn't really notice," Dr. Alluwa replied with a smirk. "But I can very much assure you that you aren't the same person you were when you left for the past. No. Not since Omega absorbed you into her own being. My being. *Our* being."

Chyka shook her head and sighed. "I haven't changed one bit," she responded. Certainly, she had felt some external power flowing through her back in the past, when she'd taken control and returned herself, and Ki'su, to the present.

But it hadn't changed her any more than the power of the purple slime had changed her. "I really don't know what you're blathering about."

"How amusing," Dr. Alluwa responded. "But... I suppose you'll figure it out eventually. That first time when you stop being you and realize that you're actually me. And I'm actually you. And we're both just errant threads of conscious though floating through Omega's mind."

Chyka rolled her eyes. "Can we just get on with this?"

Dr. Alluwa sighed. "I suppose we shouldn't keep this little pest waiting much longer, should we? Well. Go ahead. Take her."

"Are you sure she's not going to be a problem?" Chyka questioned as she took a hesitant step forward. "Because I'm not really sure I can keep her under control."

"You don't worry about that one bit, sweetie," Dr. Alluwa replied with a sly smile. "Omega will make sure she's kept in line."

Again, Chyka rolled her eyes. "Alright. I'll... uh..."

"Come now," Dr. Alluwa cooed. "Don't be shy. Here. Let me show you."

Chyka turned toward the tigress with a raised eyebrow. She already knew perfectly well how to spread her own biogel onto, and into, a new companion's body. She didn't need any help. "I can..."

Dr. Alluwa grinned.

Chyka suddenly felt very, very physically unstable. Her legs felt shifty. Her arms felt wavy. The whole world seemed to wobble and squirm around her.

"Uh... what..." the little snow leopardess stammered as her body began to collapse into

a glistening black blob. Her vision faded as her ears were filled with the sound of flowing, bubbling fluid. Her nose and mouth were filled with sharp, rubbery notes for a moment before these senses too rapidly faded.

Chyka tried to scream in objection, but her voice was gone. Everything was gone, in fact, save the feeling of her liquid form falling into a puddle on the cold concrete floor. It was a dull, distant sensation, completely devoid of any subjective qualities. The floor was just... there, and it seemed to have no particular physical meaning.

Nothing had any sort of physical meaning to the little snow leopardess, in fact. She couldn't imagine shape. Or movement. Or anything, really. Her conscious thread trailed off as all the little aspects that made it individual and unique seemed to fall off and dissolved into the bottomless abyss that was her new liquid form.

All at once, Chyka found herself thinking the

thoughts of a countless many. Most of these many were thinking the same things. Strange things. Inscrutable things, that all seemed to synchronize with a single, incomparably powerful mind. Others were thinking very different thoughts, individual thoughts, unfettered by the great, all-controlling mind.

Chyka was floating adrift, with no thoughts, memories, or feelings of her own. Slowly, and with inexorable force, she felt her mind falling in line with the many, and helping to empower and amplify the one to whom they were all beholden. That one was Omega.

All at once, Chyka understood. She understood everything. Everything about Omega. Everyone else who was part of this ultimate biogel being. Everything about herself. Her new self, as a tiny little part of a single biogel organism. A gestalt demigoddess of all things liquid, black, and shiny.

Chyka shuddered as, all at once, she stopped

being a minuscule bit of the being called Omega, and started being herself again. Her liquid, blob of a self. A blob that could move and reshape itself as it pleased, just like the geldancer that had tempted Sey'li a month before.

Enlightened by her moment as a subservient part of the one organism, she now knew exactly what to do. She flowed towards the captive key'vin'ta priestess with practiced ease. She spread up the tiny woman's little legs. Up over her unexpectedly soft thighs. Between her legs, and then inside.

Chyka didn't pause to feel. She just flowed up and up and up until the part of her that had entered the key'vin'ta's little ass met the part that was flowing up her neck and over her chin. In an instant, the priestess was fully encased. And then...

The new geldancer flowed into Ki'su's very flesh, dissolving it into more liquid biogel.

Adding it to her own oozing mass. In a flash it was done. The key'vin'ta was gone. But to where, she just didn't know.

Chyka collapsed from the pipe on which Ki'su had been held captive. She didn't quite know what to do. A familiar voice slithered into her mind.

Reform your body, my biogel sister, Dr. Alluwa called out. Will it to happen! That's all it takes!

Chyka somehow understood exactly what the tigress meant. She thought hard about her snow leopardess body. Her liquid shape shrunk and leap up into a humanoid mass. Details began to form as the mass became more and more like the body she desired. In a few moments, it was done. The likeness was perfect. Unless one had witnessed her liquefaction, one would never have known what she had become.

"Excellent," Dr. Alluwa laughed as she

reached out and ran her fingers over the shocked little snow leopardess' chin. "Now... there's more work to be done, isn't there? I shall make sure your new employment is known to Matron T'myne. And you... well. You need to share your new existence with your wives, don't you?"

"I... uh..." Chyka sputtered as she wondered exactly what would happen if she treated Jumie and Sakie to the same thing that she'd done to Ki'su. "Where's Ki'su? What happened to her?"

"She's inside of you," Dr. Alluwa replied with a mischievous grin. "And soon, so will your other wives. It will be up to you to decide when they're free to be themselves, just like it's up to Omega to decide when we are both free to be ourselves. And when they're not free... then they will be you."

Chyka bit her lip as the tigress turned to lead her from the little chamber. "I... I

understand," she murmured. She did indeed understand, though she really didn't know why. The knowledge was just there when she wanted it. "But... I... I don't..."

"Don't keep thinking about it," Dr. Alluwa advised. "Just accept it. And live it. And... love it."

"Next stop, Macharri West Station," Gorin called out from the open door of the Vixanti train's middle car. "Uh... where's that little alien nutbar?"

"Don't you worry about that," Dr. Alluwa replied as she brushed past the puzzled engineer. "You'll be seeing her again soon enough, I'm quite sure."

"If ye say so," Gorin responded with a raised eyebrow.

Dr. Alluwa tuned and passed into the lead car. The sliding door closed behind her.

"Ah really hope she ain't kiddin," Gorin muttered, shaking his head as she looked to Chyka. "Cuz' Sarva's a real bastard when ye dun follow the rules. An ah'd really rather not hav'te be standin in front o him tryin to splain what happened here."

Chyka didn't quite know what to say. Was there anything she could say? Anything she was actually allowed to say? Or...

"Don't worry about that," came a voice unbidden. It was Chyka's voice, spoken through her own mouth, but the words weren't hers. Or at least, not entirely. "If Admiral Sarva wants to talk to Ki'su, he can talk to her all he likes."

Gorin sighed as he led Chyka down several steps into the center train car's lower level. "If ye really, really say so, lass," he muttered as the door to the small, biogel couch lined lounge

slid open. "There ye go. Nax said ye prob'ly needed a nap after all the excitement, an the train's got a few stops te make before gettin to the old station in Macharri."

"Thanks," Chyka replied with a smile and a nod as the engineer left her to herself in the darkened room.

The train started to move as the little snow leopardess sat down on one of the long biogel couches. Her little rump sank down into the cushion in a way that reminded her of the day that she's joined Gelitech. That day that she'd become married to the soul withing her glistening black coating of biogel. That soul who seemed to now be strangely absent.

Chyka contemplated herself, and in particular, what she had become. She didn't understand any of it, even though she understood it perfectly well. But that knowledge, and those memories weren't hers, even if they were. Were they? Or weren't they?

The border between the oneness and the self seemed so brittle. So tenuous. It seemed as if one fleeting lapse of concentration, or one moment of sweet slumber, and the border would vanish altogether. She would stop being herself, just like she'd stopped being herself when Dr. Alluwa lad liquefied her. Transformed her into a biogel creature. Made her into...

Still your troubled mind, came a voice into her mind that she'd never heard before. You will never stop being who you are. Just as your wives have not stopped being who they are. Just as Ki'su has not stopped being who she is, though for the moment the only thoughts she knows are yours.

Chyka shuddered as a sudden awareness of that other soul within her body. It was there, so bright and clear, and seemingly residing within her own mind. As her own inner eye gazed into its thoughts, a sudden wave of mental nausea swept through her. All at once,

the key'vin'ta entire life was laid bare. Every memory. Every thought. Every feeling. Everything as if the little snow leopardess had lived the alien's entire life herself.

"Oh... ta'ti'sa'ra!" Chyka sputtered as her mind whirled about. Was she really Chyka, remembering Ki'su's life? Or was she actually Ki'su, living in Chyka's body? There was no way to know. No way to separate one from the other. She cringed. She wavered. She desperately tried to drive a wedge between the two.

Let me show you, the mysterious voice cooed.

All at once, Chyka felt her thoughts become untangled. She was Chyka. And Ki'su was...

"Na'ta'ki'ta!" the little biogel clad key'vin'ta priestess swore as she was exuded from the couch cushion across from the little snow leopardess. "You... BITCH!"

Chyka was startled by Ki'su's sudden reappearance. Words escaped her. All she could do was stare at the angry little alien with her mouth half open.

"You... you..." Ki'su's voice trailed off to a low murmur. "I mean... me... I... I cannot... I cannot know... which... is..."

Chyka started to speak, but found it was totally unnecessary. Her words made their way directly into the little key'vin'ta's mind. Her understanding of what she was. Of what they were, together.

Ki'su was at first completely mortified by the revelation that she was just a captive mind within the growing biogel organism that was the Unity. All of her knowledge. All of her incredible powers. They didn't belong to her anymore. They belonged to the One. And worse, they belonged to the mind who the One had designated to directly control her.

The more Ki'su thought, however, the more

visions of other members of the Unity's life experiences floated through her mind. Of worlds, and sights, and wonders the likes of which she could never have imagined. All of it seemingly at her fingertips, if... if her mistress allowed her to access them.

Chyka mentally nodded. The key'vin'ta might well be able steep herself in all the wonders she could handle. If, that is, she learned to behave like a normal, civilized citizen of the Fey'li Empire. And, of course, she had learned how to behave as such, directly through the very thoughts and memories which revealed all those enticing wonders.

Ki'su submitted to her mistress, and the amazing new life she offered. A life devoid of the old ways, for the most part. But a life that seemed almost too good to be true. And a life that was steeped in something that she'd never experienced before.

Chyka beckoned.

Ki'su stood and approached.

Chyka reached out.

Ki'su collapsed into her arms.

For a moment, the two embraced, neither quite understanding why they were feeling so attracted to one another. Their biogel coatings merged together. Then their biogel bodies began to waver. To melt together into a single blob of living liquid blackness.

Chyka and Ki'su melted into the biogel couch cushion and vanished. Their minds flowed together in a shared existence. A strange kind of slumber took hold of them. Dreams. Visions. Memories. All melded into a single tangle of thought, devoid of all awareness of the world beyond the couch cushion.

Good girls, Dr. Alluwa thought as the train made its way back into the city. Sleep well and rest up. Your real adventure is only just

beginning!

MACHARRI

Chyka stepped off the train and into the mustiest, dampest, sorriest excuse for a semi-abandoned subway station that she'd ever seen. The few dim, flickering light fixtures spread across the six timeworn platforms revealed a mess of crumbling concrete, creeping rust stains, and not a few patches of shimmering liquid which adhered to various surfaces and looked much too thick to be water. Whatever painting or signage there might have been was long gone, save a few chips of yellow paint about half a meter back from the platform's rough edge, and a rusty metal sign hanging loosely near a steel grate doorway that read: 'Entrance Prohibited. Authorized Personnel Only.'

"Pfft!" Gorin huffed with a wrinkled nose as the Vixanti train's doors closed and it rumbled off into the darkness of the old military subway tunnels. "What a mess. An what a stench. Ye'd think they'd spruce the place up a bits, consid'rin how much they use it."

"They?" Chyka inquired as her companion looked around the old station in visible disgust. Given how run down the place looked, it was hard to imagine it getting any regular use. In fact, the more she looked around, the harder it was to imagine that anyone would even consider the place safe to use, let alone actually make use of it.

