

THE COMPLETE
GELITECH

VOLUME 1
1st SEASON – BOOK 1

BY SHETIRA ANWAE

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ONE

TEMPTATION

The sable haired jaguaress probably couldn't have found herself a more receptive pair of fluffy fey'li ears. The little, silver haired snow leopardess listened intently to her honeyed words. They resonated with her on a deep, almost primal level. She'd spent several long years working the overnight shift at the stuffy, pretentious university library, playing the part of the innocent, blissfully naive librarian to absolute perfection. But something had long been simmering deep inside her. Something that the jaguaress' silken sales pitch had brought to the surface.

"Don't you dare tell me that you wouldn't thoroughly enjoy it," the jaguaress purred with

a warm, sincere tone in her voice as the pair stepped out into the broad, well lit underground tunnel. She gently steered her new friend away from the residences to the west, and toward the subway station to the east. "Come my way for a bit. Hmm?"

"Well, sure," Chyka replied with a shrug. She certainly didn't have anyplace better to be. The close proximity of her companion's glistening black body certainly had its particular charms as well. She was particularly enjoying the serenade of little rubbery sounds that came from every one of the very attractive fey'li woman's graceful movements. These cute little rubbery sounds came along with an equally rubbery odor, a natural perfume that smelled like a freshly opened package of latex balloons.

"You know, Gelitech has open interviews for biogel modeling positions this morning," the jaguaress noted, playfully bumping her slick, perfectly polished thigh against her little new

friend's hip.

"Really?" Chyka inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"Yep!" the jaguaress replied with a casual gesture toward the rather conveniently placed video advertisement. It was displayed on the wall, right next to the library entrance. "All species. All sexes. Why not come with me to the Gelarium and apply? Seriously! You'd look incredible done up like me, all shiny and black. What do you think? Wouldn't that be way more fun than dusting old books all night?"

Chyka shrugged. "I... I don't know," she responded somewhat hesitantly. Her eyes fixed on the other part of the ad, where a very enthusiastic, and very naked, tigress was being turned into shiny black goo by a machine. Shiny black goo that was presumably going to be used to dress a girl like herself at some point. It was a thing that Gelitech did. One of many such things, all revolving around turning

people into that obsidian black substance that they called biogel.

On the face of it, the things that Gelitech did seemed more than just a little perverse. Turning people into goo, or into solid objects made from that goo was something that probably should have been illegal. Or at least frowned upon. But this was the fey'li Empire, where letting the curious sate their desire for certain sorts of forbidden knowledge was just part of the culture.

Some foreign yokels liked to say that 'curiosity *killed* the cat girls'. Such dullardry was typical of the culturally hidebound little fiefdoms that dotted the Imperial Frontiers. One might even say that statements like that were a bit on the racist side. The truth was that curiosity rarely killed any cat girls. Did it get them physically transformed into very un-cat-like things? Well, that was an entirely different story. And Gelitech? They were the current reigning masters of turning cute, fluffy

cat girls into very un-cat-like things.

Chyka wasn't keen on the idea of being turned into a very un-cat-like thing. To her, that had always been Gelitech's biggest turnoff. Their glistening black biogel might have been the biggest thing to hit Mashiva since the Vesvik Mar crash landed in the river, but it came with certain costs. Costs that were measured not in credits, but in time until the shiny black inevitable. They didn't call it 'The last job you'll ever need!' for nothing.

On the other hand, there was definitely a dark allure to the idea of becoming a biogel model at the Gelitech Gelarium. It was the models' job to facilitate the creation of un-cat-like things. They used charm, wit, and their biogel coated bodies to reel in the curious, the naive, or even the just plain bored. They would all become biogel. One hundred percent pure glistening blackness. Some would become liquid, like the tigress in the advertising video. Most, however, would become solid shapes of

one sort or another. Still living, but barely animate. All thanks to the models. The obsidian temptresses, and very well paid ones at that.

"Trust me," the jaguaress purred softly into Chyka's ear. "It'll be so much sexy fun that you'll wish you'd signed up on day one. And all that money too! Really! I can't even find the words to explain how awesome it is. What do you say? Give it a try?"

"Well... I... I guess," Chyka replied, giving in to the glistening black temptation.

"Really?" the jaguaress cooed. "Well! Come on. Let's go! We can get all the paperwork done before they start interviewing. Before you know it, you'll be just as shiny as I am!"

"Wait. Right now?" Chyka questioned, having a second thought about perhaps having second thought or two. "You want me to go with you and apply right now? Like... now, now?"

"Yeah," the jaguaress responded with a giddy smile. "Right now."

"Well... alright," Chyka responded with a shrug. "You only live once... I guess."

"That's the spirit!" the jaguaress chirped.

"Do you think they'll actually hire me?" Chyka asked as the jaguaress led her toward the Gelarium and her date with destiny.

The jaguaress grinned and bumped her new friends hip with her thigh a second, and far more enthusiastic time. "Sweetie... I *know* they will!"

TWO

MARRIED TO THE BLOB

Waiting. If there was one thing that the little snow leopardess just couldn't stand, it was waiting. She'd been waiting for at least an hour now, and there seemed to be no end in sight.

Chyka began to wonder if they'd forgotten about her. What could possibly be taking so long? All of her paperwork had been in order. They'd seemed to genuinely like her during the interview. What was the big hold up? Surely they could tell her whether or not she'd gotten the job by now.

As if the time spent sitting in the little waiting room hadn't been more than enough to

get her lush coat of silky-soft fur all up in ruffle, she'd been obligated to spend all of that time completely naked. Her clothing had been left behind, tucked into that little green bin in the dressing room where she'd been required to denude herself in preparation for her interview. It was a requirement for anyone who wanted to enter the fancy, high-tech conference room to have their particular qualities examined. Poise and self-confidence while nude in front of strangers was pretty high on the list. While the job didn't technically involve public nudity, the company's required attire made the point more or less semantic.

Granted, Chyka wasn't nearly as naked as most of the others who'd passed through the waiting room while she was left to wait. Her thick coat of luxurious felyi fur was quite concealing. If the trio of nameless interviewers had been expecting a good look at her more intimate of assets, they must have been left quite disappointed. She began to wonder if

that was the reason she was being left to fidget on the soft, glistening black couch, while the rest weren't even being given the chance to sit down.

Chyka wanted to relax, but in the absence of any real stimulus outside of the occasional passage of a naked job seeker through the little room, there was nothing to take her mind off the wait. The glossy, obsidian black couch wasn't helping, either. Its deep seat cushion gave off an intensely piquant scent of warm latex rubber, and the odd way her posterior had sunk into its slippery surface was more than just a bit unsettling. It behaved almost as much like a liquid as it did a solid, embracing her cute little rump and shapely thighs in a firm, form-hugging fashion. If her brain wasn't playing tricks on her, the substance of the black cushion seemed to be moving of its own accord in a strange and subtle way. It was edging up around the base of her long, floofy tail, almost as if it intended to surround and trap it within its mass.

I have to be imagining it, the little snow leopardess thought to herself as she shifted about. The cushion made no attempt to restrain her. It even seemed loathe to fill in the space left by her movement. It reminded her of her bed at home, and the thick 'memory' foam that held an indentation in her shape for a surprising length time after she'd gotten up. It's just like my mattress. Form fitting foam. Or something like that. But shiny. And so... slick. I wonder where I could buy a mattress like it?

Chyka let out a deep, sonorous yawn. They simply *had* to have forgotten about her. It was the only logical possibility. Everyone else had been taken into the next room without a moment's delay. But what could she do? She didn't want to seem too overeager. Or to seem like a pest. Not if she wanted to get in on all the sexy fun the job seemed to offer. All she could do was wait. And wait. And wait.

The little snow leopardess yawned again. She picked up her legs and laid them across the

couch. *Maybe it'll feel nicer if I stretch out*, she thought to herself as she rested her head against the pillowy armrest. *Or at least a bit less... odd. If I can just relax a bit, maybe the time will go by faster. Maybe. I hope.*

Chyka gasped sharply as her little fluffy body immediately sank straight into the couch. Without even a hint of a warning, the glistening blackness had become fluid. The thick, sticky goop flowed up around her sides as she wiggled and squirmed in a vain effort to stay afloat upon its shimmering surface. A sloppy serenade of *glurps*, *blurps*, and *squitches* filled her ears as the smile sucked her down into its heavy, amorphous mass.

All that the snow leopardess could do was pant heavily and whine in lonely desperation as the ooze swirled and bubbled around her. The feel of it was almost as silky-sensuous as the whole thing was terribly frightening. It had happened so suddenly, and was progressing so quickly, that she didn't have the chance to take

a deep breath and try to sort out what the goo was doing to her. In an instant, she had been pulled almost fully within, leaving only her chest and head exposed to the cool air of the waiting room. In another instant, it seemed, she would be sucked completely within the voracious mass.

Chyka held her breath. She closed her eyes and contemplated the potential horrors that might be inflicted upon her body in the moments ahead. She definitely hadn't signed up for this. Or had she? She didn't know. She didn't remember exactly which boxes she had checked on the many forms she'd been asked to fill out.

The little snow leopardess wasn't consumed by the hungry couch. She was left laying face up, tits out and held in place by the again-solid, rubbery surface of the couch cushion. She groaned. She struggled. She tried to pull herself free. It was no use. She was stuck like a fly in molasses. Never in her life has she felt so

completely, physically helpless.

Chyka took a deep breath. "Don't panic," she murmured softly as she tried to convince herself that her slimy prison was completely harmless. "It's not going to hurt you."

The couch cushion certainly didn't seem like it was going to do anything to actually hurt her. At least not at the moment. She was floating freely within its thick, liquid confines. She could move her legs and arms. She could wiggle and flex her fingers and toes. Only the cushion's tough, stretchy surface kept her from being able to break free.

It's not going to hurt you, Chyka thought in silence as she slowly flexed her hips and legs within the heavy goo. With calm came clarity, and she quickly realized just what it was she was floating in. It's just that biogel stuff. It's just a toy. It's not going to hurt you. It's all just for fun. Right?

Granted, it was hard for her to see the fun

in being suddenly sucked into the confines of a sticky black blob that had been masquerading as a benign piece of luxury furniture. That said, this was exactly the sort of gooey black surprise that made working in a place like this so unique and exciting. It was a good part of what had convinced her to go through with the application.

If Chyka planned on keeping the job for any useful length of time, she was obviously going to have to get used to unexpected interactions with such things. Perhaps the couch was just a test to see how she would react to a sudden encounter. Why they'd want to test her and not any of the other applicants was mystery though. On the positive side, it was becoming quite clear that unexpectedly interacting with biogel could be quite a physically pleasant experience.

Whatever discomfort the little snow leopardess may have experienced in the wake of the initial surprise was fading fast. The

warm, wet goo actually felt quite pleasant once she had worked up the courage to stop worrying about her situation and to begin contemplating the sensations that it offered to her captive body. It was very much like a warm mud bath, but without the lumps and dirt and the dirtiness. It felt smooth. Clean. Sterile, even. And the way it oozed and flowed around her body every time she shifted felt absolutely amazing!

Well, okay, Chyka pondered to herself as she wiggled about and savored the incredible feel of the sensuously fluid biogel swirling through her fur. Over and between her flexing thighs. And so much more. This isn't so bad, is it? It feels really nice. Kind of sexy. I wouldn't mind going a bit deeper, really. Just a bit deeper. I wonder if I can do that? Or won't it let me?

Try as she might, the squirming snow leopardess just couldn't force her perky chest down and further into the goo. She was really curious to know how it would feel flowing over

her tender little breasts. How it caressed her firm, succulent nipples. How it...

A sudden hiss snapped Chyka straight back to the cold, hard reality of the world outside of her glistening black cocoon. She turned her head as best she could. It wasn't the door to the conference room, opening to allow yet another favored applicant a quick passage into the inner office. It was the door to the inner office itself that had opened. Within the open doorway, a rather athletic tigress was standing, a big, silly grin on her face.

"I see you've made yourself quite comfortable," the tigress said with a mischievous giggle as she stepped into the waiting room. Her unbroken neck-to-toe coating of glossy black biogel made soft little *squitch* and *squip* sounds as she advanced to perch herself upon the couch opposite the helpless little snow leopardess. "Biogel furnishings can be quite comfortable all on their own, but the real enjoyment comes from

the virtually unlimited ways you can program them to interact with the bodies of those who might be inclined to sit upon them. What do you think? Does it suit your tastes?"

"I... I guess so," Chyka replied, trying her best not to sound too disappointed with the interruption. She'd hardly even begun to enjoy herself, let alone spend enough time within the gel's embrace to decide if it was really her kind of thing. A few minutes more would have been nice. Or perhaps a few hours.

"I hope your wait wasn't too interminable," the tigress went on as she settled into her own glistening black seat with casual ease. The biogel that coated her body merged into that of the couch cushion, leaving her looking very much like an unfinished obsidian statue, still attached to the mass of raw material from which it was being fashioned. "There were certain, shall we say, 'signing bonuses' for me to attend to. They took a bit longer than expected, but I wanted to get them all out of

the way before I came to you. Saving the best for last and all that."

Chyka couldn't find any words to respond to the bemused tigress. Her thoroughly distracted eyes were fixed upon the lines where the tigress' biogel coated body had merged so seamlessly with her seat. Did that make her part of the couch? Or was the couch part of her? How could she make it look so easy? So casual? So... perfect? There were so many questions. Were they even possible to answer?

"Now, let's get right down to business," the tigress said with a warm smile and a casual flick of her long back hair. "You obviously want to get that cute little fluffy rump of yours into a lovely coating of biogel just like mine. And, you're clearly willing to allow Gelitech a wide range of liberties in the use of that pleasing posterior, for the purpose of showcasing Gelitech's many biogel and biogel related goods and services. Now, what I really want to know is in what manner you'd prefer Gelitech

to make initial use of that lovely body of yours? Don't be shy! What do you *really* have in mind?"

Chyka was puzzled by the question. Hadn't she answered that already? She'd applied to be a model, to work right here in the Gelitech Gelarium, enticing guests to purchase biogel goods, or to enjoy the 'free' biogel related services. "Well... I'd like to be a model. I thought that's what I was applying for."

"Oh, you're going to be a model, for sure!" the tygress chuckled. "A shiny black biogel model. But what sort of model? We have so many choices!"

"Really?" Chyka inquired with a puzzled expression. That there were different kinds of models hadn't been mentioned on the application. Or during the interview. "What are they?"

The tigress clasped her hands together and cocked her head to one side. "*Well*, you can

just run around like me with a very permanent, and very shiny, coat of ever-so-sensually stimulating slime covering you from neck to toe," she mused with a decidedly mischievous tone. "But working the floor like that is just so plain and ordinary, isn't it? If you're really looking to get right into the real fun of it all, why not allow Gelitech to modify your body into something... more interesting. Imagine being almost completely transformed into pure biogel, shaped into something so different from the shape that you've spent your life thus far, and yet still as vibrantly alive and as fully animate as can be! Something so strange and bizarre that everyone who sees you will stare in wonder, and want nothing more than to interact with your alien features. What would you think of something like that? Hmm?"

Chyka frowned. "By modify, you mean like the biogel mermaids?"

"Exactly!" the tigress purred. "But there are

oh, so many other, far more interesting options to choose from! Other sapient species of unique and interesting form. Hybrid creatures, part humanoid and partially beast. Mythological beings of legend. Artificial forms specifically composed for entertainment and pleasure. Or maybe you're into things not quite so pleasing to the eye. Being turned into a biogel body-mod 'nasty' can be so much fun in so many unexpected ways!"

"That's not really what I had in mind," Chyka replied with a shake of her head. As much as she'd become fascinated with biogel and its myriad erotic possibilities, being permanently transformed into unpleasant shapes wasn't something she'd ever considered doing herself. Watching others do it, on the other hand...

The tigress laughed. "More the talking people into doing things so you can watch type, hmm?"

"More or less," Chyka answered with a nod.

"That's perfectly fine," the tigress noted with an approving nod. "You can always get that cute little bum of yours modded later on. That said, you *do* truly understand that wearing the biogel means wearing it for the rest of your life, body-modded or not, right?"

"I do," Chyka replied. That was a given. Gelitech offered biogel. What they didn't offer to the general public was a way to get it off. If it could even be gotten off. No one seemed to know if the currently available version of biogel was actually removable.

"And you *do* understand that at some point that biogel is going to subsume you?" the tigress inquired. "Not might. It will. Do you understand that?"

Chyka nodded. That too was a given. Becoming a faceless, totally generic, and almost completely inanimate 'doll' of the appropriate physical sex was something every

biogel host had to accept as part and parcel of the experience. Unless she became something else first, that is.

Biogel was a synthetic, symbiotic life form. It was designed to be nearly as one with its host, caring for her and keeping her whole and healthy to the best of its ability, even in the most extreme of conditions. It was well known for its ability to render its host largely immune to disease. It could accelerate natural healing to incredible speeds, making most penetrating wounds vanish in seconds. For more serious injuries, it could replace the damaged or missing flesh with its own substance, even to the point of replacing lost limbs. For more insidious threats, such as poisonous atmospheres, it could spread over the host's head and provide perfectly filtered air to breath. For a limited time, it could even provide breathable air in a vacuum, and with it hydration and sustenance.

If all else failed, however, biogel had one

last trick up its sleeve. If its host so much as seemed to be facing imminent death due to massive injury, imbalances within the biogel itself, or merely old age, it would completely transform its host's body into pure, solid biogel. The resulting, completely anonymous 'dolls' had come to be known as 'gummies'.

Gummies didn't have to be created by accident or old age, however. Transformation into a gummy could be deliberately triggered. Indeed, most gummies came into being in this fashion. Physical transformation as a generally acceptable, if relatively rare, fetish was a very real thing in the fey'li Empire. Strange and erotic transformations were very much sought after, though they could often be quite hard to obtain access to. Quite hard, that is, until the creation of biogel and the 'casualization' of the transformation fetish that came along with it.

Most of those who had chosen to spend their lives clad in a glistening sheen of perfectly black biogel weren't particularly interested in

the transformation fetish aspect of it. They were often more interested in exotic shininess. Or the sensuous sliminess. Or the aura of rebelliousness that came from sacrificing a 'normal' life to a symbiotic substance that could never be removed, and all of the lifestyle changes that went along with it.

Chyka was definitely of the latter sort. She couldn't have cared less about biogel's transformative powers. She wasn't too fond of the skin tight, glossy blackness of it either. And the sliminess... well. That didn't seem *too* bad now that she could feel it for herself. But that didn't matter. All that mattered was that she was going to stop being that cute little fluffy snow leopardess and start being the glistening black temptress. There would be no more spending her days answering silly questions from flirtatious lugs about literary works of questionable character at the university library. She was going to be spending her days convincing people of the incredible wonders of having unspeakable things done to their

bodies. Unspeakable things, crafted from the very same blackness that coated her own body. And she was going to enjoy every moment of it. If that was what Gelitech actually allowed her to do, at any rate.

"And you *do* understand that working for Gelitech will result in your constant exposure to many varied forms of biogel experience?" the tigress went on. "Forms who's initiation can be engaged by accident, with processes that cannot be stopped, and results that cannot be reversed, for better or for worse, whether you like it or not?"

Chyka again nodded. "Yes. I read all the terms and conditions. All of them. More than once. I'm fine with it."

"And, finally, you *do* understand that you will be obligated to remain in the employment of Gelitech, as a Gelarium model, for a minimum of three years," the tigress said. "If you leave beforehand, and in the absence of

some specific arrangement agreed upon in advance, you will lose the offered contract completion bonus, and virtually all prospect of re-employment. The only exemptions, of course, are leaving to work in our parent company, Vixanti Corporation, or to engage in authorized, high marketing value activities such as joining a Biogel Games team. But those are the only exemptions. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Chyka replied. Three years was hardly a long time, even for such a potentially perilous a workplace as the Gelarium. And the benefits were just too good to pass up. The biogel suit. Free room and board. All for thirty thousand credits a year.

As if the regular benefits weren't good enough, there was a fifty thousand credit bonus for the completion of the first three year contract. For every three years thereafter, the bonus went up by ten thousand credits. And after twelve years, four contracts worth of employment, you would move out into a

private home provided by Gelitech that was fitted out with all of the highest tier biogel amenities. That included a lifetime supply of biogel care and maintenance consumables.

When it came to the extended benefits, it was the fully equipped home that had really piqued Chyka's interest. If she was going to get into biogel, she might as well go whole hog and embrace the lifestyle. And if she was going to go whole hog on that, she was going to make sure she was all set up to share the fun with someone special. Or maybe a few someone specials. The offered home could accommodate a modest little pride, after all.

Getting into biogel was surprisingly inexpensive for the average citizen of the Fey'li Empire. Indeed, money was hardly an obstacle. A basic kit cost a mere hundred and fifty credits, and the monthly consumables were only twenty-five. But that was all just a hook to snare people into the lifestyle. Getting deep into the lifestyle was much, much more

expensive.

Getting Gelitech to pay for it all seemed like the ideal way to surrender oneself completely to the biogel lifestyle. All Chyka would have to do was stick to it for twelve years. If it was all as fun as she was imagining it was, that wouldn't be a problem. If.

"Well, it seems like you've made up your mind," the tigress responded with a warm smile. "Do you have any last questions before your beautiful body is officially added to the Gelarium's modeling collection?"

"No," Chyka replied, shaking her head and wondering what the tigress had meant by 'modeling collection'. She wanted to ask, but didn't dare rock the boat now that she'd actually gotten the job she'd come looking for. "I don't have any questions."

"Alright! I guess there's nothing left to but say... Welcome to Gelitech!" the tigress purred with a sly, mischievous grin. "All I need you to

do now is to take a deep breath. Relax. And let the biogel take you..."

Chyka's warm biogel cocoon shuddered. It thrust upward in a heaving undulation that crashed over her exposed chest and head like a gooey black tidal wave. Her world was cast into total darkness with a single loud *BLUP!* For a brief, terrifying moment, she felt as if she couldn't breathe.

Oh! Oh! No no no no NO! the little snow leopardess thought in forcibly imposed silence, as a sharp, tingly sensation filled her wide open mouth. Thick, slightly bitter tasting slime slithered down her throat, as it made its way toward her desperate lungs. This rapid and unrelenting inward flow was quickly followed by an icy wave of absolute numbness.

It was as if her throat had simply vanished from within Chyka's neck. Behind her teeth. Behind her tonsils. There was nothing there. Nothing at all, save the spine tingling feel of the slime as it penetrated ever deeper into her helpless body.

Down the goo and the numbness went. Down her throat and into her stomach. Down her esophagus and into her lungs. Her body was disappearing. Dissolving, it seemed, from the inside out.