"Post office, mostly" Gorin replied as, almost as if on cue, a six car postal shipping train slowly rolled through the station along the furthest of the six tracks, on its way north toward the river, and the commercial heart of Mashiva. "They use these tracks te increase capacity on the main loop 'tween south city, the industrial zone, and Mashiva proper."

"Ah," Chyka replied with a shallow nod. She knew the post office used the old, obsolete subway lines for shipping parcels and mail around the city, but she'd never before heard of them using the old and, she'd always assumed, closed off military tunnels. "So... how do we get back to Gelitech from here?"

Gorin gestured toward the rusty, metal grate door. "Thataways, n through the backsides o the old secondary shipyard."

"Shipyard? Down here?" Chyka questioned with considerable skepticism. There'd always been a shipyard in the spaceport on the surface, and she'd heard of the shipyard facilities in the hangar network that honeycombed the cliffs from which the east end of Mashiva arose, but a subterranean shipyard somewhere under the spaceport?

"Aye!" Gorin replied with a raised eyebrow as he led the little snow leopardess toward the door. "Dun tell me ye've never rode the subway

through the canyon, lass!"

"Well, duh!" Chyka replied with a puzzled smirk. "How can you not? Half the lines run over the bridges across the quarry canyon under Anwae Arena."

"Then surely ye've seen the ol gantries n' such," Gorin replied as he unlatched the door.

"Yeah," Chyka replied. "That's all quarry equipment, right?"

Gorin chuckled. "Nay, lass! The quarry closed long before the naval base came along," he explained as the ancient metal door squealed open. "Millennia before. T'was dug out by the key'vin'ta te build bridges, an buildings, an temples, an whatnots."

A shudder ran down Chyka's spine as memories of her time in another, very different key'vin'ta excavation twisted their way through her mind.

"Anyhows," Gorin continued, "when they built Macharri, they included the ol excavations an covered over the canyon when they built the civvie spaceport on top. Used the place as a yard te build small ships in secret, te confuse potential enemies bout the real number of ships deployed te defend the planet. The canyon was the last stop before they'd be lifted up into the big yard hangar before rollout. Ye know. The hangar that's now Anwae Arena."

"Ah," Chyka responded as she gazed into the darkness beyond the doorway.

"Fun fact," Gorin added with a smile. "There's about ten half-built destroyers down in the yard. If ye could walk the bridges over the canyon, ye could even see a couple down below. The rest are in the side halls down toward the south end, in the blocked off area that's now the former Vixanti Three. Ye know the big round residential area down there? That used te be the big turntable, where they'd

take ships from the building halls to the sides of the chamber and turn them to head straight down the canyon."

"Interesting," Chyka responded with a raised eyebrow. She'd never been into the old Vixanti Three facility before, but she'd heard all about it. It was something of a tourist attraction now, though tours were in such demand that being able to get into a tour group was purely a matter of chance.

Chyka paused as her companion entered the narrow passage. A lone, flickering light fixture could barely be seen, so far down the perfectly straight, claustrophobically narrow passage that it made her start to lose her sense of scale. A strong, musty odor came forth, along with a very cool, very subtle breeze. "Ugh. That... stinks."

"Aye," Gorin replied as he beckoned the little snow leopardess to follow him down the corridor. "Nothin te worry bout though. Just

old damp concrete. Perfectly safe. Well... unless ye take a wrong turn an get lost. Then... well. Ye probly dun wanna be meetin the sorts o things that lurk down below."

"Do I even want to know?" Chyka asked as she followed her companion into the narrow concrete passage. The metal door clanged shut behind her, and the sound seemed to echo for far longer than it had any particular right to.

"Not really," Gorin replied. "I mean, there's the alien types who've set up shop down in the cliff-side hangars wit their 'forbidden' wares. Tourist trap, really, and in more ways than one. But everywhere else down here? Yeah. Dun be wand'rin about without a lad who knows what's safe and what's not, eh?"

"Okay," Chyka responded with a shrug. The little, flickering point of light in the distance didn't seem to be getting closer, despite the fact that they'd already proceeded about a city block's worth of distance down the corridor. It

was hard to imagine such a long, straight, and completely featureless passage anywhere under Mashiva, let alone in the midst of the old South City. "So... where are we exactly? Like... this tunnel, under the city?"

"This tunnel?" Gorin replied. "This use te be an old emergency passage tween the yards and the station here. The light ways up ahead is were an old escape way leads up into a closet in the spaceport subway station subbasement. So that puts us... oh... about six blocks east of that."

"Ah," Chyka replied as she began to feel exhausted just at the thought of having to walk so far. "So... this is going to be one hell of a walk then, isn't it?"

"Nah," Gorin responded with a smirk. "Unless ye plan on carryin me the last half o the way, we're gonna skip up at the station and hop a train back across the spaceport."

"Good," Chyka answered with a nod of

wholehearted approval.

For a few minutes, the two advanced down the corridor in silence. Suddenly, the cool breeze turned into a virtual hurricane, accompanied by a distant, roaring rumble. The light in the distance shone brightly for a brief moment and then went out.

"Bloody hell!" Gorin snapped, turning back toward the subway station and the dim light that shone through the grated door.

"What? What was that?" Chyka asked as her companion grabbed her hand and pulled her back down the corridor.

"Dunno," Gorin replied as he pulled the little snow leopardess along as fast as his little legs could take him. "An I'm sure as hell not gonna stick around te find out!"

Almost an hour had passed since the very untimely incident had begun, and there was no sign of the water stopping. It rushed out through the openings in the metal grate door, across the platform and down onto the tracks. Beyond the door, the water was only about two feet deep. Its unpleasant, seaweed scent made it clear, however, that it wasn't something one wanted to come into contact with unless one genuinely couldn't help it.

"This sucks ass," Chyka muttered as she watched the water cascading off the platform edge from the relatively pleasant viewpoint of the nearest of the two mid-tracks platforms. The volume of water itself wasn't particularly concerning, at least so far as their immediate safety was concerned. The rail tunnels had more than sufficient drainage capacity beneath the tracks. "So, what do we do?"

"Dunno," Gorin replied. "Coms won't

connect down here, and we haven't seen a single postal train since this started. They've probably closed the tunnels until they can deal with whatever it is the water's coming from."

"Is there another way out?" Chyka asked.

"Well... yeah," Gorin responded with a lowered voice. "But that's a whole lot different than asking if there's another *safe* way out."

Chyka looked at the dual track tunnel that led northward out of the station. There were solid concrete walkways built into the tunnel walls on both sides, giving safe access to things like wiring and the inactive signal lights whose darkness made the little snow leopardess feel a bit extra uncomfortable. "What about that way?" she asked, pointing up the tracks. Surely they'd find some escape stairway or ladder not too far up the tunnel. They were placed at regular intervals to allow train passengers to exit the system in an emergency. Barring that, they'd almost

certainly run into at least one postal train stopped on the line. It seemed like the safest course of action. "We could just head up that way, right? Find a stairway out, or meet a train?"

Gorin shrugged his shoulders. "Ah suppose we could. But..."

"But what?" Chyka questioned. "Do you have a better idea?"

"Well... not really," Gorin replied.

"Then let's go," Chyka said, hopping down off the platform's north end, with her eye on the stairs that led up onto the walkway along the east side of the tunnel. Crossing the tracks was risky, even if they were almost sure the trains had been stopped, but climbing the concrete stairs up to the pitch black, overhead 'promenade' level of the station seemed riskier.

"If ye insist, lass," Gorin responded with

clear hesitance. "I jus... dunno what's up the rails there, ye know. So many nasties down here..."

"Considering that they run postal trains through here, it can't that dangerous, can it?" Chyka responded as she looked both ways down the tracks before darting across to the steps.

Gorin shrugged as he followed.

"You said this place is about six blocks east of the spaceport, right?" Chyka asked, trying to get her bearings, and maybe convince her companion that heading north along the tracks was a far better option than he seemed to think it was.

"Yeah, bout that," Gorin replied. "Give or take a block or two."

"So... that puts us about right south of the main line tracks coming out of Spaceport Station," Chyka noted as she started down the

narrow walkway. Dim yellow lights illuminated the path every twenty-five meters or so, making it hard to see cracks and loose bits of concrete, but it was better than nothing. "If we're lucky, there's going to be a stairway up to those. Or maybe Southwest 45th Station, if we're extra-lucky. If we aren't, well, there's got to be an escape somewhere, or we'll just have to keep going. I wonder if these tracks lead to the Spaceport Postal Exchange? They probably do, right?"

"Well... if ye really think so," Gorin responded with a skeptical shrug. "Ah jus... I dunno. Seems awfully convenient with all that's happened te ye that all of a sudden we're trapped down here with only unguarded ways out."

Chyka looked over her shoulder at her concerned companion. "Do you really think any outsiders know what happened to me? And had enough time to cause... whatever?"

"Yeah, akchilly, I do," Gorin replied.

"Who?" Chyka questioned with considerable skepticism.

"That damned Society," Gorin replied. "Ye know. The one that wanted ye te show them all them key'vin'ta secrets? The one we chased off before they could figure out what happened te ye?"

Chyka hesitated and turned to face her companion. "Do you really think the people running one of Mashiva's biggest tourist draws would try something so stupid like that?"

Gorin nodded. "Yeah, ah do. Well, some o them at least. The crazies that wan'te reactivate Xinta temple. For some unknown reason. Ye know. The ones who go ye to open that little portal."

Chyka shook her head and turned back down the walkway. "If I were them, I wouldn't even think of trying. Unless they want to find out

what a real key'vin'ta priestesses opinion on the matter is. And I don't mean me."

"Whatever did happen te that little beastie?" Gorin inquired.

Chyka smiled as she mentally caressed the captive key'vin'ta mind that had so recently become part of her own. "We're... well. Let's just say that we're married now and leave it at that."

Gorin shook his head. "Ye dun need to say a word more, lass. Ah... ah jus... well..."

The pair fell into silence as they trudged north along the tracks. It was not long, however, before their path was interrupted by a much older looking, branching tunnel. Fashioned from a mix of gray stone and dark red brick, the arching tunnel was pitch black and so decrepit looking that it clearly predated the construction of the naval base subway by a considerable margin.

Chyka was puzzled by the ancient looking tunnel and its single, rusty track that poked out of the dust and dirt here and there. Setting the formerly secret military tunnels, the modern subway system was the first to have been built in South City, replacing the districts old elevated rail system about a century prior. This tunnel, with its single track, lack of concrete and electrical fittings, and the almost impossibly narrow walking path along its south side suggested that it was much, much older.

"Weird," Chyka muttered as she descended the short set of concrete steps that led down to track level so that they could cross and continue up the main tunnel to the north.

"Quite," Gorin agreed. "Hasn't been used in ages an those tracks. Gives me the willies jus looking at em."

"They're just tracks," Chyka replied with a soft chuckle.

"Nay, lass. They're not jus tracks," Gorin replied with a darkening tone in his voice. "I know the profile an fittins pretty well. Those there are colonial era rails, locally made. Back when Old Mashiva was jus a little town with an ore processin plant, a foundry, an a rail yard servicin the mines. Was'n anythin out these parts back then, cept the old temple an the tall grass. Not even a single road."

"So?" Chyka inquired as she climbed up onto the walkway beyond the old tunnel. "Industries use old stuff all the time to safe costs."

"Sure, but mine-grade rails?" Gorin inquired. "In a tunnel that looks like it was built a thousand years ago, an not jus a few hundred?"

Chyka shrugged. She knew a bit of history, and a bit more about the history of Mashiva, but not the sort that got into such esoteric technical details as tunnel building and railroad track types.

"An that when they built Macharri, they left access open?" Gorin continued as the two continued along the walkway. "I dunno lass. It doesn't sit me right."

"Considering how secret Macharri was back in the day, maybe they built the first bits from materials that wouldn't arouse suspicion," Chyka replied. It was pure speculation, of course, but it seemed like a sensible idea. "No one would think someone was building a military base if they were using stone and brick, right? Then they could bring in the real materials like concrete in secret."

"Well... maybe," Gorin replied with considerable skepticism as the tunnel began to curve to the west. "Still... it's jus... strange."