Chyka's sense of being unable to breathe melted away along with the intensely physical sensation of inner dissolution. She began to feel strangely comfortable. Peaceful, in a wispy, disconnected sort of way. The biogel was caressing her body, flowing around it and making her feel as if she was starting to melt. As if she was becoming one with the biogel's own liquid mass. She probably should have been horrified, but the sensations were so weirdly pleasant that she could do little other

than float there and savor every warm, and oily-slick moment.

Indeed, the biogel's sensuous ministrations felt so incredibly fascinating that she didn't notice that it had begun to explore far more intimate places than the interior of her digestive tract. Before she knew it, the biogel was caressing all that could possibly be caressed, both on outside of its quivering captive's helpless body and within. No accessible orifice or cavity was too sacred to be spared its tender attentions. Everything that could be filled, was filled, and with that filling came the same eerie numbness that had filled her lungs.

Chyka felt like an empty husk, a living shell bereft of vital contents. Muscle and bone, with no organs to support their continued life. It was as if she had become a mere frame to support the biogel in a shape like her own. All of the vital functions of the one were now the vital functions of the other. For all intents and

purposes, she had become the biogel. The biogel had become her. There were a single organism. A single being. It felt so strange. So bizarre. So... incredible!

Something withing the little snow leopardess' mind broke. Something deep, and deeply fundamental. Her concept of life, and of knowing what life was, and what it was supposed to be, was shattered. Her sense of self as an individual dissolved. She was no longer the center of her own world. She was no longer unique. No longer important. She was just... a thing. One unimportant thing among many equally unimportant things. Irrelevant. Pointless. And completely, utterly liberated.

A deep sense of intimate affection flowed through Chyka's suddenly liquid and malleable mind. She had no idea from where it had come. Nor did she particularly care. It didn't seem to matter. It just was. And it was very much to her enjoyment.

The biogel between the captive snow leopardess' shapely legs began to press and flutter. A sharp wave of arousal crashed into her like an erotic tsunami. Unexpected. Uninvited. And unstoppable.

There was no way for the snow leopardess to tell if something else was playing with her body, or if she was inadvertently stimulating herself with her constant squirming and flexing. It seemed impossible to find any distinction between her body and the dense coating of biogel that had formed a heavy feeling layer which hugged every centimeter of her captive body. Or between that newly formed coating and the liquid substance of the couch. It was all the same now, as far as she could discern.

It was an intriguing idea, accompanied by intriguing sensations. Chyka began to lose her sense of physical form. The humanoid shape she had been born in seemed to fade away, replaced by a plush, puffy smoothness. She

could feel cool air, but it wasn't cool air wafting through her lush fur. It was flowing over her smooth, oily skin. But not the skin of her dense biogel coating. It was a smooth skin that seemed to be stretched over the shape... of the biogel couch cushion.

Did... did I just get turned into a couch? Chyka thought as she found herself bereft of all sense form other than the piece of inanimate furniture she seemed to have become. Her mind whirled and stretched to fit the new shape that had been so unexpectedly imposed upon her. *I didn't really want to become a couch. Am I supposed to be a couch? It's not so bad being a couch. It feels quite pleasant.*

For a few pleasantly confusing moments, it seemed like the captive snow leopardess had indeed become the couch. She could perceive nothing besides the couch cushion's form. Nothing else at all. The couch was all there was. The couch, and the hand that was gently caressing it.

Chyka could feel the smooth, slick fingers petting her cushion body. Caressing its oily black surface with tender affection. Who's fingers were they? Were they the tigress' fingers? Or did they belong to someone else? How could she know?

The couch cushion couldn't see. She couldn't hear. She couldn't smell. And she certainly couldn't taste. All of her senses were gone, save that of touch. Even that lone sense was left partially mute. It was dull. Distant. And so incredibly smooth that it left her with no ability to feel details.

If Chyka could have panicked, she would have, if her mind hadn't so easily contorted itself to match her body's new shape. Just as her exterior senses had been stripped away, so had her inner senses. There was nothing in her soft, jiggly shape to become tense, if she had been inclined to do so. There was nothing to make her feel the unsettling tightness of anxiety. The stomach wrenching nausea of

sheer terror. It was all gone.

All that the couch cushion was left with was a confusing cloud of ideas. Ideas that should have triggered all the complex mechanisms and feedback loops of emotion. With all of those mechanisms gone, the ideas remained ideas. She knew what she should be feeling. But she couldn't feel any of it. It was dull. Peaceful. And, in an oddly abstract way, euphoric.

Chyka began to feel a strange, nauseating sensation. It seemed to come from within her cushion body, but exactly from where she couldn't tell. It was just there. It made her feel as if she needed to expel something from her liquid mass. Something big. Something that just didn't belong. She pushed. She pushed hard. She could feel it floating. Moving. Breaking through her rubbery surface.

For a brief, mind blowing moment, Chyka became hyper-aware of the world around her.

She could suddenly see in all directions at once. She could hear sounds that she'd never been able to hear before. She could smell scents with such intense clarity that every faint note wafting about in the air carried with it absolutely unambiguous meaning. She was so stunned by it all that she didn't even realize that she was in the process of tumbling out of the couch, onto the thickly carpeted waiting room floor.

The biogel that was covering Chyka's head in a completely featureless, vaguely effeminate encasement pulled away from her face with a slimy *shlick!* It melted away, into the thin coating of glossy, unadulterated blackness that now clung tightly to every centimeter of her petite little body, from the nape her neck all the way down to the modest heels that it had formed beneath her feet. She gasped and panted as she tried to steady herself. She rose up onto her knees and looked up to find the tigress gazing at her with a very satisfied look on her face.

"What... what was..." the snow leopardess stammered as struggled to get up onto her knees. Just as her senses had returned, so did the relative clarity of her mind. "Fuck... just... fuck..."

Chyka's sense of self reasserted itself, but not with the same force as it had before. The mind she'd been born with was only a part of the mind that controlled her unified, biogel coated body now. She was intensely aware that the dull, empty feeling husk that her body had become wasn't entirely under her control. It wasn't even mostly under her control. Indeed, as she struggled to make her limbs move as they had before, she felt as if she were not so much as in control, as she was along for the ride.

The biogel coated snow leopardess flailed about a bit before finally managing to get up onto her knees. Her attempt to stand was another exercise in futility. She'd never been one for elevated heels. Between those, and the

disorientation produced by her feeling like someone else was controlling her body, she could barely get her footing. The only thing to grab onto to try and help herself up was the couch, and she had no intention of going another round with that... thing. Not right now, at any rate.

"You've just had your first experience of the myriad wonders of life within the all-encompassing embrace of biogel," the tigress laughed as offered the struggling snow leopardess a helping hand. "How does it feel, now that you're well and truly as one with it?"

"I... I... it's so... so... weird," Chyka replied as the tigress lifted her up onto her wobbly feet. Weird indeed. She felt as if she was simultaneously swimming in a pool of thick, oily slime, and standing solidly on dry ground all at the same time. It was an impossible contradiction of the senses that she simply couldn't get her head around. "I just... I just don't have words..."

Chyka ran the fingers of her right hand over her left forearm. It felt like oil upon oil. Perfect lubrication. Not even the slightest hint of friction. It made her wonder how she could possibly pick anything up without having it immediately slide right out of her hands. When she tried to grip her wrist, however, the oily slickness seemed to vanish, replaced by the stiff feel of unpolished latex.

"I just can't believe it," Chyka murmured as she looked down at her chest, and the perky little breasts that looked for all the world like they were now made of gleaming black glass. Her nipples, however, were nowhere to be seen, concealed by the biogel as the substance was generally wont to do with almost all of its hosts' sexual features. "Just... wow. Wow."

Some liked to say that biogel rendered its host sexless, only permitting them to feel like they possessed a physical gender when it suited some specific and useful purpose. That didn't seem to be quite the case, at least for the

moment. The snow leopardess was feeling very much like a woman, and a very aroused woman at that. The biogel wasn't as passive as she'd imagined it would be. It was moving around underneath its surface, stroking her in sensuous ways. Around her thighs. Over her hips. Into the place right beneath her tail that sent twitchy tingles up and down her spine.

"Well now! She seems to be enjoying your body quite a bit, isn't she?" the tigress noted, patting the quivering snow leopardess on the shoulder. "I set her aside just so she could wrap herself around those cute little tits of yours, you know. She just loved watching fluffy fey'li tails getting into biogel. Now she's got a fey'li tail of her very own to play with. So sweet!"

"Who? She? What do you mean, she?" Chyka inquired as her biogel coating turned its affections toward deeper and more intimate places.

"Your new wife," the tigress purred. "The woman with whom you're now bound together in eternal marital bliss. You didn't check the box specifically requesting *not* to be united with a soul infused biogel coating, after all. And let's face it, that little body of yours is just the thing to get a girl all hot and bothered, right? So I thought, why not?"

"You mean... there's... there's a person inside this goo?" Chyka stammered in stunned disbelief. "A real, living person?"

"Yes!" the tigress cooed. "And a very lovely one at that. Cute, dark haired elf-ear with lovely tanned skin and a sweet, sexy smile that was absolutely *irresistible!* Student over at MMU. Nanya was her name, I think. Maybe you know her. She loved to watch guests get their bodies all done up in the Gelarium. Fey'li girls in particular. To be honest, I was really convinced that she wanted to just cuddle them more than anything else. That's why I sweet-talked her into getting herself gooey'd and

made into a biogel suit. Then she could cuddle a fine, fluffy rump to her heart's content. Granted, it was breaking the rules more than just a bit, but I made sure to get hold of her and stash her away as soon as she was finished liquefying herself, so I could match her up with a particularly fine fey'li body. As it so happens, I've decided that that particularly fine fey'li body is the one you happen to be residing in at the moment."

Chyka really didn't know what to think. She'd been ready for everything else. That had all been covered in the application form. Try as she might, she just couldn't remember seeing anything about being dressed in a biogel suit with someone's soul living inside of it, let alone a soul so intent upon exploring its new companion as the one that was now enthusiastically toying with the softness between her legs.

"Trust me though, it's going to be so much fun that within a few days you won't even be

able to imagine living any other way," the tigress continued with a warm smile. "Sure, she's going to take advantage of the situation for a little while. Who wouldn't, right? But before long, you'll be thinking and acting as one, and reserving your mutual pleasure for less public venues. That's how it goes, and I can assure you that from very, very personal experience. I've got a wife of my own. Well, I think she's a wife. I honestly don't know what sex she was before she spread herself over my body. You really aren't ever supposed to know who's in a soul infused mass of biogel. It prevents certain... abuses. That's why me doing what I did with your new wife is technically against the rules. Technically. At least for us peons."

Chyka bit her lower lip as the biogel of her suit pressed more firmly. She instinctively grabbed herself with both hands to try and keep the probing goo from going any deeper. It was no use. She could hardly move the solid surface of the biogel around with her fingers.

There was no way for her to affect what was happening beneath.

As shaken as she was by the idea of spending the rest of her life in the unending embrace of some person she'd never known, and who had unfettered access to every square centimeter of her body, inside and out, she didn't really mind having that unknown soul rub her into glossy black ecstasy. After all, letting the biogel have its unfettered way with your body at least half the point of the whole biogel lifestyle, wasn't it? Did it really matter whether or not it was controlled by a computer or by a living mind?

Of course, there was a time and a place to explore such interactions of extreme intimacy. Right now, in this little waiting room, in the presence of a stranger she'd only just met, was neither. But she couldn't stop it. She could only stand there and let her 'wife' do as she pleased.

"You two really *are* getting on nicely, aren't you?" the tigress chuckled. "How about you follow me into one of our private rooms for so you can share a little mutual marital orientation without any unwelcome interruptions, hmm?"

Chyka could only nod in reply. That was the easy bit. Actually following the tigress into the inner office, and then into one of the small, attached private rooms was another thing entirely. Between her unsteady step on her elevated heels; the continued, and increasingly firm, probing of her unexpected companion; and the fact that every move of her legs only added to the rubbing between them, it was almost too much to handle all at once. The tigress had to hold her arm to steady her as waves of tense, tingling arousal accompanied every little *squeak* and *squitch* of her affectionate biogel coating.

The inner office door slid open. To Chyka's considerable surprise, the office space that

she'd seen when the tigress had entered was no longer there. Instead, she found herself being gently led into a small, dimly lit chamber. "Uh... this... this wasn't here before."

The tigress laughed. "Wasn't it? Perhaps. Perhaps not. It doesn't really matter, does it?"

"I... I guess not," Chyka replied as she began to feel like her 'wife' fully intended to drive her straight off the looming erotic cliff before she had the chance get off her feet. The little room offered only one option for relaxation. A thick, glistening biogel mattress had been laid out on a low table. For a moment, she recoiled from the idea of touching it. Surely, it was going to be no different from the couch that had clearly been trying to turn her into a couch cushion? Wouldn't it?

A strange urge to lay down came over the hesitant snow leopardess. An urge to lay down on that mattress. To surrender to whatever it might have in store for her body. And with

each passing moment, that urge became more and more compelling.

At first, Chyka could clearly distinguish between the biogel's desire for her to lay down and her own desire not to. Then it felt like she was having an argument with herself. After a few moments, she wasn't sure which desire was hers and which had come from the gel.

Chyka clearly needed to lay down. If she didn't she was going to fall over the moment her playful 'wife' managed to send her careening over the coming precipice. It seemed silly that the thought keep standing had even crossed her mind. She turned and began to settle her rump down into the glistening black softness.

The tigress smiled. "There you go. Feels nice, doesn't it?"

Chyka nodded as the mattress hugged her hips just as the couch had done. "It does," she responded softly as she felt a strange,

piquantly fizzy sensation where the biogel of the mattress touched the biogel coating her body. The two were merging together, no doubt making her look as much like an unfinished obsidian statue as the tigress had done, seated within the embrace of the other waiting room couch. It felt strange, like the mattress surface was her skin, and whatever had sunk within its thick, gooey mass was no longer there. Except that place between her legs, strangely disembodied as it now felt. That was a bright, shining beacon of pure sensation that sizzled away within the nothingness that surrounded it. "Really weird. Really... really weird. But nice."

"That's so good to hear. Now, I guess I'll leave you two alone to do your thing together, hmm?" the tigress purred as she turned to leave. "Have fun! Lots of fun! I'll be seeing you again soon enough!"

The door slid closed behind the tigress. The lone little light above her head dimmed, and

turned a deep shade of purple. Chyka was alone. Alone with her biogel suit, and the amorous woman who lived inside of it.

Chyka laid back upon the glistening biogel mattress and surrendered to its all-consuming powers with a long, soft sigh. There was nothing to do but let herself sink in and become as one with its thick, gooey substance. To become the mattress, just as she had become the couch. If, that is, the other soul within her body allowed it.

On one glossy black hand, this definitely wasn't what the naive little snow leopardess thought she'd signed up for. As she sank down into the mattress, she couldn't help but think she was being taken advantage of. That she was being used as an unwitting object for the

personal pleasure of others. For the personal pleasure of a soul from whom she could never be separated, and to whom she would always be obligated to submit.

On the other glossy black hand, the physical sensations of it all were so incredibly arousing that she couldn't find any good reason to be genuinely upset with any of it. So far, the biogel was pretty much everything that she had been promised it would be, even it did happen to come with that one extremely amorous unexpected extra. So far. The rest was yet to be seen.

The unknown soul living within Chyka's new suit of pure, unadulterated blackness seemed to understand exactly what it was that made a woman's body sign. She slithered her slimy substance into all of the right places. She pressed her thickness against all the right buttons. She took her captive host straight up to the soaring heights of supreme arousal. And then...

The little snow leopardess just couldn't contain herself any longer. She let loose with a shrill moan as the thumping pulses of orgasmic release took hold of her body. Roaring waves of mind wrenching pleasure crashed over her, seemingly amplified to the extreme by the biogel into which she was still slowly sinking. The waves abated, and the stormy sea settled down into a soft, heady haze of pure, unbridled ecstasy. Never before in her life had she felt this good. This satisfied. Or this spent. And it was only the beginning.

The unknown soul was unrelenting in her determination to please her new host's body. Time and time again, she brought Chyka to the heights of carnal pleasure. With each successive orgasm, the huffing, panting snow leopardess sunk deeper into a strange, liquid sort of bliss. At first, it was a bliss steeped in the acrid brew of unrepentant lust. Lust for the substance that was making her body sing. Lust for the soul that was controlling its every movement.

The bitter yearnings of raw lust soon gave way to a deeper sense of intimate desire. A sweetness of ripe black cherries and succulent salted caramel. A wonderful thing to be savored, not for a day, or a week, a month, or even a year. A magnificent thing that would always bring pleasure and joy, no matter how many times it was tasted. Could it possibly be... love?

Chyka was indeed in love. She was in love with the gel. In love with the way it touched her helpless body. In love with the way that it held her captive to its unknowable desires. In love with the mysterious soul who was working so hard to bring those desires to fruition. And there was nothing more that she wanted in the moment, than to be as truly as one with the object of her love as she could possibly be.

If there was any such thing as a perfect unity of partners, in love and in physical intimacy, the little snow leopardess was

convinced that she had found it. What greater sort of unity could she ever possibly hope to achieve with another? Only if they became biogel together in one form, one mass, could they know true unity of body and mind. But as one being, they would cease to know the wonders of mutual physical bliss. Of each other. Or would they? Who could possibly know?

Chyka's pleasure-addled mind wandered to darker thoughts. Insidious ideas. As with all things related to biogel, the only way for a curious soul to learn such secrets was to try it out for oneself. Wouldn't it be amazing to experience such a total, all-encompassing oneness? Wouldn't it be incredible to become a completely new and unique being, even if it meant an eternity trapped in a barely animate biogel shape? Wouldn't it be wonderful? Magnificent? Glorious?

As Chyka descended through imaginations and into dreams, her body descended into the

biogel mass upon which she lay. The world faded away, even as her state of arousal rose to new and mind bending heights. There was one last, impossibly intense orgasm, so powerful that it made the whole of the mattress heave. And then there was nothing. Nothing but liquid warmth, and dreamy words that came unbidden, not through her ears, but directly into her mind.

Blessed are the betrothed who live together as one through the gel, the smooth, airy voice fluttered through Chyka's mind. And blessed is the produce of their pleasures.

So blessed are you, so too shall you bring the blessing to others, the voice continued. The blessing of biogel, and the prospect of eternal betrothal within its immortal substance.

Lay forth your existence for this purpose, the voice concluded, and exalt in the glories of the immortal substance which you shall one day become.

Chyka jumped up, as wide awake as she could possibly be. She looked around in a frantic effort to find the source of the mysterious voice. There was no one in the room. She was alone.

The little, biogel clad snow leopardess was sitting atop the thick, biogel mattress. But it wasn't the mattress in the little private room. It was a much bigger mattress that spread the full breadth of one wall in a furnished, though otherwise undecorated single room apartment. Everything around her was painted in a dark shade of metallic gray, with numerous illuminated, deep purple accents. A desk and a small table were adorned with glossy black surfaces, just as perfectly polished as the black glass floor. What few metallic accents there were were all polished silver.

Above the bed was a window almost as wide as the whole room. It rose all the way up to the ceiling and offered her an unobstructed view of the Mashiva Spaceport's western ramp. It

was raining outside, and quite heavily. Rain hadn't been forecast for at least two days when the snow leopardess had arrived at the Gelarium for her interview. How long had she been asleep?

Chyka sat up with crossed legs upon the biogel mattress. Even amid the downpour, there was no mistaking the dark, angular silhouette of the Destiny Omega. The starship was one of the original three converted freighters that had been used to test biogel and the whole biogel lifestyle as a fully self-contained spacefaring system. The ship was in port for the annual Team Pink vs. Team Aqua Biogel Games match, along with several other vessels belonging to Vixanti Corporation, the semi-nationalized business entity of which Gelitech was a subsidiary.

It was hard for Chyka to believe that the same substance which was coating her body could also control and power a starship. It could act as the starship's weapons too, if the

rumors were true. And perhaps even more.

The snow leopardess turned her eyes further north along the ramp, toward the building hangars of the Mashiva Mariner's University. There too were biogel powered starships, in varying stages of fitting out. Experimental gunships and light transports, mostly, but a brand new prototype destroyer could be seen with its blunt nose poking out from the nearest of the hangars. All of these had been built in part by students at the university, as an integral part of the practical instruction every student received as they were prepared for a spacefaring career. And for many of those students, developments in biogel meant their education came packaged in the same glossy blackness that had taken up residence upon, and within her own body.

Chyka's mind turned to the story the anonymous tigress had told her about the soul that was living inside her living coating of glistening blackness. She wondered if the

woman had really been a student at MMU. Or even a woman. Was Nanya just a made up name, part of a story concocted to make her feel more comfortable with being subject to someone else's control? Or was she a real person as much a willing captive within the substance of the biogel as she was? And how had she actually come to be there? Did she know what she was getting into? Or had she been coerced into doing something that no rational mind could possibly fathom beforehand?

There were so many questions to ask, but for now, there was no one to ask them to. It was only her and the soul within the blackness, and she didn't seem to be the talkative type. Was it even possible for the two to speak to one another? Or were they left to communicate on the far more primal level of emotion and touch?

Chyka sighed and slid herself off side of the bed. She hadn't noticed before, but the high

heels that had caused her so much trouble had vanished. Vanished, that is, until her feet had just about come to touch the floor. Again, she found herself wobbling about on the sort of elevated footwear that she'd never been able to get used to. She struggled to stay upright as she made her way toward the little desk that was mounted on the south wall, along with some bookcases and a wardrobe.

As she approached the desk, a holographic display screen illuminated above a matte black physical keyboard. She had done nothing to activate it. Nor did she do anything to cause it to open the universal messenger program. As if that weren't surprising enough, it promptly signed her in to her own existing personal UMS account, using her own very private credentials.

Chyka couldn't recall having provided her own personal digital credentials as a part of her application. It would have been very unusual, even for something so unusual an

employer as Gelitech. Had she really been sleeping all this time, or had the biogel orgy addled her mind so badly that she just couldn't remember what she'd been doing for the past couple of days? Or was there something more insidious going on? If she couldn't remember anything from the past two days, what might they have been having her do without her knowledge... or her consent?

Of the dozen or so messages, only three were from Gelitech. The first two were exactly the sort of standard new-hire fare that one might expect. The first was a short welcome letter, probably identical to the ones every other new hire received. The second contained digital copies of all of the forms that she'd filled out, and instructions on how to use the company's internal software interface to review training materials, technical manuals, and other such sundries.

The third letter from Gelitech was a bit more personal in nature. It didn't come from

the company, per-se. It came from her new 'training supervisor'. It only took a few seconds for the snow leopardess to put a face to the words on the screen:

Hey there, sweetie! I trust you and your new wife are enjoying each other's company. You may find that a few days have passed since your wedding. A first encounter with biogel, and especially such an intimate one, can be quite draining on the soul. It's perfectly normal and quite common for newlyweds like yourselves. While you were dreaming away inside your mattress, I had it moved into your room and expanded to an appropriate size for such a vivacious pair of lovers as the two of you are no doubt going to be.