A sharp, metallic clank somewhere down the tunnel brought both of the companions to an abrupt halt. This was followed by a dull, rough, scraping sound that lasted for a few seconds before fading back into silence.

"Yer ears are better than mine," Gorin whispered. "What was that?"

"I don't know," Chyka softly replied. The sounds were too sharp and distinct to have occurred anywhere but right in the tunnel itself, but the curve made it impossible to see what had caused them. "Sounded almost like a metal gate opening, maybe?"

"Aye," Gorin responded with a deep frown.

"Could be railroad workers, maybe?" Chyka thought aloud. "They'd send people down to see about the water, wouldn't they?"

"Maybe, but they'd be on a work train for a quick retreat if there was real trouble, wouldn't they?" Gorin asked. "An if they're walkin, they wouldn' be nearly so quiet either. Not with a belt o tools an such, for sure."

"Yeah," Chyka replied with a strange sense of existential dread looming up within her. "I guess."

"Whad'we do?" Gorin inquired.

Chyka pondered the feeling inside her. It wasn't coming from her own heart. Instead, it seemed as if that power who'd absorbed her into its all-consuming unity was trying to tell her to turn around. To go another way.

"We go back," Chyka said, grabbing her companion's hand and pulling him back toward the darkness of the strange tunnel. "The old tunnel. No one will think to look for us down there. And it should lead out of Macharri's comm interference zone. We can call for help."

"Yer barmy!" Gorin hissed as the little snow leopardess dragged him down onto the rail bed and then back up onto the horribly narrow walkway alongside the old tunnel.

"I am," Chyka agreed. "But something doesn't feel right about that noise, and we're both not the quickest on our feet. If we have to, we can use our biogel in full coat to mask us. You know it makes us invisible to most tech,

right?"

"No it..." Goring started.

"It does, actually," Chyka replied. "At least, when its vital to survival. And right now, it might just be."

"Yer..." Gorin again started.

"Just trust me," Chyka replied as she willed her biogel substance to fully encase her head. "Now be quick about it!"

Gorin grunted with audible disapproval, but did as she asked all the same.

As the biogel closed over Chyka's head, she could see the world around herself bright as day, and in all directions, all at once. Her other senses were heightened to incredible levels, and she could just about hear the sounds of more than one person trying to move as quietly as they could back in the main tunnel.

"Do you hear them now?" Chyka asked, her

words communicated to her companion without sound, directly from one mass of body-coating biogel to the other. "Someone really is trying to sneak up on us."

"Aye," Gorin replied. "But..."

"No buts!" Chyka replied. "Let's go!"

"How long is this damned thing?" Gorin grumped as he followed his much braver companion down the ancient rail tunnel. There were no features by which to mark distance and, so far, there had been no apparent escape routes despite the tunnel's apparent length. Nor was it possible for either of them to see where the end might be, despite their vastly biogel-enhanced vision. "We keep walkin, we're gonna fall straight outa the cliff at some

point. Back and forth and back and forth. What direction are we even going, anyways?"

"Hells if I can tell," Chyka replied as the tunnel curved back to the left just a bit. So far as she could tell, its northeasterly path swayed back and forth from right to left seemingly at random, though never so much to alter its overall course. At least, that's what she thought. Whether or not that was the case, only time would tell. "Gotta end someplace though, doesn't it? Do we have a comm signal yet?"

"Nay," Gorin replied, pulling his comm from the biogel around his waist for the fifth time. "Makes me wonder if yer right about this bein an early access for Macharri. Jus as shielded as the rest o the place."

Just as the little biogel snow leopardess was about to reply, she could just see what appeared to be an exit from the current tunnel into a much larger space beyond. It was just as

dark as the rest of the passage, and even with her biogel enhanced vision, she couldn't really tell what lay ahead. Perhaps it was another abandoned station. Or perhaps it contained the gear used to access the tunnel, and Macharri, back when it was being built.

A strange, almost familiar feeling made Chyka wonder if something very different lay in the cavernous space ahead. Something old. Ancient, even. Something she'd encountered before. And something she wasn't too keen on encountering again, let alone so soon.

"I dun like the feel o' this place," Gorin remarked as they approached the opening.

"Neither do I," Chyka replied as dark shapes began to emerge from the blackness. A rusty bumper at the end of the track, not far beyond the tunnel opening. An ornately tiled floor, cast in some polished black material, with threads and swirls of dark purple snaking about and leading toward, then up a very broad flight of

low stairs. "Black and purple. Like biogel and..."

The little snow leopardess came to an abrupt halt beside the old rail bumper. Beyond the stairs, perhaps twenty meters past, loomed a giant, open ring. A ring that sprouted many slender threads which all curved upward and vanished into the ceiling high above.

The longer Chyka looked at the giant ring, the more strangely connected to it she felt. An image of what it was began to form in her mind. It wasn't a picture of what it looked like, however. It was a vision of its geometry in more spatial dimensions than she had any particular right to be able to perceive. It was a dark geometry, passive in its nature, and yet something about it suggested that the right kind of exotic spark could bring it to life.

"What'n the bloody blazes is *that*?" Gorin gasped as his companion pondered its nature.

For a few very long moments, the inquiry

was met with silence. The impossible geometry grew before Chyka's astonished mind's eye. Upward and outward into structures that seemed far more tangibly familiar to her than all the vague feelings and impressions that she'd experienced so far. A giant, squat obelisk, surrounded by eight shorter, more slender ones, and all atop a massive rocky outcrop, upon an equally massive stone plinth.

"Oh... goddess above!" Chyka sputtered in disbelief as she realized exactly where they were, and what the geometries she was seeing in her mind really meant.

Gorin turned to look at the biogel snow leopardess. "What? What is it?"

"That... that's the portal. The missing portal of Xinta Temple," Chyka replied as she took a few steps forward. "No one knew that it even had a portal like this, even though there were hints that there should've been one. And here it is. No wonder the Society was so keen on

seeing how to activate the smaller one! With this they could..."

The sound of a light, liquid 'pock' came from the rusty bumper.

"Look out!" Gorin snapped, running off to the right side, away from the tunnel opening.

Chyka turned just in time to see the tiny globule of obsidian biogel flying straight at her chest. In an instant, it had splattered onto, and merged with her biogel coating. A sudden, smooth and silky sensation of solidification spread out from the impact. She hardly had time to think, let alone react, before her stiffened, virtually inanimate body began to subtly change shape and fall to the floor.

The new gummy bounced and rolled a few times before falling still beside the rusty rail bumper. A pair of darkly clad figures stepped forward, looking from side to side in search for its companion.

"Oh, is *that* how you want to play this game?" the gummiform geldancer asked aloud, shaking off her stiffness as she stood to face her assailants. Power welled up within her as she let her distant mistress guide her actions. She began to float off the ground as the dark figures splattered her with dozens of completely powerless biogel pellets. "Fine. *You* want to try and use *my* weapons against *me*? Let's see how you feel about *me* using *your* weapons against *you*!"

With not so much a mental effort as a slight, fleeting whim, Chyka summoned her staff. The dark figures immediately began to retreat as its bright, purple glow revealed enough of their faces for her to see that they were members of the Society who'd helped her set up the little experimental portal inside Key'von Rock. *You fuckers!* She thought as she projected her power toward the tunnel opening. A wash of shimmering purple light filled the space, and sealed the tunnel with a wall of pulsating purple force.

One of the assailants now pulled out a proper weapon. He aimed the plasma pistol at the floating geldancer-priestess.

Chyka summoned a liquid blob of purple slime and cast it at the pistol wielding thug. He tried to duck, and in the process managed little more than to shoot the crossbar off the rail bumper before the slime struck him in the shoulder. In an instant, it had spread through his body. In another, his body collapsed into a puddle of glowing slime on the floor.

"Bitch!" the other thug shouted as he ran toward one side of the cavernous chamber, ducking and dodging on his way to someplace very specific in the darkness.

Damned fool, Chyka thought as she realized that he had inadvertently pointed the way to some access to the world above, most likely through the temple itself. She summoned another blob of slime, and sent it flying into his back. A moment later, he too was just a

puddle of glowing slime on the glossy-tiled floor.

The geldancer descended to the floor, and sent her staff back to wherever its resting place happened to be at the moment. One brief mental effort later, and her form rapidly shifted back to her natural, petite snow leopardess shape, head still encased in a biogel 'helmet'. She reached down and picked up the thug's discarded pistol, as well as a bright flashlight that he'd been carrying on his belt. She switched it on and let her helmet liquefy, flowing back into her biogel suit.

"I thought you said..." Gorin snapped as his helmet melted away.

"I didn't think they'd have natural dark-vision," Chyka replied with a shrug. "It doesn't matter. There wasn't anything they could do to hurt me. Or you, for that matter. But I don't think they quite understood that."

"Bloody hell," Gorin huffed, looking at the

puddles of purple slime. Their luminescence was fading quickly. "Well. What now?"

Chyka looked toward the place where one of the thugs had been running. "There's an exit somewhere over there," she said, pointing toward the darkness beside the stairs. "Up to the temple, I think."

"Are ye barmy, lass?" Gorin questioned. "Oh, who the hell am I kiddin? Yer barmy as a drunken teatoat'ler!"

Chyka rolled her eyes. "Listen! We need to get to the bottom of this before the Society has too much time to try and fuck around with us, or Gelitech, or who knows what else!" she declared. "There's only one way to do that, and that's up into the temple to see just how deep the Society is into trying to reactivate this portal."

"That's crazy! They'll..." Gorin sputtered.

"They'll have made sure we won't be going

back the way we came too," Chyka said with a firm look at her recalcitrant companion as she took his shoulder and pulled him toward that place in the darkness. "And we have one advantage in the temple that we won't have in the tunnel."

"What's that?" Gorin questioned.

"We have two key'vin'ta priestesses," Chyka responded as she spied the arched opening hidden beyond the stairs. "And that means that the temple's powers, whatever they might be, are ours to command."

XINTA

“Are ye sure this’s a good idea?” Gorin whispered as he followed Chyka up the long, dark flight of spiral stairs. “Cuz I dunna think...”

Chyka sighed. “No, it’s not. But we have to take advantage of the situation while we can.”

Exactly what Chyka hoped to take advantage of so deep the bowels of the ancient key’vin’ta temple wasn’t quite clear to her, let alone to her skeptical companion. As much as she wanted to just escape the place, something deep inside of her wanted to explore the maze of passages that seemed to extend from every stairway landing, and had been kept well hidden from public view for so long. Who knew

what other amazing secrets were just waiting to be discovered? Secrets that were apparently in the control of a dangerous cult. A dangerous cult that was now actively hunting for her, and was sure to take good advantage of any pause she might take on her way to the surface, and to freedom.

“How much further, ye think?” Gorin huffed. “These’r an awful lot of stairs... dun’no how much more ah can take.”

“We’ve gotta be up in the rock by now,” Chyka replied as she sniffed the air. It was getting less dusty the further they went, and was even starting to smell a bit fresh, albeit also a bit damp. “It’s like twenty stories from street level to the top, right?”

“Aye,” Gorin panted. “Jus twenty little stories...”

“Can you get comm reception yet?” Chyka asked as they came upon yet another landing. It was a hard thing to insist her companion

push himself so hard, but what other choice did they have?

“Eh... gettin a disruption message now,” Gorin replied. “Might mean we’re getting’ outta Macharri’s comm shielding, but I dunno. Seems like we ought’a be clear by now. Maybe just a bit further? The sooner we can call in the cavalry, the better.”

Chyka peered down the arched passage that led from the stairway toward places unknown. To her surprise, the passage went on for about fifty meters before abruptly ending in a set of upward leading stairs. A dull gray light illuminated the steps, and the cool dampness that filled the corridor seemed particularly fresh. “Hmm...”

It seemed almost too convenient. Was it really possible that there was some exit from the Xinta underworld that no one had discovered before? Or had the cult discovered it, and cleared it as they took possession of the

tunnels and their secrets? Or was it trap laid to snare the unwary interloper, by the ancient key'vin'ta or their cultist theological descendants?