Just in case you missed it in the official notice, start the remote training as soon as you're lucid enough to understand it. You're not allowed out of your room until its finished! Usually takes about a week. Don't worry! There's plenty of snacks in the kitchenette

behind you, and it's all free as free can be. It gets automatically restocked every morning, so don't worry about running out of anything. Your bed will take care of the rest of your bodily needs.

*Hope to see you in the Gelarium soon! And who knows... maybe we can have a little fun together once you're in the groove of things. *wink wink**

Hugs and licks!

Tashie Anya, Gelitech Model & Temptress

Chyka sighed and closed out the tigress' letter. She reopened the second message and started to read the instructions for the remote training program. *A little fun together*, she thought to herself as she worked out exactly where she was supposed to start. *What an ass. What makes her think I'd ever want to have fun with her? Especially that kind of fun. After what she...*

An odd feeling came over the snow leopardess. An opinion, expressed as emotion. It wasn't her opinion. But it also was her opinion. Or was it?

It wasn't the first time that Chyka had felt like some part of her mind was running off on its own and making decisions for her. Was it the biogel trying to manipulate her for some mysterious purpose? Or was it actually the 'wife' within the biogel, expressing her opinion on the matter of tiger-y relations?

Fine, fine, Chyka thought to herself as she chose to believe the latter explanation, simply for her own sanity's sake more than anything else. She did her best to let her displeasure toward the tigress fade. *If you really want to. You probably know her better than I do.*

A soft, satisfied feeling washed over the snow leopardess as she opened the training program. She smiled in reply. *Now don't you go distracting me*, she thought, wondering if

her 'wife' could actually hear her mental words. *I didn't get myself married to your slimy goop just to sit in this room all day. I want to get out there and enjoy all the fun. You know. Just like she said you used to.*

At first, the biogel offered Chyka no response. It seemed as if her wife couldn't hear her thoughts after all. But then, after a few passing moments, she found herself consumed with a laser-like focus on the holographic video screen. Nothing else seemed to exist in the world. It was all just fuzzy darkness.

The little snow leopardess shook her head in surprise and sat back. The focus faded, replaced by an urge for something hot. Something... coffee. *I'm not going to get much done without a bit of caffeine to keep me awake,* she thought as she turned to the folding kitchenette. Everything except the stove top, sink, and a small counter space was concealed behind a patchwork of little doors and sliding panels. One of these opened without

prompting, revealing a beverage dispensing machine. Inside, a big mug fill of steaming, dark roasted nibune coffee was being filled, complete with extra veyloo cream and sweet brown sugar.

For a moment, Chyka stared at the mug of coffee in stunned silence. How could the machine possibly have known her favorite coffee? Or how to brew it to get that perfect aroma? Or exactly what she liked to put in it?

"Was that... was that... you?" Chyka murmured aloud as a dawning realization slow came over her. It was hard enough to believe that an actual soul lived inside her glossy black coating of biogel. Could she really control the drink dispenser too?

A warm, fuzzy feeling welled up within the amazed snow leopardess. *It was you!* She thought as she took the coffee from the machine held it up to take in its wonderful, nutty aroma. As she turned back to the desk,

the computer selected the first training session, all on its own. It was titled 'Biogel Host Basics (Soul Infused Edition)'. *Wow! Just... wow! This is... it's amazing! You're amazing! We're going to have so much fun together! You just wait and see!*

The fuzzy feeling felt even warmer as the first segment of video began. Chyka felt like she was being hugged by a teddy bear. A big, wet, slimy teddy bear that was all up in her everywhere. This feeling soon faded away, however, replaced by that laser-like focus that promised to make getting through the training material a total breeze. *Got it. No more distractions. Focus on the training*, she thought as she took a sip of coffee. The sooner the training was done, the sooner she could get out onto the Gelarium floor. The sooner she could get out there, the sooner she'd be able to get neck deep in the real fun. *Gotta keep at it until I'm done. Until we're done. And I'm sure we'll be done in no time flat!*

THREE

A LITTLE LIGHT ROLEPLAY

"Hey there, new girl!" the tall, muscular man called out from across the dimly lit canteen. His dull, ashen colored face was contorted into an exaggerated, machismo steeped grin. He winked in a sly, mischievous way toward the little snow leopardess who'd just picked up a packet of chocolate chip cookies from the counter. "How'd you like to try out a shiny new biogel body on for size this morning? We've got lots of very attractive options to choose from, and they're all available for a price so low, you'll think they're free! Because they are! What do you say? Interested?"

Chyka crossed her arms and looked over her shoulder at the overly enthusiastic interloper.

"Dran. You know that I work here too, right?"

"Well, yeah," the big, gray nivandi replied with a deeply disappointed look on his face. "Still. Can't hurt to try. You never know, right?"

Chyka raised an eyebrow. "There's no bonuses for sweet talking the other staff," she noted as she tore open the packet of cookies. The sweet aroma of succulent dark chocolate filled her nose. Gelitech sure knew how to please its staff. Even the break room snacks were second to none.

"Well, I mean... I gotta practice somehow, right?" Dran responded with a less than convincing shrug. "I mean, let's face it. With that fine little body of yours, you'd make a great looking gummy. Really! You would! And I'll bet you'd bring in a heaping wad of cash in a charity auction. All proceeds go to the Frontier Assistance Fund. It's a wonderful organization dedicated to eliminating poverty

and bringing the benefits of modern civilization to independent colony worlds in deep frontiers. Wouldn't it be great to help support such a noble cause with that beautiful body? How about it?"

"You're going to have to do a hell of a lot better than that," Chyka replied with a smirk as she turned to pick up her mug of steaming hot nibune coffee. "I've heard those rowa robot hunters make a more convincing argument than that, and they've got about as much charisma as a moss covered rock."

Tashie chuckled from her seat at a nearby table. "Seriously though. You need to lose that 'girls like to play kinky dress-up' trope. Coming from another girl, it might sound a bit silly or playful. Coming from a guy, it just sounds... well, let's just say it sounds a bit creepy. Like you don't really care about the woman you're supposed to be offering guidance to. Like you're just there to get her to do something so you can watch it for your own

personal pleasure."

"Indeed," a lavender skinned elf-ear called Sey'li agreed from another table. "You are not selling a used car. You are not selling anything, really. You are supposed to be gently guiding someone into a complete transformation of how they will be living life for the rest of a virtually eternal future. You need inspiring adjectives. A bit of appropriate grandiosity. And you definitely need to learn how to convey convincing sincerity. Otherwise, you will just sound like a sexist ass."

Dran rolled his dark blue eyes.

"She's right, ye' know," Gorin, a short, bearded fellow with piercing green eyes noted as he sat down opposite Sey'li. "Gotta spend yerself a lots more time studyin' technique and a lot less time starin' at shiny black butts. Not that ah personally mind, really. It's rather quite flat'rin."

The canteen burst in to laughter.

"But it ain't helpin' ye' get through practical training," Gorin added. "If ye' wanna get out on the floor with the rest of us, ye' gotta change how ye' look at people. An' women in particular. It might've worked in the ol' used car lot, but it ain't gonna work in civilized society 'ere. Ye' cacthin' me drift?"

Dran shook his head. "I don't know what you think ladies like, but I've had plenty of experience..."

"Sellin' old junkers to foul mouthed farm girls," Gorin laughed. "Those lass's'l give it right back t' ye, and better than they got. And I'm bettin' that's why yer here right now, and not still tryin' t' push old hunks o' rusty metal on a bunch o' sassy gearheads who a'ch'ly know how t' tell a lemon from a decent fixer-upper."

Dran's face turned a shade lighter.

"Now, that Tash," Gorin went on. "She knows how t' get it done. How many girls

did'je get last week, love?"

"Eleven," Tashie replied with a casual flick of her tail. "And three guys. Gotta keep my numbers up for that big bonus at the end of the month, you know."

"See?" Gorin chuckled. "Jus' pay attention t' how she does it, an' ye'll be getting' butts into biogel in no time flat. Easy-peasy, fruity-squeezy."

"Mmm," Tashie purred, turning to Chyka with a warm, inviting smile. "Hey there! I've noticed you looking at our selection of exotic gummiforms. Is there anything you see that happens to pique your particular interest?"

"Well, I guess," Chyka responded with a curious expression. They'd been role playing interactions for days now, and it had become almost second nature to play along whenever someone offered a reasonable sounding opener. It was all part of the training prior to the new hires being sent out onto the Gelarium

floor. Some were getting the hang of it far better than others. "A lot of these are awfully weird. It's hard to believe anyone would want to live in a shape like that. But... I honestly can't help but wonder what they might feel like."

"Much like the forms that inspired them, I would have to say," Tashie replied with well practiced smoothness. The tigress was one of the Gelarium's most experienced models. As such, one of her most important duties was to help new hires get into the groove of things before actually interacting with guests in the Gelarium. "But physical sensations aren't things that can be described in words without some relatable frame of reference. I can do my best to place what you see in terms that you might be able to relate to. Even then, the imagined feel you might picture in your mind could well be quite different from what the form actually provides."

"Convincing," Gorin noted with an

approving nod.

"Mmm," Sey'li responded a much less convincing nod. Her skeptical expression seemed to suggest a rather different opinion.

"I just can't believe that people actually have themselves made into these things," Chyka said with soft sigh and a shake of her head. "I mean... look at these things. They look so... deeply unpleasant."

"You may be surprised to learn that the most unpleasant looking of the gummiforms are among the most popular," Tashie answered with a brief smirk a the rather chagrined looking nivandi. "In particular, forms which have a certain overall conceptual familiarity, but lack the particular erotic attractions normally found on the typical humanoid body. It's these forms that promise the most unusual, and might I say, stimulating of alien sensations. It's that quality which many seem to find enticing enough to try these rather

unpleasant looking forms out for themselves."

"That's... interesting," Chyka replied with a distinctly unconvinced tone. It was all well and good enough to play the girl who stepped through the Gelarium doors with the intention to go all-in, but they were few and far between. Most guests were just curious to see what it was all about, or just there to acquire relatively mundane biogel lifestyle goods from the relatively normal Gelitech showroom on the south side of the Gelarium's ground floor. This time, she was going to play one of those curious guests, interesting in exploring the idea rather than initiating the action. "Which one of these is *your* favorite?"

"Well, I'm quite honestly rather partial to the dorshin grub," Tashie replied without missing a single beat. "There's just something about the idea of being transformed into a segmented squirmy-wormy thing that... well... the more I think about it, the more it gets my motor running, if you know what I mean. It's

just so different. So bizarre. And it's fully functional too."

"Fully functional?" Chyka inquired, genuinely surprised by the suggestion that a shape with limited capacity for movement could possibly be described as having functionality. "How do you mean? I thought they were just objects that could move a bit when warm?"

"That's a common misconception, born of misunderstanding, fostered by media who often describe gummies as being mere poseable dolls," Tashie explained. "In reality, gummies have a very limited, albeit vastly weakened capacity for animation when exposed to the touch and body heat of other sapient beings. Many forms also have special functions that mimic those of their inspirations."

Chyka nodded. That made sense.

"Actual dorshin grubs spit copious

quantities of sticky saliva in order to snare meals," Tashie continued. "The biogel versions are far more interested in biogel coating the bodies of those who might be inclined to cuddle, giving them their very own suits of living, glistening blackness. Suits just like the one I'm wearing right now. It really looks like so much fun in the videos. I honestly wouldn't mind giving it a try for myself at some point."