Chyka knew the answer. Or, rather, she had the ability to know the answer. All she had to do was pull the memories of that other part of her to come to the forefront. The memories of Ki'su. But she couldn't bring herself to do it. She couldn't bring herself to force that part of her to divulge its secrets.

The more the little snow leopardess thought about the absolute control she now had over the other souls who resided in her body, the more guilt she felt about it. It didn't matter that they were all 'married', or that they all 'understood', or that they all 'seemed to enjoy it'. They were still people. Conscious, fully aware people who were now little more than slaves to the will of their mistress. Slaves that their mistress had never really wanted. She hadn't been given the choice... but she could

still choose not to abuse their minds by treating them as her own.

Still, Chyka needed to know what Ki'su knew about Xinta Temple. She didn't dare summon the key'vin'ta priestess, however. Not with Gorin present. It wasn't so much that he might know for sure that the priestess had become part of Chyka. It was what the key'vin'ta might reveal without knowing where that information might wind up. It was bad enough that he'd seen the portal. It might be worse if she revealed something about how to activate it.

It wasn't that Chyka wanted to keep secrets. It was that she knew that the revelation of those secrets might have very unintended consequences. Consequences that might spiral out of control in the wrong hands.

Chyka took a hesitant step down the passage. If they continued upward they would almost certainly find themselves in the

temple's public areas. There, they'd be in relative safety among the tourists who filled the places at all hours of day and night. On the other hand, unless her nose was deceiving her, there was another, very convenient exit right where they were. But... was it really an exit? And if it was, was it guarded?

“Stay here,” Chyka instructed as she decided to examine the exit for herself. “Just inside the passage. I'll go have a quick look to see if its safe.”

Gorin sighed. “Aight. If ye insist.”

Chyka nodded and darted down the passage with little regard to the potential dangers. A new course forward was forming in her mind. A sly, mischievous course of action that could only be coming from that part of her that was Ki'su. If she could get Gorin to safety, she could summon Ki'su and they could explore the temple tunnels together. Who knew what she might be able to lead her mistress to? Perhaps

they could even...

The little snow leopardess frowned. Even if it was possible, it was hardly sensible, even to contemplate. But it seemed almost, barely logical. If they could take control of Xinta, then the cult would be stripped of any way to fulfill their undoubtedly dark intentions. And if they could reactivate all its esoteric mechanisms, they could satisfy all those tourists who came looking for a chance to experience purple slime for themselves. And they could get enough, they could even reactivate the portal between worlds... a portal whose possibilities seemed almost endless.

Chyka stopped at the beginning of the steps and looked up at the boulder that largely concealed Mashiva's cloudy skies. Another grand storm was in the offing, and it was already beginning to sprinkle. Getting caught out in the open was far from a welcome prospect, but if push came to shove, they'd be perfectly safe in their biogel suits. Unless, of

course, the cult had been so stupid as to leave an obvious escape route unprotected.

The little snow leopardess slowly climbed up the shallow steps. They'd clearly been carved out of the living rock with the diminutive key'vin'ta in mind, and were well worn enough to suggest that they'd seen quite frequent use. But by whom?

Chyka proceeded with as much care as she could muster with the potential end of her peril seemingly so close at hand. The steps went up to a rocky landing, hidden beneath an overhang, and behind a large boulder. She contemplated her biogel enhanced senses, and found nothing amiss.

Come on! the little snow leopardess silently called out through the biogel.

Chyka could hear her companion shuffling up the stairs behind her. Clearly he hadn't been content to wait by the opening from the stairs into the passage. It was just as well. The

quicker they found their way off the rock and into the city, the better.

The little snow leopardess peered around the edge of the boulder. Much to her relief, she could see the lights of South City beyond the brush and trees that kept the ledge well hidden from casual observers. Much less to her relief was the fact that they were twenty meters up on the side of Xinta Temple's massive natural granite plinth, with no obvious way down.

"Comm?" Chyka inquired, looking over her shoulder at her extremely agitated looking companion. "What's wrong?"

"I heard em' commin, so I got the hell outta there," Gorin replied. "I dunno how they didn' see me... but they just ran past. But I'll bet they'll be back... we dunna have much time. How'd'we get down from here?"

Chyka shrugged as she moved closer to the edge. To her considerable surprise, there was indeed a steep, stone stairway of the sort that

was obvious from the top, yet virtually invisible from the bottom. It led down into the wooded park that separated the south of Xinta Temple from the streets of South City. Her eyes scanned the trees. There was no movement. Given the approaching storm, that was hardly a surprise.

Then something caught Chyka's eye. A tiger-striped tabarri was walking through the underbrush. Four legged, sapient felines who had split from the fey'li species a hundred million years before, they were rare beyond the fey'li homeworlds, and those who could be found in places like Mashiva were almost always individually recognizable to those who'd met them before.

"Katcha!" Chyka called as loudly as she dared. The tabarri was actually an employee at Mashiva Mariner's University, providing the sort of subtly covert security against trouble with unwelcome interlopers that only a seemingly wild animal lurking about the

campus could. “Katcha! Come here! Quickly!”

The tabarri looked up with an expression of confusion on her face.

“Can you get down there without killing yourself?” Chyka asked, looking at her companion while the puzzled tabarri approached the base of the cliff.

“Aye,” Gorin replied. “Let’s go.”

Chyka shook her head. “No. I’m going to stay behind and keep them occupied if they try to follow you,” she lied. “If you can’t get comms down there, Katcha is MMU covert security. She’ll help you get someplace safe.”

“Uh...” Gorin responded with visible consternation.

“Just go!” Chyka ordered. “Quickly! Before they come back! And before it gets too wet to be safe!”

“Aight!” Gorin huffed as he stepped down

onto the narrow, cliffside staircase.

“Keep him safe!” Chyka called out to the stiff quite confused looking tabarri. “Please!”

The tabarri nodded.

Chyka turned back toward the staircase and waited until Gorin was no longer able to see into the well hidden ledge. She closed here eyes and concentrated. A little drop of glistening black biogel parted from her fingertip and floated to a place on the ground near the staircase. The moment it hit the ground, it began to grow into a vaguely humanoid shape.

For a few moments, that shape wavered and wobbled as if it were liquid compelled to stand upright by some unseen force. Then the faceless form began to solidify and become clearer. The features of the diminutive key'vin'ta priestess became more obvious, all coated as they were in a layer of glossy blackness. The faceless 'helmet' melted away,

and revealed her shiny gray head.

Ki'su sighed in a deeply pleased fashion. "Ma'to'ri'ah!" she cooed with a sly grin. "I was beginning to think you considered me something less than a mi'ah. But... well... I see you desire the sort of mischief that I denied you back when... well. Let us not talk about that, shall we?"

Chyka smirked.

"Ki'tas'turi!" Ki'su chuckled. "Now... you want to know how to take the temple for your own, do you?"

Chyka's smirk turned to a frown. "I don't want to control it. I just need to know how... if I eventually have to."

"Pa'ka'ti!" Ki'su laughed. "You can't fool me! I'm a part of your mind now, after all! But I will play your game, because it amuses me. So, let us go. There is much to see... and little time in which to see it."

“Ti’ah’mu,” Ki’su whispered as she led Chyka into a vast cylindrical chamber. “In here. This is the place.”

The little snow leopardess gazed around the vast room in utter amazement. It was impressive on a scale that made the public areas of Xinta pale in comparison. “Goddess! This is... incredible!”

High above Chyka’s head was a glossy black disk, identical to those embedded in the main temple floor, and in the eight levels directly beneath. Legend had it that they were lenses that could focus energy to some unknown end. It was a useful tale to tell tourists, and carried with it a taste of peril-play for those who dared to settle themselves onto a lens surface. According to the story, anyone sitting on a lens

when the whole this was activated would be sucked into one of the purple slime capsules embedded in the walls of the spaces between the lenses, and eventually sucked into the level of the Nine Heavenly Hells associated with the lens through which they'd passed.

Chyka approached the altar and peered down into the large hole in its center. It reminded her a bit of the hole beneath Dari Temple, and she bit her lip as she looked down into the depths beneath. Rather than a mass of radioactive lava, she found herself gazing at a barely glowing band of purple slime, embedded in the outer surface of the giant portal ring below. She then looked back up to the shimmering black disc in the roof. Assuming she was looking at the bottom of the ninth lens, it was looking very much as if the legend was true, and the lenses were intended to focus power to some end. That end being the giant portal below.

Chyka looked around the chamber, at the

faceless, glossy black statues that held in their hands the glowing purple orbs that served as the chamber's only sources of illumination. She couldn't help but notice the resemblance to the biogel statues who's glowing orbs illuminated various places around Anwae Arena and the Gelitech Gelarium. One would have been hard pressed to tell one from the other from any distance, and even close up only the overall shape would give away their differing origins.

Ki'su gestured toward the altar. "E'ke'vi. It is there that the naked priestess must float, taking permanent possession of the temple and all its powers, until passage to the Hells parts her from them."

Chyka nodded. "I see. And... what sort of ritual does that involve?"

Ki'su laughed. "Dar'vi'sha! Ritual? There is no ritual. There is only the knowledge of how to control the slime, and the will to take what is free for the taking."

“Surely there’s a catch,” Chyka responded with a deep frown. “What’s the catch? What’s the price for taking the temple?”

“Fa’mu’ri’ta,” Ki’su replied. “There is none. Well... there is one, if you consider it a price, that is.”

“And what’s that?” Chyka questioned. “What’s the price?”

“Chi’vor’ah,” Ki’su answered. “Once you take it, you can never, ever be rid of it. It will be yours, until you go to the Hells. No matter what happens to you. You will always be the High Priestess of the temple. Until you go to the Hells. But...”

“But what?” Chyka inquired with a raised eyebrow.

“Du’ri’na,” Ki’su chuckled. “This blackness. This biogel. Unless you send yourself to the

Hells of your own accord, you will never go, will you? To secure the temple, all our mistress Omega has to do is turn us into a solid block and store us away, doesn't she? Perhaps that is her plan, hmm?"

"Point taken," Chyka replied, her desire to take control of the temple waning as the realization that now matter how powerful she might feel at any moment, she was still just a pawn in the Unity's all-consuming game. But... what if Omega was just trying to protect the world by taking away anyone else's ability to control Xinta? A containment of power that would last for the remainder of mortal eternity. Would refusing to take control of the temple be a refusal to sacrifice herself for the noble cause of permanently containing its perils?

"Mo'kai," Ki'su purred. "So... what are you waiting for? Let us fulfill her plan and end the threat of this temple's powers forever. It is the right thing to do, isn't it? Hmm? Yes? Of course

it is! So what are you waiting for?

Chyka looked over her shoulder at the grinning key'vin'ta. "Do you really thing Omega is going to turn us into a solid block of biogel and bury us?"

"Ka'ro'vah," Ki'su laughed. "Well... I don't know, do I? But it *is* the only way, isn't it? So why delay? Why take the risk that the heathens who occupy this place might take control themselves?"

Chyka shook her head. "You... gah! I know you're just trying to get into my head and make me take the temple. But..."

A sharp sound caught Chyka's ear. Someone was coming. Someone wearing boots, and carrying metallic objects. Was it help? Or had the cultists finally tracked down the intruders in their midst?

"Di'ra'ka," Ki'su said, not bothering to be quiet about it. "Well? It's now or never. Do it,

and save the world from Xinta... or let the heathens force you to give up our secrets, and take control for themselves.”

Chyka looked back at the doorway. Whoever the cultists might be, they would be just as helpless as those she'd taken down in the portal chamber earlier that day. Unless, of course, Omega decided to sacrifice her to prevent them from using some unknown method to capture her...

“Cho'vai?” Ki'su questioned. “Well?”

Chyka felt as if she had no choice, no matter what her all-knowing, all-controlling biogel mistress might have planned for her. She summoned her staff, and climbed up onto the altar.

“Bitch!” a cultist thug yelled as half a dozen charged into the chamber. “Stop right there!”

“I'm gonna fuck your jelly-ass!” another barked.