"If you like it that much, why haven't you already tried it?" Chyka inquired. It was a common enough question from guests. Talking up services you've never actually used didn't exactly present the best of images to the uninitiated consumer. It didn't really make much sense in the context of biogel, but the permanence of biogel transformation was a concept that never quite seemed to click with most folks. At least not until it came time to decide whether or not to try it for themselves.

Tashie responded with a soft chuckle and a warm smile. "Well, I don't think Gelitech

would be too enthusiastic about my sampling these kinds of wares before my current contract is finished," she said with convincing sincerity. "Gotta work off all the benefits paid up front before I can get away with getting frisky. But I definitely wouldn't mind a drastic change of body once it's through. But not an outrageously drastic one. Something more or less natural in origin, but without anything in common with my current body. That's why I'm so drawn to the grub. It's exotic. It's bizarre. And... it's honestly more than just a little bit disgusting. But it's something that's going to be completely new to my senses. And it's going to be amazing... in one way or another."

Chyka knew the tigress was telling a white lie. Gelitech didn't really discourage its employees from sampling the wares. Quite the opposite, in fact. That was why the Gelarium was always hiring.

The little snow leopardess contemplated calling the tigress out on her deception. Many

guests would surely know that Gelarium staff were often quite willing to go all the way on the merest of whims. It didn't seem worth the mental effort, however. She wanted to drink her coffee, not spend all evening on yet another role-play when others in the room clearly needed more practice.

As to whether or not the tigress actually intended to give it a go at some point in the future, that was a question the little snow leopardess couldn't answer. Not that it mattered one way or the other. They could fib about that all they wanted, if it would help guide a guest into the sweet, sticky embrace of the biogel. All they had to do was keep their story straight for the duration of their interaction with a guest. That was a talent in and of itself, and one which she herself had already proved quite adept. Whether or not that would translate well to the Gelarium floor was yet to be seen.

Chyka decided to take the easy way out. She

raised a skeptical eyebrow. "How many other girls have *actually* gotten themselves turned into these grub things?"

"Here at this Gelarium, at least two hundred," Tashie replied. "That would be over the past two years, since the Gelarium first opened its doors to the general public."

"And how many of them actually enjoyed it?" Chyka questioned. "I mean really? Did any of them *actually* enjoy it?"

"I honestly haven't seen one who didn't," Tashie answered with a warm, sincere tone. "While it was taking place, of course. What they think once it's done, well, that's the grand mystery of it, isn't it? You can never truly know what it feels like without actually doing it yourself. Fascinating, isn't it?"

"I suppose," Chyka replied with a shallow shrug.

"Perhaps you'd like to learn the secret for

yourself?" Tashie asked, with a smooth purr and a very inviting smile. "Or the secret of any one of the strange and alien forms we have on offer? What do you think? Would you like to explore these a bit more, or perhaps something of a different nature might interest you?"

"Well, I... I don't know," Chyka responded with a hesitant tone. Stringing these sorts of conversations along was easy. Finding a way to conclude them was not. "I mean, it's certainly interesting and all... but..."

"Is there some specific concern that you would like me to address before you make a decision?" Tashie gently inquired.

"Well... if I do it," Chyka responded, giving in to a silly whim rather than trying to find some sensible way to submit to the tigress' temptation. "If I agree to let you turn me into this... thing. This grub. Will you... will you join me and have yourself turned into a grub too?"

For a moment, the canteen was silent.

Tashie's warm, sincere expression shifted to one of momentary puzzlement. Then she smirked. "Well, sure!" she replied with a sudden burst of deliberately exaggerated enthusiasm. She cast aside all pretense of role-play, standing up from her chair and heading for the door. "I never thought you'd ask! Come on! Let's go!"

The canteen burst out into laughter.

"Aw, come on!" Tashie called out, pausing for a moment by the door before returning to her table with a silly grin on her face. "Oh well. Maybe next time, hmm?"

Again, there was a burst of laughter.

"See, Dran. That's how you do it," Tashie quipped as she picked up her own cup of coffee. "Smooth. Consistent. Reasonably neutral. Positive personal investment. Completely without any consideration of species, sex, expressed gender, age, religion, and so on and so forth. Everyone is the same.

Except their personalities. That's what you focus on. And *nothing* else. Got it?"

"Yes ma'am," Dran replied with a resigned sigh.

"Good. Now, we've got another after-hours session tonight," Tashie added, addressing everyone in the room. "The topic will be body mods. Specifically nasties. It will be taking place in the Modifactory, on the fifth floor, at exactly twenty-one-thirty. Be there."

FOUR

IT'S ALL FUN AND GAMES

There was something strange in the air. Something cloyingly sweet. It wasn't terribly unpleasant, by any measure. But it was... strange. Off, in an odd, intangible way.

It was hard for Chyka to tell where the odor was coming from. It certainly hadn't been there during the hour long lecture on biogel body modification. That had come to a conclusion almost twenty minutes ago. Nothing in the long, dark oval shaped room had changed. Nothing that she could see, at any rate.

The glistening, biogel coated snow leopardess sniffed at the base of the nearest

null-g, force field 'mod tube'. Embedded in the black glass floor surface, it consisted of two concentric silver rings. These rings were separated by an ethereal purple glow that seemed to fizz and boil around its edges. The central portion of the base was just as glossy black as the floor, though it wasn't made of glass. It was a thin sheen of perfectly polished biogel. A layer of pure unadulterated blackness that gave off the very familiar scent of warm latex rubber. This was exactly what she expected. Biogel was made largely out of a natural, and naturally liquid, black latex rubber, after all.

In addition to the scent of rubber around the platform, there was a subtle scent of warm electronics. That too was to be expected. Just about everything in the Gelarium had some controlling electronic component that got warm during operation. The body mod chamber and its dozen mod tubes were no exception.

There was no sign that the platform was, or had been, the source of the oppressively sweet aroma. It was, however, quite a strange thing all on its own. Every time Chyka leaned forward to take in the scent of the biogel, strands of her long, fluffy hair would find their way into the tube's gravity field. This produced a wispy, purple shimmer along the field boundary, and her hair would float upward, only to fall back down the moment she pulled her head away.

"You smell it too?"

The unexpected voice startled the little snow leopardess. She had thought she was alone. In her haste to turn and see who else was with her in the room, she stumbled into the mod tube's gravity field with a shrill yelp.

A bright purple glow sizzled around the field boundary. The null-g field lifted Chyka's head and torso upwards. It was trying to pull her body's center of gravity into the field's own

center of force inverse force. She twisted about in a frantic effort to get out of the field before it could fully take hold of her. All she managed to do was to start herself tumbling to one side, dragging her feet around along the black glass floor with a loud, rubbery squeal as she tumbled.

Much to Chyka's considerable fortune, her tumbling prevented the field from drawing her any deeper into its unyielding grasp. Instead, she rolled right out of it. It was a lucky escape. She hadn't paid much attention to what settings each of the tubes had been left with at the end of the lecture. All she knew was that the process was totally automatic. Once she'd been fully ensnared within the field, it would have begun almost immediately. She would have become some glistening black hybrid alien creature, crafted mostly out of biogel. And there would have been no way for her, or anyone else, to have stopped it.

As with nearly all of the exotic devices

filling the Gelarium's many dark chambers, there was no way interrupt the action of a mod tube once it had taken hold of someone. From a normal, rational perspective, such a thing was mindbogglingly dangerous at best. Given how easy it was to accidentally trigger, it might even be called insidiously malicious. There were no guard rails. No solid barrier force fields. Nothing at all to prevent someone from unintentionally blundering into the tube's gravity field and being rapidly transformed.

What most normal folks might have called 'basic safety systems', Gelitech saw as a set of subtle, psychological deterrents to those who might otherwise be curious enough to voluntarily interact with the many biogel imparting devices. If there was anything at all to make the devices look like they might pose some hazard, then guests would subconsciously behave as if they did. As a result, barriers of any sort were deliberately eschewed unless their absence had the potential to introduce negative aspects to a

particular biogel experience.

Any means of interrupting the devices as they performed their glossy black ministrations were considered just another type of unwelcome psychological deterrent. They would imply that the biogel had some dangers that might need to be addressed on an emergency basis. Of course, biogel held no real danger to life. To physical shape, perhaps, but never to the stream of consciousness that was the fundamental substance of the living individual.

Chyka landed on the black glass floor with a dull thump that reverberated through her body as if it was filled entirely with biogel. She had been assured more than once that it wasn't, but things like that shuddering, gelatinous jiggle left her deeply unconvinced. It didn't matter, of course. It was going to happen eventually, and not just to her internal organs. But the idea that the biogel 'suit' that she was wearing had become far more than just a suit

was just a little bit disconcerting.

"Oh! I am very sorry! Let me help you to stand!" Sey'li stammered as she ran over to the prostrate snow leopardess. "I thought you were aware that I was here in the room with you. Your ears turned toward me just as I walked in. I presumed that you had heard me. Oh... oh goodness... you could have... you might have..."

"It's okay," Chyka replied as she got up onto her knees. "It's not your fault. I was just too caught up in my own thoughts to notice."

Accidental engagement with one of the Gelarium's safety-free offerings was a risk that every biogel clad employee had to face. Even the most momentary of distractions could lead to a sudden biogel transfiguration. It was a lesson that was reinforced time and time again during the training process. Chyka had been compelled to watch videos of accidental body modifications, glistenings, and gooifications

every day as part of her training. These videos were coupled with the same sort of sensory linking that was used to link Biogel Games spectators with their favorite gelfighters in the arena. It imparted certain physical sensations directly into her own biogel coating, reinforcing the nature of the depicted mistakes in a way no other method possibly could.

In a somewhat ironic twist, the often rather erotic nature of the sensory linked training had rendered the little snow leopardess quite at ease with the whole environment and its potentials for gooey black disaster. Indeed, she was so desensitized at this point that her fall into the mod tube's null-g field hardly seemed worthy of note. So what if she'd been pulled all the way in? It was just how things worked. Sey'li would have gotten a nice show out of it. Depending on the particular results of the transformation, she might have gotten herself a nice new pet out of it as well.

"I am very glad to see that you came to no

harm," Sey'li replied, supporting the snow leopardess under one arm as she struggled back up onto her feet. "Why in the many heavens are you still in here? Do not tell me you were actually considering modifying your body?"

"No," Chyka responded with a shake of her head. "I was going to run some of the holographic demos that Tashie skipped over. A few looked... well... interesting."

"Ah. It was my intention to enjoy a demonstration or two as well," Sey'li replied with an awkward smile. A soft, ruddy blush flared upon her lavender cheeks. "I do enjoy coming here on the few nights when the Gelarium is closed to see the latest body modifications in simulated action. I suppose that perhaps we shall watch some together? Though... I must confess that this very strange odor..."

"Unpleasantly sweet," Chyka observed with

a frown. The odor only seemed to be getting stronger, though its source was still a mystery. All of the rooms in the Gelarium had vent fans, and fresh air was pulled in from the vast open space of the facility's main hall. "I have no idea where it's coming from either. I was trying to figure it out when you came in. It definitely wasn't here during the lecture. Do you have any idea what it might be?"

"I very honestly do not know," Sey'li responded with a puzzled look around the room. "It is so strange, is it not? It smells so awfully syrupy. But... I must confess that it is making me feel a bit... lively. I genuinely do not know what to think."

Something, somewhere in the room beeped.

"What was that?" Chyka questioned, taking a healthy step back from the mod tube and looking around the relatively featureless room.

"I do not know," Sey'li replied. "Do you suppose that it might be some indication of..."

The lovely lavender elf-ear's question was interrupted by a sizzling cascade of ethereal luminosity. Holographic control panels came to life, floating in front of each of the mod tubes. Simple textual queries beckoned the chamber's pair of surprised visitors to select some form of body modification for each tube to apply. Around each of the tubes, ring shaped benches formed from translucent purple light shimmered into existence. These were made solid by null-g fields similar to those used by the mod tubes themselves. Rather than pull a body into a soft suspension in the middle of the field, the benches would softly exclude a posterior that might be rested upon it.

"Oh! It seems to have reset to the default night mode," Sey'li noted with a nervous laugh. "This is what most guests might see when they enter the room during the evenings, and the overnights when the Gelarium is open. I suppose the system does this automatically after a training session has ended."

"Perhaps," Chyka responded with a skeptical look around at each of the mod tubes. She had already become quite accustomed to having everything around her controlled by her biogel wife. Resetting the room to a more visually appealing state seemed like just the sort of thing she would do.

Was that you? Chyka asked herself in silence. All masses of biogel, no matter how big, or small, or how far apart, were all part of a single, unified organism. At least that's what she had been told. As a result, her wife could control quite a variety of things in and around the Gelarium. All that was required was that the device contain a biogel membrane control chip, or be connected via network to the central servers that used larger masses of biogel as an interface. Devices like her computer, or drink dispenser, or her biogel bed back in their little apartment, or even the machines in the Gelarium itself. *Did you just turn the console on?*

So apparently broad was her biogel wife's ability to control the technology around them that Chyka hadn't actually physically touched a computer or control panel in at least two weeks. She never needed to. Her wife always anticipated her desires, and used her personal credentials to access whatever it was she wanted to access, and was authorized to access. And even a few things she might not have been. Exploring personal limits was part and parcel of the biogel lifestyle, after all.

A warm, fuzzy feeling passed through Chyka's mind. Her biogel wife had no ability to communicate with words. She could, however, offer sensations and emotions in order to express the general flow her thoughts and feelings. Right now, she was simply answering a question in the affirmative. But she couldn't really do anything to tell the snow leopardess why.

"You know... I think I did that," Chyka added with an innocent smile. "I mean, my wife did

that. I can't say for certain, but I think she wants us to watch those holo-demos together in comfort. Instead of just standing around like we had to do for the lecture."

"Ah! That makes sense," Sey'li responded with a look up and down the little snow leopardess' glossy black body. "Sometimes I do wish that I possessed a biogel companion such as yours. But I worry that I might be paired with someone less willing to allow me to live for any length of time unmolested. It is not that I do not mind a bit of intimate erotic fun, but I... I do not know that I could ever allow another such control over my body as you have done."

"It's not nearly as bad as I thought it was going to be," Chyka replied with a warm smile. "Apparently, she can feel what I feel. And if what she does isn't pleasant to me, it isn't pleasant to her either. So, you kind of just automatically find a mutual middle ground where you can both feel good together, and life

goes on. I've already gotten quite used to it."

"You are a much, much braver soul than I," Sey'li noted. "But what of this awful smell? Cannot your wife do something about that?"

Can't you? Chyka asked her wife. It's really oppressive.

The snow leopardess' biogel wife offered no reply. There was no real way for Chyka to interpret the emotional silence. Did her wife not know what to do about the smell? Or did she just not know how to do anything about it? Or did she just not *want* to do anything about it?

"Yes? No? Well, I do not suppose it matters much one way or another, does it?" Sey'li said with a shrug. "I am still feeling quite perky. It confuses me, but I cannot deny that it is not an entirely unpleasant way to feel at the moment. I imagine it will make the demos rather more intriguing from a very personal standpoint. Perhaps it might even assist with my desire to

become enlightened upon the matter of why any sound minded person would have such things done to their body."

Another beep sounded.

Both women's eyes were drawn to a shimmering green shape that was forming in an alcove at the far end of the room. That was where the holographic demonstration models were introduced to the room, and the shape soon resolved itself into the glowing green silhouette of a woman. This glowing form solidified into a clear, three dimensional image of a beautiful, lavender skinned elf-ear. A very specific, biogel clad, lavender skinned elf-ear.

Sey'li gasped in shock. "Wait... is that... is that... me?"

"It... it is!" Chyka stammered. She was just as shocked as her companion. "How? Why? I don't..."

Sey'li bit her lower lip for a moment, and

then began to laugh. "Oh! How silly I am! I was so surprised to see my own face that it completely slipped my mind!"

"Huh?" Chyka inquired, looking from the original to the holographic duplicate and back again. At a distance, it was almost impossible for her to tell them apart.

"Holographic demonstrations triggered by non-administrators are always in the image of an individual present in the room," Sey'li explained. "A model like ourselves can choose who the projectors replicate. But if we do not, it will cycle through the population of the room in a random pattern. This time, it has selected my body to duplicate. For the next demonstration, it shall no doubt select yours."

"Why is it set to do that?" Chyka inquired out of curiosity as the holographic Sey'li began to walk towards them. It was immediately apparent that it wasn't just Sey'li's body that the computer was able to simulate with such

perfect accuracy. It made that body move in a way that was almost certainly indistinguishable from the organic original. Even the subtle squitch and squick of the biogel as she walked was reproduced with perfect accuracy.

"On the reasonable assumption that one who wishes to have a body modification modeled, wishes to see what it would look like should they choose to have it done to themselves," Sey'li replied. "It is a very popular and very successful feature. If you can get someone to start watching a demonstration or two, you can almost certainly get them to try it for themselves."

Chyka nodded. That made perfect sense. She could hardly wait to see the principle in action, though it was probably going to be at least another couple of weeks before anyone trusted her to work the floor on her own.

"It is rather... eerie, though, is it not?" Sey'li

noted softly, as her holographic duplicate came to a stop right in front of the two fascinated women. "Seeing myself standing there so serene and still. Seeing my own reflection upon her magnificently glossy chest. Wondering what I am about to watch her do. What I am about to watch myself do!"

For a moment, Chyka and Sey'li stood in silence, gazing upon the softly smiling holographic projection. It was just standing there. Waiting. But what was it waiting for?

"Might I inquire as to what body modification you would you like me to demonstrate for you this evening?" Sey'li inquired with silken smoothness. It wasn't the real Sey'li. It was the holographic Sey'li. Her voice was as perfect a replication of the organic original as was her body and its wonderfully graceful motions.

"Oh! Wow," the real Sey'li murmured in response. "She is just so much like me, is she

not?"

"It's incredible," Chyka agreed with a wide-eyed nod. It was incredible indeed. If there was some way to distinguish the holograph from the original without touching it, she just couldn't see it. Or hear it. Or even smell it. The holograph smelled exactly like the original, right down to the hint of mint upon her breath, and the subtle, floral notes of her very pleasing perfume. "It's such a perfect likeness. Everything about her... is just so real. So real. So... well... uh... what should we have her do? I mean, what should we have you do?"

Sey'li glanced at her fey'li companion. "I... I do not know. I thought I knew which of the demonstrations I desired to view when I arrived, but now that I am seeing her... she is so unlike the occasional holographic version of myself that I have watched before! So much more real! I feel as if she is going to be so much more amazing to watch. But what? How can I possibly choose from so many

possibilities? You decide for me. What would you like to see me become?"

Chyka shrugged her shoulders. "Well... I mean... I was going to watch some 'nasty' demos. You... um... you want to do something like that?"

Sey'li nodded. "If it would please your senses, then certainly yes."

"Okay," Chyka replied with a thoughtful look on her face. It felt just a bit creepy imagining what various disgusting alien body modifications might look like on such a real looking holographic projection. The fact that it was a duplicate of a very real person, one who would be watching right alongside her, made it almost impossible to pick something specific without feeling unbearably awkward about it. "Um... what kind of nasty body would I like to see you wearing? Well... what about something... I dunno. Rowa? I mean, those things aren't *too* nasty... but I feel all weird

going way out with being... you know... you and all."

"Whatever would please you the most to watch," Sey'li said with a friendly smile. "Really. I do not mind at all. Very much the opposite, in fact."

"Alright," Chyka responded with a nod and a grin. She looked the holographic Sey'li over one last time. Even though it was just a very convincing illusion, it still seemed such a shame to send such a beautiful body to such an unpleasant fate. Then again, they could always summon another. "I would like you to demonstrate one of the rowa body mods."

"Very well," the holographic Sey'li inquired with such perfect intonation and body language that it made the snow leopardess hesitate. "And which of the rowa body modifications would it please you for me to demonstrate?"

"I don't know," Chyka replied with a shrug.

"How about a random, female appropriate rowa body modification? Can you do that?"

The holographic Sey'li smiled. She reached out toward the little snow leopardess with an open hand. A shimmer of green luminescence flickered over her glistening black palm. The vague shape wavered and whirled for a moment before solidifying into a transparent purple dodecahedron.

"Those who wish to couple chance and fate must themselves perform the physical act of rolling the deciding dice," the holographic Sey'li declared as she fingered the bizarre pictographic symbols which adorned each face of the twelve sided die. "As my fate is placed in your hands to decide, it is you who must roll the die. I shall then be quite pleased to demonstrate the selected body modification for your viewing enjoyment."

Chyka reached out to receive the immaterial die from the illusory Sey'li. Exactly how she

was supposed to take hold of the thing, let alone roll it, was a mystery. Perhaps she was just intended to touch it, and it would roll itself. Or was there some other trick to it?

To the little snow leopardess' utter astonishment, the holographic elf-ear placed a very real twelve sided die into her open hand. She was so shocked, in fact, that she immediately dropped it. It hit the floor hard, clattering around between the women until coming to a rest between the holographic Sey'li's feet.

Purely out of habit, Chyka bent right over to pick the die up. On its upper surface was a symbol like an ant's head. She didn't have any idea what body mod it might be referring to. Nor did she have any idea if her dropping the die actually counted as a roll? Was this what the holograph was going to demonstrate, or would she have to give it another, more deliberate go?

As she took hold of the die, the little snow leopardess' hand brushed against one of the holograph's glossy black feet. Oily smoothness slid lightly over oily smoothness. She gasped and recoiled. The holographic Sey'li wasn't a holograph at all!

"What... what the fuck?" Chyka stammered as she took a step back from the duplicate elf-ear. "You... you're... you're real?!?"

"What do you mean, she is real?" Sey'li questioned. "She is just a holograph! Is she not?"

"No! She's as solid as... solid as you or I," Chyka replied. "How? How is that even possible?"

The duplicate Sey'li smiled warmly at the two astonished women. "You have rolled the die," she declared, completely ignoring her little audience's reaction to the discovery of her very material nature. "The die has chosen the k'v'ky body modification for me to

demonstrate. It is my very sincerest desire that you most thoroughly enjoy the experience of which I am about to partake. And, I do very much expect that you shall find the result to be *very* much to your personal liking."

"Unable to be physically transformed in the conventional, purely biological manner," the duplicate Sey'li explained as she turned toward the very same body mod tube that had nearly ensnared Chyka, "biogel clad visitors to the rowa homeworlds would have been immune to the typical tribute imposed upon all visitors at the end of their authorized stay. That tribute, of course, comes in the form of one's own body, given up in order for it to be fully transformed into an example of one of the several dozen minor rowa subspecies. These walnut-brained creatures spend their days

mindlessly performing various sundry tasks within and around the hives, under the total control of their hive's Queen."

Chyka was still stunned by the fact that the duplicate of Sey'li wasn't actually a holograph. So stunned, in fact, that she failed to notice that the duplicate's monologue was definitely not part of the normal holo-demo routine. She just watched in unsettled astonishment as the duplicate moved and spoke exactly like the original. Whatever it was that had created it was beyond her comprehension. It was tricking all of her senses, even with the original standing close beside her for comparison. It was just *that perfect* a reproduction.