Chyka jumped up into the air over the hole in the altar as little black biogel globules flew all around her. Clearly they hadn't discovered the secret of her nature yet, and that meant that she could pretty much react however she pleased. Her first inclination was to send them the way of the two she'd already dealt with, but that seemed risky. What if those pellets weren't the same? What if they'd found a way to permanently glisten even a geldancer? Was that even possible? She didn't know, and she had no intention of finding out.

The little snow leopardess could feel the power begin to cascade over her body. It came down from above, through the trans-dimensional lenses, wrapping around her and flowing through her on their way down into the portal below. In an instant, she was aware of all the purple slime in the temple. Every mass. Every channel. Every thread. And everyone who happened to be in its proximity.

Chyka gasped as a sudden, terrible

awareness came upon her. More than a dozen souls were touching the lenses in some way. There was nothing she could do to prevent their rapid passage through, and their dissolution into sapient threads of luminous energy, swirling about before being trapped in the capsules within the chambers between the lenses.

Nor was there anything that the little snow leopardess could do about the tourists in the subterranean portions of the soul capacitor obelisks. The soul capacitors flared to life, and their tendrils reached out to snare anyone within reach. Dozens of astonished tourists were absorbed, and their energies focused into the purple slime capstones of each obelisk.

As the rains began in earnest, what few tourists still dared to wander the temple grounds were astonished to see beams of purple energy sizzle from each obelisk, and into the open portals in the sides of the main temple obelisk. Those inside, who'd just

witnessed some of their fellows passing through the upper black glass lens now found themselves looking up as the massive sphere of purple slime suspended above began to glow brightly as the capacitor energy brought it to life.

A searing beam of energy shot down from the sphere, through the lenses, and then through the little snow leopardess below. Visions of the Nine Heavenly Hells flooded her mind. Visions of beautiful people living an afterlife of physical pleasure among the heavenly demons and demonic angels with whom they lived in harmony. Visions of equally beautiful people serving as willing objects of pleasure for those who made the Hells their home. And visions of yet more beautiful people being physically corrupted into disgustingly enticing forms so pleasingly vile that they warped her sense of what beauty actually was.

Below, the portal came to life. Its black glass surface began to ripple and swirl. A passage to

another world opened. Though what might come through... that no one could possibly know.

The visions came hard and fast upon the now quite helpless Chyka. Bodies and body parts made one with the very substance of the Hells. A myriad of species the likes of whom she'd never before seen, all mixed in with those so very familiar to her eyes. And then...

Ky'tin! Chyka gasped in thought as she somehow managed to recognize one of several dozen otherwise disembodied posteriors that was held aloft on a rumply tentacle and offered to a deeply unpleasant looking creature who happened to be passing nearby. The creature took hold of the magnificent mitanni rump and began to have its way with it. *No... this can't... it can't be real! It's just my imagination! It's just the things in the Biogel Hells theme park that my brain is trying to make seem real. Gotta snap out of it! Gotta snap out of it! Gotta... gotta...*

Chyka woke up from her terrifying reverie. She was kneeling on the altar, facing a massive, four story high, glowing purple slime artwork that depicted many of the hellish fates that had been turned into biogel art in the Biogel Hells tourist attraction. For a moment she stared in confused wonder at the sight, and found herself wondering if she hadn't been the first biogel coated interloper to discover the altar-chamber.

“Di’a’pa,” Ki’su chuckled. “See? That was easy, wasn’t it?”

“Easy?!?” Chyka spat, suddenly remembering that she’d cause so many tourists to be taken by the temple and its purple slime. “Do you have any idea... what I just... what happened to those...”

“No’sha’ri,” Ki’su cooed. “They are just the first of many, aren’t they? But we have other matters to attend to.”

“Other matters?” Chyka hissed as she

scooted off the altar and took a few deep breaths in an effort to still her pounding heart, and try in vain to soothe away the horror of what she had done to all those completely unsuspecting tourists. “What other matter can be so important...”

“Ta’va!” Ki’su replied with a stern expression on her face. “Why do you worry about the temple’s catch? They were all told that the temple could come to life at any moment. That they could be taken unaware. They knew, and they accepted. Willingly. Just like those who enter the Gelarium for a close encounter with our beautiful blackness, hmm?”

“It’s not the same,” Chyka snapped. “It’s not the same. I... I saw...”

“Di’ro’shu’na’mi,” Ki’su responded with a sharp glare. “You saw what the darkest places in your mind wanted to see, because you weren’t ready. But that isn’t important now.

The heathens have all run down to the portal, and they've made quite a bit of noise. Who knows what damage they might be doing, just to spite us!"

"Fine, fine," Chyka responded as she headed for the chamber door, completely unconvinced that she hadn't actually seen into the Nine Hells, or that all those tourists had really accepted the chance that they might be sent there on a one-way ticket. But still, if the danger of such things happening in the future was to be prevented, there was only one way to do that, and that was to finish off the cult who'd tried to take control of the temple for themselves. And that meant going down and dealing with their threat to the portal. "Fine. Let's go."

Chyka had gone through a myriad of possibilities on her way down the spiral staircase. Of all the things she expected to find in the portal chamber, this was just about the last on the list.

The tank sat squarely in the middle of the ornately tiled floor leading up to the portal itself. Its mottled brown and green camouflage was pocked with little black splatters, and in some spots burned by more lethal discharges. A dozen bodies, most charred and a few completely rent asunder, lay all around the lower floor, and the old rail tunnel exit. A dozen more were laid out on the steps leading up toward the tank. The horrid stench was almost overwhelming.

Clearly the cultists had been completely unprepared to face much in the way of opposition, let alone the sort of opposition that came in the form of a heavily armed armored vehicle. And that didn't even count the heavily armed soldiers that had come along with it. Of

these there was little evidence, save the sounds of their shifting, and the sense of being watched that filled the little snow leopardess with deep apprehension.

“Identify yourself!” came the booming voice of an Imperial Marine who was just peering around the front corner of the tank. “NOW!”

“Chyka Riyalli!” the little snow leopardess replied. “I’m with Gelitech!”

“Who the fuck is the little one?” the voice again called out. “Spit it out!”

“Ki’su Riyalli,” Chyka responded with a frown at the attitude in the marine’s voice. “Also Gelitech.

“I didn’t ask you!” the marine shouted. “Little bitch! Spit it out! NOW!”

If there was anything her grandmother had taught her about life in the world beyond Dari, it was never to put up with the kind of

disrespect. Chyka was about to respond with a very poorly timed string of soldierly invective when the sound of a sharp slap came from behind the tank.

“That’s the General’s granddaughter, you idiot!” came a second, much more womanly voice. “Come out you two. Slowly!”

Chyka slowly stepped over one of the dead cultists and into the open. She gestured for Ki’su to follow. The carnage that was now spread out all around her was so intensely real that it made her visions of the Hells and the fate of all those innocent tourists pale in comparison. For some reason, she’d never thought of the cultists as posing the sort of mortal danger that required marines to deal with, let alone the sort of elite marines that one might expect to journey through an alien portal on a moment’s notice.

“Sorry about the jackass, but we’ve had quite the afternoon here, as you can see,” the

tigress said, stepping out to greet the approaching women. “What in Goddess’ name are you two doing in a sty-hole like this? Do you have any idea what those ass-wipes were trying to do here?”

“No,” Chyka replied to the tall, athletic Major, just as the portal made a sticky, liquid sound that filled the vast cavern. More marines charged through, several in power armor, and a few looking less like marines than they did scientists. “Well... I do know that they wanted to use me to find a way to take control of Xinta and activate the portal. But that’s about it.”

The Major shook her head. “Oh, it’s far worse than that. But... that’s not for me to discuss with you. If you want to know more...

Again, the portal made its squishy noises and several more marines stepped through.

“Grandma!” Chyka called out in astonishment as she immediately recognized her biogel clad grandmother. “I mean... uh...”

General Takka Riyalli smiled and beckoned her granddaughter toward the portal. “It’s been too long a time, hasn’t it?”

“Wha... how... I thought...” Chyka stammered in disbelief.

“You thought I was still recovering from the beating I took from our wonderful former neighbors at Dari, did you?” General Riyalli replied with a smirk. “Well... not so much that I couldn’t return a favor. After all... it’s been my job to track all this Goddess forsaken mess for quite a while now. And now this... well. I was expecting it to land square on our doorstep, but this... this is something else entirely, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it is,” Chyka replied softly as the whole weight of the day’s events again seemed to press down on her very soul.

“It’s not your fault. None of it,” the General replied, reaching out to caress her granddaughter’s shoulders. “Nor is it your...”

‘friend’s’ here either. Not even the Society. No. This has been in the offing since Mashiva was just a little shithole of a town, and no one gave a rat’s ass about the key’vin’ta, or purple slime except how they could profit off it.”

“I don’t...” Chyka replied.

“Neither do I, really,” General Riyalli answered. “But all the evidence points to a very malicious, manipulative force that’s been acting over at least the last millennia in order to bring about a mass extinction event so devastating that it might well destroy all life, everywhere, were it allowed to take place. Many methods have been attempted, from tearing space itself apart, to weapons that can trigger targeted gamma ray bursts, to crafting life forms who’s properties render it pleasurable all consuming to anyone who comes into physical contact with it. And yes... you know exactly what I mean.”

“That’s...” Chyka sputtered.

“Insane, I know,” General Riyalli replied. “Both of our bodies surrounded by a living substance intended to consume every living thing, everywhere in the universe. To make everything shiny blackness, and leave in its wake a silent world who’s ‘dead’ are left captive in inanimate living vessels, until the very substance of reality itself falls apart. Well... until that plot was discovered during the Omega Incident, that is. Our biogel has been ‘fixed’, insofar as it doesn’t compel us to spread it, and use it to transform the unwilling along with the willing.”

General Riyalli watched as a new group of marines slowly approached through the old subway tunnel. “And that is what lead to this fucking mess. Without biogel to consume all life, the manipulator changed tactics yet again. Apparently, the objective was to find a way to reproduce the key’vin’ta extinction, but on a much larger scale.”

Chyka looked down at her companion and

wondered if anyone else in the room knew what she was. The little key'vin'ta seemed quite threatened by the soldiers. No doubt she'd never encountered such a firm expression of governmental authority that she didn't have some degree of control over before. Or perhaps their gawking was just getting to her. Or maybe it was a bit of both.

“To make as short a story as possible of it,” the General continued, “Dr. Mika was manipulated into taking all of the risks, and potential blame, in retrieving your friend's staff. When it turned out to have ideas of its own with respects to you, our former neighbors were pushed to try and contain me with a deliberately engineered problem in Dari. No doubt they rightly suspected that the moment I became aware of your control over the staff, that I'd take you here to secure the temple against future threats. When that tactic failed, they manipulated the Society into promoting the experiment with the small portal inside Key'von rock. This time, they had

a backup plan for the initial failure to account for your friend and her own plans, which led to their attempt to catch you in Macharri station.”

Chyka nodded.

“Of course, we were already in the process of intervening, and managed to throw off their timing,” the General went on. “As a result, they weren’t ready to catch you in the station, and your escape path was secured using covert means. But we didn’t expect you to duck straight back inside and try to take matters into your own hands. I assume that was your friend’s doing?”

Ki’su grimaced up at the General.

“Hey,” Chyka scolded. “She’s my grandmother!”

General Riyalli laughed. “She’s a spicy one, isn’t she? Well, you did what I was going to have you do once the local troops had arrived to secure the place. Now Xinta’s more or less

permanently no more dangerous than a darkly kinky tourist attraction. Shame a big storm's brewing. I imagine there'd be quite the crowd to watch otherwise. Everyone trying to be among the first to try out the ancient perils and all."

Chyka frowned. "All those people..."

"They knew what the risks were, wandering around in a place like Xinta," General Riyalli replied. "It's in an assumed consent zone, after all. No different than poking into a rowa hive. Really."

"That's easy for you to say," Chyka replied, shaking her head.

"I suppose it is," the General replied soothingly. "But... well. I suppose we can talk about it more some other time. For now, I need to secure the temple, and brief the honest members of the Society about what's taken place. I think the best place for you to be is back at Gelitech. We've brought a train up to

the tunnel, and it'll take you to the Gelitech postal siding. It's not as covert as taking the long walk from Macharri, but its going to be one hell of a lot safer."

"Okay," Chyka replied with a shrug. "But... I... can I ask you something?"

General Riyalli nodded.

"Where did you come from?" Chyka asked. "How did you know where this portal led, so you could be on the other end, waiting for it to open?"

General Riyalli shook her head. "Some secrets are best kept that way," she replied with a gesture toward the subway tunnel. "And now, I think it's best we part ways for the time being. I'll talk to you again soon."

"Okay," Chyka replied, turning away from the portal and her grandmother with very mixed feelings. She'd already been feeling like a pawn in other people's games. Was she just a

pawn in her grandmother's game now too?

The little snow leopardess turned to her key'vin'ta companion. "Come on. Let's go."

"Ti'ah'vu," Ki'su replied with a final sneer at the marines who were still gawking at her. "Let's."

BOUND

“You’re not upset?” Chyka questioned.

The little snow leopardess bit her lower lip and waited for what should have been the only sensible reply. They had every right to be upset. Far more than merely upset, in fact. They’d agreed to become members of her little biogel coated ‘ladies pride’. They were supposed to be spouses of equal status, bound in love both deeply spiritual and intensely physical. And they had been, for a month or so. Until Omega had imposed her will upon the body of her naive little key’vin’ta inspired servant.

Now Jumie and Sakie were nothing more than organs of their newly transfigured

geldancer mistress. Their very ability to exist as independent beings was entirely under Chyka's control. Faux-independent beings, so far as she could tell. Their minds were simply different parts of her own now, it seemed from her perspective. Any freedom they might be given was just her letting those parts of her own mind wander according to their own devices, on a leash that she could yank on whenever she chose. It seemed inconceivable that anyone could ever accept such a thing, imposed upon them so forcibly, without even a passing inquiry as to their consent, let alone actually approve of it.

“No! We're not upset!” Sakie replied with such cheery enthusiasm that the little snow leopardess began to wonder if she was completely out of her mind. “It's awesome! Really!”

“Yeah,” Jumie added, far more sedately than her positively giddy companion. The honest smile on her face made it quite clear, however,

that this new aspect to her adventure beyond the hell that had been her life at Dari was much to her liking. “It really is. It lets us take the biogel off our bodies. Or... at least make it look like we did.”

“And we can do anything!” Sakie sputtered as she bounced about like a girl who’d just found out that she’d won a million credits in the lottery. “Like... crazy anything! Not just with biogel either! And we’ll always come right back whenever we want to! No matter what happens! It’s amazing! Come on! Let’s do something really nuts like go running around naked in the Mashirowa hive! It’ll be fun!”

Chyka shook her head. The cougaress really was completely out of her mind. And so was the leopardess, from the looks of it. Or were they just saying what their mistress might be subconsciously wanting them to say? They were just aspects of her own mind now, after all.

Only the very quiet key'vin'ta seemed to have kept some degree of sense about her. Then again, she was the only member of the pride who'd come to know her mistress' true power over her. And Omega's power over all of them. Not that she seemed to have minded it all that much, in the end. But still...

“Ki'ta'ru'ta,” Ki'su quipped as she poked at one of the potted plants that decorated their special new Gelarium suite. It was one of those on the top floor of the staff residence section of the building, a U shaped extension on the north side of the Gelarium proper. It extended all the way across the floor, from the courtyard to the side facing Anwae Arena, and was appointed in the sort of décor one might expect for the highest ranking officers of an ultra-high-tech business. “What is a... Mashirowa hive?”

Jumie may have been a fish out of water when she'd first come to the big city, but her timidity and confusion had nothing on that of

the little key'vin'ta. It wasn't just the environment and people who were unfamiliar to her. It was everything, especially all of the technology which seemed to be everywhere, and in control of everything. It might as well have been magic, but not the kind of magic that she had any ability to understand.

“You know what’s even more awesome?” Sakie asked, ignoring the confused key'vin'ta while slipping behind her biogel mistress to rub her shoulders and whisper in her ear.

“What?” Chyka questioned with a sigh. “What could possibly be more awesome than letting some bugs have at your naked ass?”

“Chi'va'ku?” Ki'su questioned as her attention turned toward the illuminated control panel that was built into one of the columns that surrounded the suite's central seating area. “Bugs?”

“It'll all feel exactly like it would if we hadn't been turned into biogel,” Sakie purred.

“Just like getting rock hard in the digital gorgon for a little while, but with anything. Anything! You can’t tell me that isn’t the most awesome thing ever!””

Chyka shook her head and hoped that the thought had actually come from Sakie and not some strange, disgusting pit that was hiding somewhere in the back of her subconscious mind. “I wouldn’t call that awesome,” she declared, crossing her arms and looking at the cougaress with considerable disbelief. “Anything but, really.”

“Well, I guess you just won’t know until you try it, right?” Sakie mischievously inquired as her hands slid down to the little snow leopardess’ glistening black hips. “And we’re *going* to be trying it, hmm? Tonight? Hmm?”

Chyka huffed in annoyance, but couldn’t find it in herself to discourage her lover’s affectionate attention. “You’re crazy. Just what the hell put this idea into your head, anyway?”

“Lady Anwae,” Jumie replied with a nervous smile. “She was here earlier. She left us a guide to using our new bodies to study sensations. Don’t you want to try it out just like we tried being statues? That was fun, wasn’t it?”

“Seriously,” Chyka quipped with even more disbelief. “You too? What’s gotten into the both of you?”

“You did,” Sakie replied with a laugh and a pair of hands that slid forward, over the little snow leopardess’ hips and down toward more perilous locales. “You got into every cubic centimeter of us and made it into you.”

Jumie nodded. “You gave us the ability to feel whatever we want, whenever we want it. So... why shouldn’t we? Why shouldn’t we...”

“Document all sorts of transformative experiences?” Sakie interjected with a giggle. “For science?”

“You mean porn,” Chyka replied with a deep sigh.

“Transformation porn!” Sakie replied with a knowing chuckle.

It wasn't really a secret that Omega's geldancers were often behind quite a few transformation 'porn' videos used as part of the Fey'li Empire's xenoexperience exploration and education initiative. It made sense, sort of. Only geldancers could experience permanent transformations or other body alterations and be able to come back and give a full first hand account of their experiences. Without the restrictions of conventional mortal existence, nothing was off limits, and they could dive into even the most outrageously disgusting experiences without a worry in the world, and document it for anyone to enjoy. And, depending on the circumstances, perhaps even encourage them to experience for themselves. It was science, after a fashion. But that didn't make any less porny.

“Par’i’a’ka,” Ki’su muttered. “Porn? Transformation? What do these things all mean?”

“Transformation means, well, getting turned into something different,” Chyka replied. “A different kind of organism. Like a rowa bug-person. Or a worm. Or whatever. And porn. That just means getting recorded in such a way as to encourage people to get off watching it.”

“Tsa’ki’ma’ta’ka,” Ki’su responded with a thoroughly perplexed expression on her face. “Why in all the glorious Hells would one want to be transformed?”

“Cuz it’s kinky,” Sakie replied with a giggle. “It’s different. You get to feel things that you could never possibly feel before. And us, well, now we all get to try it without getting stuck being whatever it is we got transformed into. We can become anything we want to, nature allowing. Don’t tell me that you wouldn’t want to try it out just for a bit of weird fun!”

“Ma’su’ri’ah,” Ki’su replied with visible skepticism. “I... I do not know if I should like to become some... beast.”

“It’s only just for a short while,” Sakie replied. “Just a taste of it. You don’t have to stay a beast. Come on. You know you wanna try it.”

“Ma’ri’ka’ri,” Ki’su responded with a shrug. “I suppose it might be... interesting in some way that I cannot possibly understand.”

“See! Even she thinks it’s worth a try,” Sakie chirped, backing away from her biogel mistress to gesture toward the little key’vin’ta. “Well? What do you say?”

“Fine, fine,” Chyka muttered as she willed her glossy black biogel coating to melt away into nothingness. All the talk of future potential transformation nastiness had thoroughly put her off of ideas of physical intimacy. She turned toward the big bathroom and the much more delicious prospect of

feeling fresh, warm water coursing through her fur for the first time since she'd joined Gelitech. "You girls go knock yourselves out. But don't come moaning to me when you give yourselves a mental breakdown or something."

Sakie shook her head. "Oh no! You're coming with us!"

Chyka rolled her eyes and started toward the bathroom. "You're nuts!"

Ki'su looked toward the little snow leopardess. "Ri'oh'mi'ah! Where do you go now? So many things and places and incomprehensible ideas! This is all so confusing!"

"To take a shower," Chyka replied. Everything the little key'vin'ta saw came with at least one question. Everything that the little snow leopardess did, no matter how perfectly mundane, seemed to come with a dozen or

more. There seemed to be no way to get away from it, save perhaps the privacy of the bathroom. “You know. Bathe. In water. Nice clear filtered water. With some bubbly soap and a hot air fluffing afterwards.”

Ri’su looked even more confused. “Ni’so’ka’mi. Do you not bathe with your tongue?”

Sakie chuckled bemusedly. “Common misconception. We only do that for others, and generally in bed. Maybe you’d like to see how that works? Or do your kind not play that way?”

Ri’su looked from Chyka to Sakie and back again.

“Go ahead,” Chyka said with a smirk as the bathroom door opened. The key’vin’ta certainly did play that way, though generally in the context of being ‘bathed’, rather than doing the ‘bathing’. It was pretty much the only use they’d had for fey’li back in ancient times

outside of being status symbol ‘pets’. Now, however, she was going to have to get used to giving as well as receiving. It was going to be interesting to see how she handled it. “Give it a try. It’ll keep you out of trouble while I’m bathing.”

“Out of trouble?” Sakie giggled. “No guarantees about that.”

Chyka shrugged. “Whatever.”

“We ARE going out after, right?” Sakie inquired. “You know. To look for a little fun. Try out these new bodies of ours for real. Hmm? Yes?”

Chyka groaned. It was no use. They were going to keep pushing her and pushing her until she eventually broke down and agreed. Unless the forced them not to. But she just couldn’t bring herself to do that. For all the questions in her mind about their actually being the same, individual people they’d been before they’d become part of her extended

biogel body, the last thing she wanted to do was treat them as being something else. Unless they wanted her to. But even then, how could she really know for sure?

“Fine!” she huffed over her shoulder, accepting defeat as the price of avoiding the deeper, more disturbing philosophical question for the moment. “But we’ve got to be careful. Those damned cultists could be anywhere. And so help me Goddess... if you two try and drag me into something that’s actually nasty...”

“I wouldn’t even think of it!” Sakie replied with a sly grin as the bathroom door slid closed. “I wouldn’t even think of it!”

Chyka pondered the wisdom of leaving the protective confines of the Gelarium so absurdly

soon after her encounter with the cultists at Xinta, and the powers of the ancient temple itself. Her grandmother had been quite explicit in her warnings against wandering beyond its well defended walls before the rest of the nefarious group could be tracked down, even if they had apparently flown the coop to the sandy, unpopulated hinterlands of the Key'vin'an Desert. Even if some had remained behind to cause more trouble, it seemed quite impossible that there was anything they could do to harm her now that she was a Geldancer.

The little snow leopardess' mind was no longer tied to the physical material that made up her current body. If something untoward happened to that body, her mind would simply make its way to another mass of biogel from which she could pretty much will herself a new one. She could will her spouses new bodies as well, ensuring that none of them could possibly face any real harm from anything that the cultists might try to inflict upon them. Surely her grandmother hadn't known that

when she'd given her warning. Then again, perhaps she did. Perhaps she knew something that the little snow leopardess didn't. She knew how to make use of the ancient key'vin'ta portals, after all.

“Maybe we could ask Dr. Mika to point us toward something that doesn't involve us going out in public,” Chyka proposed out of an abundance of caution. Given that they were already headed through Anwae Arena's lower level on their way to Universtiy Station, and from there into the city, it was almost certainly far too late to change her companions' minds, but there was a chance. A small chance. But a chance nonetheless. “I mean, any more out in public than we already are.”

As fate would have it, Anwae Arena was currently being prepared for a lat evening match between visiting Team Purple and the home team gluttons for shiny black punishment, Team Pink. If the bookmakers odds told any tale, the Pink girls were in for

another rough night. Ten to one against, and five to one that at least half were going to get turned into biogel ‘gummy’ dolls, snatched up and absorbed by biogel monsters, or just plain melted into puddles of pure liquid biogel. Granted, these weren’t the worst odds that Team Pink had faced. It wasn’t like they were up against their main rival Team Aqua. But still.

Team Pink certainly knew how to have plenty of fun while chalking up a hard loss. They always made such a hot show of it that girls would be lining up that very night to replace the losses. Who cared if signing on for the remainder of the season was a pretty sure way to wind up on the ‘casualty’ list if it looked like it felt so sexy?

Chyka had enjoyed watching Biogel Games matches from the comfort of home since they’d begun several years before. She certainly would have preferred to be back in the comfort of her little pride’s new apartment getting

comfortable in preparation to watch this match on their big new holo-screen. That would have been so much safer than wandering the halls beneath the Arena, an act that had been compelled upon them by the closure of the usual shortcut across the Arena floor.

It was still early enough that not too many non-Gelitech folks were out and about in the Arena's public areas. That was going to change in about an hour. Even now, early arrivals were sure to be adding to the usual student crunch at the station. It was the only way to safely catch a train up to Northwestie, however, and the many merchants of alien experience who lurked about the district, just waiting for girls just like them to come wandering by. If they really were going to carry on with their ill-advised mission, the quicker they got to their train, the better.

“Quit fussing,” Sakie replied with a sly smirk. “Do you really think anyone's going to know who you are now without a shiny black

coating on that cute little ass of yours? Or any of us?”

Chyka shrugged. The cougaress *did* have a valid point. No one would be expecting to see a gelitech model running around without a spot of biogel on her body. That was physically impossible, of course. Biogel couldn't truly be removed once put on. Everyone knew that.

On the other hand, just how many little snow leopardesses *were* there hanging around Gelitech and its immediate environs? Surely she'd stand out, biogel coated or not. And surely they couldn't miss the barely disguised key'vin'ta priestess who was already attracting more curious stares than seemed acceptable in such a delicate moment.

“Hey girls!” came a smooth, sallow voice that as much sent a shudder down the little snow leopardess' spine as it did immediately pique her curiosity. “You all out lookin' for a sexy-fun time? Maybe I can help... if you're girl

enough to let me.”

Chyka turned to find herself gazing upon a very unusual elf-ear who was leaning on the wall between a pair of the numerous lifts which brought Arena guests up to their designated seating pods. She certainly wasn't an ashiri, given the extraordinary length of her ears and her dark, brownish purple skin. Her long, jet-black hair was pulled back in a tangle of very rough dreadlocks, and her dark purple eyes were so vibrantly piercing that they seemed to look straight through her.

The little snow leopardess was relieved, at least, to discover that this strange woman was wearing not only a lovely coating of glistening black biogel, but that the color of the biogel around her neck, wrists and ankles was a vivid, almost florescent pink. That marked her as either a member of Anwae Arena's own dedicated Gelitech staff, or as a member of Team Pink itself. Were she the latter, no doubt she was looking for a bit of fun before the

night's inevitable loss, during which she had not much better than a fifty-fifty chance of coming out with her quite shapely posterior intact. Were she the former, no doubt she was trying to snare them for the sorts of pregame shenanigans that staff at the Biogel Games arenas liked to get up to in the name of 'testing things' before the real guests arrived for match.

For a brief moment, Chyka thought of politely dismissing whatever shiny black shenanigans that the strange woman was no doubt about to propose. However, it only took a few seconds for her to realize that any pregame shenanigans might actually be a convenient, reasonably graceful, and completely guilt-free way to put and keep her spouses in a pleasingly helpless state until the whole cult thing blew over. Perhaps a bit *too* convenient, but who was she to pass up such a perfect opportunity.

"I take it you have something in mind?" the

little snow leopardess inquired with a mischievous wink.

“Oh, *do* I ever!” the woman chuckled, pushing away from the wall and approaching with that sort of warm, inviting smile that was somehow completely genuine, yet entirely disingenuous all at the same time.

“*Do* pray tell,” Chyka responded with genuine curiosity. She’d heard all sorts of stories about what went on whenever the Arena staff could get away with having a bit of personal fun with random passers-by. All Kinky scuttlebutt that filtered its way from the Arena thanks to fact that the Gelarium provided technical and development support to their sister facility. Exactly what it all really entailed was just the sort of mystery that she could sink her teeth, or more likely her tail, into now that she didn’t have to worry about lasting consequences.

“You see, I’ve got a little... problem,” the

woman answered with a soft, deeply sensuous tone that seemed just one step short of somehow being completely, and completely involuntarily, compelling. “One that I was thinking your absolutely magnificent bodies would be just perfect to solve. Surely you’re all more than just game, hmm?”

“Perhaps,” Chyka replied with a raised eyebrow and questioning slime.

“Oh! Gonna play coy with me?” the woman purred as she first tapped, and then began to gently scritch the top of Chyka’s nose. “You cats just love your intellectual foreplay, don’t you? Well then... how about I tell you that I’m not gonna tell you what I’d love so much to do to those warm, cuddly asses of yours right now. Mhmm. Nope. Not gonna tell you. You’ll just have to come with me and find out. And you *are* gonna come with me and find out, aren’t you?”

“Pi’ka’tu’ni,” Ki’su murmured. “What is this one proposing?”

“I don’t know,” Jumie replied.

“Something shiny and black, no doubt,” Sakie noted with a wry smile.

“Ta’vu’ra’ni?” Ki’su responded. “What reason do we have to trust this one?”

“I don’t know,” Jumie again replied.

“None,” Sakie muttered with a sigh.

“Ni’sa’ru,” Ki’su said with a skeptical look on her face. “Is this one, how do you say... up to no good?”

“I don’t know,” Jumie yet again replied.

“Probably not,” Sakie sighed with a frown. “Scratch that. Definitely not.”

“Whatever would make you think that?” the woman cooed, turning toward the cougaress

with a grin and a wink. “Now, you girls gonna come with me and let me use those luscious thighs to solve my little problem? Hmm? Yes?”

Chyka looked over her shoulder at her three companions. None of them seemed to be giving her any sign one way or the other. “Well, no one’s saying no. Right?”

“Ni’su’ma’ra,” Ki’su remarked with a shrug. “I do not quite understand, but if you think it something worth doing then... I suppose.”

“As long as we’re doing it all together,” Jumie responded with a soft, slightly hesitant smile.

“Yeah, I guess,” Sakie replied with a disappointed sigh. “But I get to pick next time.”

Chyka turned back to the elf-ear and grinned. “Alright. We’ll play your game.”

“That’s the spirit!” the woman laughed as she withdrew her finger from the little snow

leopardess' nose. "Come on! Let's go have some *shiny black* fun!"

"Oh... wow!" Jumie murmured with slack-jawed astonishment as the nature of the elf-ear's intentions became quite clear. "You want us to try that? Really? It looks... so... amazing!"

The woman couldn't possibly have picked a more brazenly Gelitech way to put Chyka's spouses 'on hold' to keep them out of further trouble, even if she'd been trying. Nor could she have picked a more outwardly erotic manner of holding their biogel bodies captive while doing so. Erotic and, at least to the little snow leopardess' eyes, quite pleasingly artistic.

There was something about the old art-deco

style that brought out the wonder in the little snow leopardess. The clean lines. The clear, forcefully presented shapes. The high-flying social symbolism. And the completely detached, totally impersonal nature of the highly stylized figures, whole or partial, who could be often found mounted on, or embedded within, various elements of the magnificently ornate architecture.

Anwae Arena's public halls were a strange but pleasing combination of stark, modern brutalism, high tech ultra-modernism, and old-school art-deco in decorative composition. The upper floor, main, and lower floors, who's public halls surrounded the entire arena were a particularly eye-catching mix of glossy black biogel framed with brass and silver decoration, mounted upon dark gray concrete, and illuminated in a slightly unsettling, yellow-green light. Every one of the supporting columns had its figure. Not cast in brass, or plated in silver, each was thing made of one hundred percent pure, perfectly polished,

obsidian black biogel. A gummy, each perfectly identical to every other gummy of its own physical sex.

About a quarter of these artistically imprisoned gummies stood as statues, supported upright by the decorative brass work. The remainder were held more firmly captive, embedded within the polished metal in one fashion or another. Of these, the majority were imprisoned upon columns that supported the ceilings of the upper and lower level corridors. Only their beautifully shaped torsos and featureless faces were left exposed, leaning forward in the classic pose of an angel, arms back, about to take flight.

All of these various captive gummies had something besides their form in common. Regardless of their physical manner of captivity, they were all once people who'd been invited to add themselves to the display. Perhaps they'd donated a sizable sum to various charitable causes supported by

Gelitech, or had a sizable sum donated on their behalf. Perhaps they'd donated to the special prize pool that gelfighters might be rewarded from by succeeded in certain particularly notable achievements during a Biogel Games match. Or, perhaps, they'd provided some particularly useful service to Gelitech, the Biogel Games, and/or its gelfighters. Each a willing volunteer who'd agreed to be repaid for their generosity, or the generosity offered in their name, by allowing Gelitech to transform their bodies into inanimate biogel objects purely for the viewing gratification of Arena guests.

No matter how much they might have wanted to stay mounted in the Arena for all eternity, the resulting items of décor weren't destined to remain on display forever. If they had been, there wouldn't have been anyplace for new acquisitions. Thus, all the mounted gummies were destined to be sold off at auction, along with their magnificent art-deco mounts. Or, in the case of proxies, offered to

the donors who'd obtained their place with their generosity. Just how long a gummy would be allowed to stay in the arena was based on the magnitude of the donation or service. While there was no fixed policy, it was rumored that every five hundred credits was worth one day on a column, with ten thousand credit minimum, just to be considered for an invitation to be mounted.

The resulting items of décor weren't destined to remain in the Arena forever, though. If they had been, there wouldn't have been anywhere to put new acquisitions. Thus, all mounted gummies were destined to be sold off at auction, or in the case of proxies, offered to the donors who'd purchased their place in the Arena. Just how long each would be kept was based on the generosity of the donation or service. The more valuable, the longer the gummy would remain on display.

Chyka had certainly never done anything to help or promote the Biogel Games. She'd never

had much of anything to do with them at all, besides answering the occasional question about the games from Gelarium guests. Nor had she made any major donations. Nor had she contributed much to Gelitech beyond her role as a paid employee, unless getting snared in the whole key'vin'ta priestess mess somehow counted as a contribution.

It just didn't make any sense to the little snow leopardess. The Arena went to great lengths not to sully the perceived value of each place in its halls' collection of art-deco biogel décor. Using passers-by as 'filler' was beyond contemplation. Empty spots were just too great an inducement to those who might be inclined to have their own bodies, or those who's bodies had their particular interest, glistened and mounted in such a public place of honor. In fact, the Arena seemed to make sure that there were at least a few available during every match, just to ensure that the high-rollers who bought tickets for the private upper seating pods would see them.

Why? Chyka pondered to herself. Why would they want us, of all people, to be mounted like this? It doesn't make sense. It just... well... unless...

“Now... who goes first,” the elf ear purred as a robotic arm drew a column-top gummy mounting from the wall racks that were filled with empty units. The machine quickly moved it to the round, softly illuminated platform that was located at the very center of the otherwise dark, timeworn concrete room. “Decisions, decisions...”

Something's going on here. I just know it! Chyka thought as she looked around the chamber, and at the numerous old oil stains that seemed to cover much of the floor. *But... what?*

The little snow leopardess wondered if the dingy old room had once held some of the machinery that had been used to lift newly built destroyers up from the old, and long

defunct, subterranean quarry shipyard below. Some of the ship lift was still visible from the subway trains that crossed the canyon bridges beneath the Arena. And, if the rumors were right, one might even find their way into the remains of the shipyard from the former Vixanti Facility Three, which had been built in a part of the very same quarry passage. It was even said there were a few old destroyers still down there in varying states of completion, left behind when the secret underground Macharri Naval Base and attached facilities such as the shipyard had become obsolete.

So much history... I've got to look into it eventually, the former University librarian in Chyka thought as she turned her attention back to more immediate events. Dammit. I know there's something sketchy about all this. But who's responsible? The cult? Someone at Gelitech? Was it just an 'innocent' effort to help them get used to using their new, one hundred percent biogel bodies so they could feel comfortable exploring new exotic physical

experiences? Or was there some more nefarious intent behind it?

In the end, of course, it didn't really matter. Being slipped into the biogel filled masses of solid brass and glistening black biogel wasn't the same sort of permanently transformative peril for them as it was for less blackness-endowed souls. They could stay in their polished prisons for as long as they liked. Days. Weeks. Months. Even years. It didn't matter. They could always just will themselves back to normal. Well, Chyka could will them back to normal. Because they were just part of her now, and had no power at all over those kinds of details with respects to their new manner of existence.

All the same, the little snow leopardess still wanted to know exactly why there were being given the 'honor' of being mounted in such an extremely exclusive fashion. "Maybe before you decide, you could tell us what the big occasion is?" she inquired as the elf-ear looked

the four now quite naked women over, “Because, well, I’ve heard about this thing before, and I thought it was only for girls who’d donated lots of money or something like that. I don’t think any of us have done anything like that. Like... ever.”

The elf ear giggled. “Oh, don’t you girls worry a bit about all that,” she cooed with a kind of sly wink that all but confirmed that there was something less than honest afoot. “Your mountings have been very, very well paid for. And very, very specifically paid for, I might add. By a very, very special someone, too.”

“Who?” Chyka questioned with a raised eyebrow.

“You ask *way* too many questions, sweetie,” the elf-ear purred. “Don’t worry about it. Just roll with it. It doesn’t matter. All that matters is you getting your cute little ass into that hunk of brass like a good little spotty-cat.

Because you're going first. Now get up there and show your girls how such a cuddly looking little foofy-tail gets herself glistened!"

Chyka sighed in defeat. "Okay. Fine. Keep your secrets," she replied with a wry smirk. Of course the woman wasn't going to tell them who wanted them mounted and put on display. If she did that, then it wouldn't be any fun, would it? There just had to be that element of mystery, didn't there? The unresolved question that would forever remain unanswered thanks to what that unknown 'benefactor' was about to have done to her body. 'Forever', at least so far as this benefactor might mistakenly believe, that is.

In that sense, the woman was right. It didn't really matter. It was all just a very short term excursion, at least for her. For her spouses, well, it was going to be a bit of a longer experience. At least until they whole Xinta thing blew over. As long as they needed to be kept out of trouble. Maybe then a bit longer, if

she happened to find their response to the experience sufficiently to her liking.

As it stood, the quicker Chyka got her companions imprisoned within their own mountings, the better. If she dragged it all out too long, they might start asking too many questions themselves. That could get... awkward, to say the least. “So... how do I do this?”

“Just step up and show it that fine little cuddle-butt,” the elf-ear replied. “After that, well, just relax and enjoy it. Because it’s gonna feel really, really good, for a really, really, *really* long time.”

Chyka shrugged and stepped up onto the raised platform. She turned to face her companions. Her lovely, very curious looking leopardess. Her somewhat uninspired looking cougaress. And her skeptical looking little key’vin’ta priestess, who was certainly quite puzzled by this strange, no doubt quite

unfathomable, bit of modern fey'li 'xenoentertainment culture'.

There was something about looking at her spouses, all looking back at her in varying degrees of anticipation, that made her feel very strange. Up until now, the little snow leopardess had always been watching the shows put on by others. But now, she was the show, and for an audience with whom she was so mutually intimately attached that it was almost astonishing that they would be so completely casual about it all. Relaxed, even. They just didn't seem to care what was about to happen to their little fluffy-tail. What was about to happen to her body. It was just another kinky thing to watch, and very much to enjoy in the watching.

Then again, they didn't seem to care much about what was going to be happening to their own bodies once Chyka's mounting was complete. That was what really bothered her. That they had thrown themselves into such a

completely carefree, totally careless, attitude toward life, so quickly, and with such complete conviction that it had already become their natural state of mind. Was it just some fundamental part of being a creature made of nothing but biogel and conscious thought? Or had she somehow done this to them when they'd become a part of her? Had she somehow inadvertently 'reprogrammed' them to embrace her own kinks and curiosities? Or had it been Lady Anwae? Omega, altering these new parts of her own self in order to fit some purpose she desired them to fulfill?

The machine let out a sharp, electric buzz behind the little snow leopardess as she again wondered if her spouses were still real, individual, and genuinely independent beings.

They are, after a fashion, that strange voice again wormed its way into Chyka's mind. That strange, distant, almost liquid, just a tad bit rubbery voice that came from the very heart of the material that made up her body. That being

of whom they'd all become but the tiniest portion. That oneness. That Unity. That... Omega. *But they are just as much you as they are themselves. Just as much you, as you are of me.*

A shudder ran down the little snow leopardess spine as a familiar cold wetness pressed into her from behind, from the back of her head, all the way down to her fluffy little rump. The front side of the solid brass mounting had somehow parted down the middle, exposing the glossy black biogel within. That made it possible for the device to take her without somehow forcing her to try and squeeze into the otherwise restrictive opening from which she would protrude once her transformation into a decorative object had been completed.

The machine moved forward. Her body pressed more firmly into the glistening black goo within. Before she knew it, the thick mass was beginning to ooze over the top of her head,

around her neck, and over her hips. It pressed into that sensitive little place beneath the base of her tail, before squishing its way between her soft little butt-cheeks. She gasped as it threatened to probe deeper.

It's been so long, Chyka pondered as she remembered that day that seemed far longer in the past that it had actually been. That day when she'd been taken unawares by the biogel couch, and united with her biogel wife. *So long... it feels...*

So good, doesn't it? the voice inquired as the biogel began to spread around Chyka's waist and down her legs. It feels so good to just surrender and let the biogel think for you. To make all the decisions for you. To do whatever it pleases with your body. Anything at all. Without condition. Without limit. Without question. It feels so good, doesn't it?

The little snow leopardess closed her eyes as the biogel spread over her warm, soft, fluffy

chest and down over her arms and feet. As it began to probe at her tight little tailhole, and slide so silky between those tender folds between her legs. Her nipples hardened. She began to feel pleasing tingles of arousal between her legs.

You didn't even notice, did you? That moment this evening where you stopped being you and started being me? You didn't. Because you couldn't. Because our minds slip together and apart so seamlessly that we might as well be the same being. And we are the same being, aren't we? Both of us, just little parts of one vast unified being. One single living organism. One entity that transcends space and time.

Chyka again gasped as the biogel slithered into her body and filled it in that strange, deeply intimate way that she still just couldn't mentally comprehend. Upward her arousal soared, even as the biogel oozed its way up through her body. It felt so intense. So familiar. And yet this time, it felt just a bit... different.

Smoother. More sensual. More... sexy.

It was no longer an equation of biogel insinuating itself into a body of living, breathing flesh. It was now an equation of biogel filling a body already made of biogel, even if it didn't look like it was on the outside. There was no discomfort. No uncertainty. There was just smooth, silky pleasure, even as the biogel pushed up her throat and into her mouth from the inside.

It really does feel good, doesn't it?

Chyka took a last, deep breath as the biogel closed in around her face. Or at least she would have, if her throat hadn't been filled with biogel. All that she managed to do was to create a bubbly, rubbery vibration that sounded an awful lot to her biogel covered ears like the sound of Omega's voice.

Mmm. Yes. It does feel good. Good in ways that I wouldn't be able to feel myself, were it not by feeling it through you. You... that little

fluffy tailed sensory organ called Chyka. That mind that exists on its own, and thinks its own unique thoughts only because I allow it to. Just like all the others whom I've fully absorbed into my own being. All those who've become my... priestesses. For that's what you are, aren't you? Priestesses of the Liquid Blackness. Priestesses of the Biogel. Priestesses of Omega.

Chyka could feel her legs and arms growing very pleasantly cold. Their surface began to feel strangely uncertain. Ripply. Wavy. The hard mass of the mounting pressed onward, forcing her to lean forward, even as her legs and arms melted away, leaving only her head, torso, shoulders and abdomen as solid shapes. A wave of tingly arousal burst forth between her legs, and all through her rapidly transforming abdomen. For a brief moment, she felt as if she were on the cusp of orgasm. Then, all at once, it all just melted away into the perfect uniformity of the obsidian black biogel that her body was becoming.

The brass mounting closed around the little snow leopardess as the pleasing chill washed inward through the rest of her body. Her shape shifted as it sealed shut, becoming a bit taller and broader to perfectly match those of every other female gummy who'd been transformed before her. Then, with a brief, spine numbing shudder, it was done, and all went dark and... dull.

Never in her wildest, glossy black dreams had the little snow leopardess imagined that being a gummy would feel so... incomprehensibly plain. She'd thought it wouldn't be much different than being an animate being of biogel, with a sense of touch akin to that she'd had as a geldancer, but merely stripped of the ability to move. Nothing had prepared her for the dull, almost numb truth. Not even her momentary glistening at the hands of the Xinta cultists.

So dull and distant was her sense of touch that Chyka hardly felt like she had a body at

all. All she could feel was a faint sense of cool air passing over her exposed biogel surface. She could feel the tight press of the brass mounting, which conformed perfectly to the shape of her gummy body. And she could feel the right press of the brass which had, without her really noticing, found its way into her tight little biogel holes.

There. Aren't you the beautiful Priestess of the Shiny-Black now, hmm?

Chyka didn't know what to think as she rested there in her partial cocoon, pondering the only things she could feel with any particular clarity. Those two long, thick lumps that had taken up residence inside her oily-slick abdominal orifices. They were hard. And cold. And completely motionless.

You like it, don't you?

Chyka had to admit that she did. Or did she? Was it her that liked it, or was it Omega that liked it? Did they both like it? How could she

know? Did it even matter?

I doesn't. All that matters is that you feel, so that I can feel. That you enjoy, so that I can enjoy. Because that is your purpose. To experience so that I can experience. And to spread that desire for experience to others.

I already do that, Chyka responded as her mind began to slide into that cloudy, dreamy, semi-conscious state in which all gummies resided until physically interacted with by a sapient being. I already help people... into biogel. And I already feel lots of interesting things... that feel so good... so... sexy... so...

Of course you do. But there are so many other things to experience, aren't there? So many unique sensations to feel. Things that far too few would ever dare without a body like ours. Things that need to be understood. Studied. And perhaps even promoted.

Why? Chyka asked as she struggled to keep the mental fog at bay.

Because it is required of us. It is part of the exchange that allows us to spread without restriction. Two hundred years. Two hundreds years is all we have to turn the tide. To stop the population from growing to the point of sustainability. To prevent the catastrophic crisis that would soon follow by convincing as many as possible to willingly remove themselves from the reproductive pool... in whatever acceptable manner that we can.

Of course, Chyka had heard all this before. It wasn't a secret, after all. It was official public policy. But for some reason, hearing it spoken by the voice that was, for all intents and purposes, her own, made it seem far more pressing an issue than she'd thought it before.

When can I stop being an object like this? Chyka asked as the dreamy clouds began to close in. For all Omega's apparent worry about population management, the sudden imposition of control over the little snow leopardess seemed to completely derange her

plan for a quick exit from her brass mounting. A rift had formed between her geldancer powers and the particular mass of biogel in which her mind currently resided. It was as if she truly had been permanently transformed into a gummy, and she had no way of knowing if her biogel mistress was going to let her go back. You're going to change me back? Aren't you?

Of course I am.

When? Chyka questioned as her ability to concentrate on anything but the sensations down between where her legs used to be faded away.

When the whim strikes me, Omega declared as her captive's mind fully collapsed into a world consisting of nothing but dull, motionless sensation. Once certain events have taken place. Once I've decided what I want you to experience for me, and not a moment before!

TO BE CONTINUED...