The little snow leopardess glanced at her companion, the real Sey'li. Her expression was one of deeply confused wonder. Her silent gaze was fixed upon her replica's face. What was could the beautiful elf-ear possibly be thinking as she watched herself go through the motions, preparing to be transformed into a mostly

biogel, mostly rowa creature?

"The k'v'ky body modification was created for the specific purpose of allowing biogel clad humanoid females to serve as pseudo-k'v'ky worker-drones," the duplicate Sey'li continued, turning back toward her audience of two as she stood right in front of the silver ring on the floor that marked the boundary of the gravity field tube. "Not nearly as mindless as their all-natural counterparts, biogel k'v'ky have come to be utilized for various tasks where a certain independence is required. Tasks that typically involve routine interactions with other sapient beings not generally tolerant of the close presence of malodorous, mucous dribbling insectoids."

Malodorous indeed. And very, very handsy too.

Chyka grimaced at the memory of her own recent close encounter with a group of Mashirowa Hive worker-drones. They were

always so hard to avoid during their semi-annual Hive Week hunt. It was a lucky thing she'd managed to resist their pheromone laced coercion. Otherwise she would have gotten herself treated to a mouthful of rowa juice and a one way ticket into the hive. And who knew what foul task she would have been forced to perform once she'd gotten there?

"Biogel k'v'ky created here in the Gelarium are obligated to become part of the local Mashirowa Hive," the duplicate Sey'li went on. "However, biogel k'v'ky created from Gelitech's own staff models are permitted to remain in the continued employ of the company. Only if the biogel k'v'ky choose to not renew their employment contract will they then be obligated to follow their biogel k'v'ky sisters into the hive."

"Exactly two hundred and thirty four biogel k'v'ky have been created here at the Gelarium over the course of the past two years," the duplicate Sey'li said with a warm smile as she

gestured toward the null-g bench. "It is my sincerest hope that after you watch me demonstrate this body modification for you, that you shall together make that number two hundred and thirty-six."

The real Sey'li needed no further prompting to plop herself right down on the edge of the null-g bench. Her body bobbed up and down as ripples shuddered their way through the luminous field. She began to slide to one side, compelling Chy'ka to take hold of her arm and steady her. Null-g seats were fiddly at best. You could float there all day, but shift the wrong way too abruptly and you might get pushed along in some random direction until you could find a balance point again. Or get pushed right off onto the floor. The latter was the usual case, though most considered it just part of the exotic, high-tech fun.

Chyka carefully settled herself down next to her elf-eared companion. As she looked up at the perfect duplicate, she couldn't help but

wonder if she was being tricked somehow. Was it possible that Sey'li had a twin, and they were trying to get her to become one of those k'v'ky herself? Or was it perhaps some kind of test to see how vulnerable she might be to biogel temptations before investing too much into her training?

The duplicate Sey'li smiled one last time before twirling herself into the mod tube's null-g field. In a singly, and somewhat unnervingly graceful motion, she cast herself into the inescapable embrace of the machine. Purple luminosity shimmered and pulsated where her beautiful body passed through the field perimeter. The glow quickly bubbled itself away as she floated serenely upwards, toward the place where she would have neutral buoyancy within the field's inward sloping gradient.

A shiver ran down Chyka's spine as she recalled her own momentary entry into the mod tube's field. The floating sensation as her

upper body was being pulled in. The spinning sensation as she so helplessly twisted and whirled. The fact that the only thing that had saved her from taking the duplicate elf-ear's place had been sheer, blind luck.

In what seemed to be a mere instant, the duplicate Sey'li was floating upright at the very center of the field's area of effect. She seemed so peaceful. So accepting. So... disturbingly pleased with herself.

The expression on the duplicate Sey'li's face was no longer warm and inviting. It was sly. Mischievous. Insidious, even.

Chy'ka began to wonder if the duplicate Sey'li was really the artificial, computer controlled puppet she should have been. Her expression seemed to suggest there was far more going on in her 'mind' than one would expect from a digital entertainment AI going about an interactive demo. Was it actually possible that this duplicate was a real person?

But how could she be so perfectly identical to the real Sey'li?

The little snow leopardess became increasingly convinced that the 'other Sey'li' wasn't a duplicate. It simply *had* to be a real, living, identical twin. Or maybe it was the 'real Sey'li', and the one sitting next to her was the twin. It seemed impossible to know.

The two of them must have seen Chyka when she'd turned back to return to the mod chamber alone. They'd probably been considering sharing in a little body modification, but couldn't decide what they'd wanted to become. Instead, they'd induced their new friend make the decision for them. No doubt, they fully expected her to join them.

Bloop!

A tiny globule of glossy blackness parted from the biogel that coated the mod tube's floor. It ascended at a slow, almost casual pace toward the waiting body floating so serenely

above. Up past her feet. Up past her knees and thighs. Up until it came to that place where a thick, perfectly smooth coating of biogel was hiding her most delicately intimate features.

Bloop!

Another shiver ran down Chyka's spine. Again, thoughts of her own near accident came to the forefront of her mind. That could have been her own body where that potent little sphere had planted itself. There would have been nothing she could have done to stop it. One quick *bloop* and she would have been done. Or done up, as the case happened to be.

The thought was unsettling. But it was also a catalyst for the little snow leopardess' untamed imagination. The more she pondered what might have been, the more curious she became as to what it might have felt like. And the more she thought about that, the more she felt all warm and fuzzy inside.

You can't seriously think... she thought in

silence as the 'other Sey'li' began to softly huff within her null-g prison. Was her biogel wife seriously suggesting that she wanted them to follow in the duplicate elf-ear's footsteps together? She began to feel more than just warm inside. The firm tug of genuine desire began to well up inside her. *Oh, come on! Really?*

The 'other Sey'li' moaned softly as her body began to shrink in a bizarre, spine-tingling way. Her beautiful curves flattened and pulled taut into glistening black, grub-like segments amid a cacophony of little rubbery squeaks, crackles and snaps. These rounded segments completely covered her shrunken torso, abdomen, and upper legs. Her arms and lower legs shrank even further, taking the form of slender limbs of glossy mock-chitin. The fingers on each of her hands merged to form two large fingers and a thumb. The toes on each of her feet merged to form two toes. Her heels stretched out to form a stubby, 'third toe' to the rear.

"Oh! Oh my!" the 'real Sey'li' murmured, leaning forward to stare as her apparent twin transformed into a little, mostly insectoid-humanoid creature. "I cannot... I do not... have words..."

Even as the 'other Sey'li's' body shrank and morphed, liquid biogel flowed upward, around her jaw and into her wide open mouth. "Oh! Oh! Ooooh!" the transforming elf-ear moaned as the biogel around her mouth began to solidify and change shape. "Ooooh! Ooo... oob... gbl... blb... ulbl!"

Chyka couldn't help herself but gawk in deeply unsettled wonder as the 'other Sey'li's' mouth rapidly transformed into a vertical slit. Puffy 'mandibles' formed to either side. Her nose vanished, replaced by a little black nubbin among smooth, slender inner folds that could only be seen when the creature flexed its mouth.

Heavenly hells... that's... that's almost as

nasty looking as the real thing, the fascinated snow leopardess thought as memories of her encounter with real rowa worker-drones flashed through her mind. The resemblance of their mouths to a woman's genitalia had far more than just passing. Behind their chitinous mandibles, the form of the gooey, mucous oozing pink flesh was virtually indistinguishable. The biogel version seemed almost pleasant in comparison. Almost. Almost as bad. But I really have to wonder what it must feel like to have a mouth like that. It looks so weird. So... kinky. So...

Another wave of desire washed over the fascinated snow leopardess. Her biogel wife wasn't asserting herself though. Despite its intensity, the feeling the biogel imprisoned soul was imposing upon her host didn't shove her hosts own thoughts and feelings aside. She wasn't making a decision for the two of them. She was just offering an opinion. A statement that this was something she might like to do. And perhaps sooner, rather than later.

Dribbles of warm liquid biogel spurted out of the 'other Sey'li's' mouth as a pair of glistening black antennae sprouted from her forehead. She began to flex. And wiggle. And shudder. A large gob of liquid biogel sprayed from her mouth. The creature relaxed. It was done.

Chyka couldn't help but think that her wife might be on to something. The new creature seemed so at ease now. So accepting of its new, unpleasant looking shape. So completely at peace with what it had become. Maybe it really was something to try out. To experience for oneself. Perhaps it could even be a bit of fun. Perhaps.

Thock!

The biogel k'v'ky dropped down onto its feet as the mod tube's null-g field faded. It wobbled from one side to the other, as if it weren't quite comfortable standing on such strangely shaped feet. It took a few moments for the creature to

get its balance. It straightened its back with a long, shuddering squitch, and stepped out of the silver rings that marked the tube's outer perimeter.

Chyka held her breath as the little biogel k'v'ky turned to face its audience. She couldn't help but wonder at how small it had become. It was smaller even than her own rather diminutive figure. Only its upper head remained much the same as it had been before. Eyes. Cheeks. Ears. Hair. None of that had changed. At least, none of that had changed on the outside.

What was beyond the creature's vulvic lips was a mystery. Was it's head filled with biogel mucous glands and a deep oral tunnel in imitation of its organic counterparts? Was it left with the same little walnut sized brain? The little snow leopardess wanted to know. But she didn't want to know quite badly enough to get up and try to find out.

"Urp. Blp. Rbl. Plp," the biogel k'v'ky attempted to speak. All that came out were wet sloppy sounds and little sputters of liquid biogel.

"Oh!" the 'real Sey'li' murmured as she reached out to touch the creature. Her fingers slid smoothly over its slender, four-segmented thighs. "It... it is real! It is really real! Just like you said it was!"

Chyka nodded. "Yeah. It is. I mean... I think it is?"

"But... how? How? Um... oh!" the 'real Sey'li' exclaimed as the biogel k'v'ky took her by both arms and pulled her up off the glowing null-g bench. "You... what do you think you are doing?"

The biogel k'v'ky drew the 'real Sey'li' into a deeply affectionate hug. It stretched itself upward to rub its firm, flat chest against the beautiful elf-ear's soft, ample breasts. It looked up into her eyes and burred goeey non-

words all over her slack-jawed face. Its hands slipped downward. One came to a rest in the small of her back. The other began to caress her hip and thigh.

"I think it likes you," Chyka remarked with considerable puzzlement. It was acting exactly like the real k'v'ky worker drones had acted when they'd caught her out running in the park. Mindless affection. Meaningless, mucous soaked words. All of it driven solely by the instinctual desire to help expand the hive.

The little snow leopardess hadn't thought that biogel body mods could have such a significant effect on the recipient's mental capacity. While they might acquire some subtle rowa instincts, and regard themselves as being rowa rather than what they were before, biogel k'v'ky shouldn't really be much less intelligent than they were before they were transformed. Was this body mod an exception? Were biogel k'v'ky really as walnut-brained as their natural counterparts?

All at once, the biogel k'v'ky reached up and grabbed the 'real Sey'li's' head with both hands. It yanked the startled elf-ear down into a deep, sloppy, liquid biogel kiss. Her nose and mouth were fully encompassed by the creature's soft oral folds, leaving her to gasp and sputter as the liquid biogel therein adhered to her face. She shuddered as the goo spread around her jaw and neck, forming a mask that covered an area almost identical to the transformed area of the creature's face.

The kiss seemed to go on forever. The little biogel k'v'ky just wouldn't let go. Nor did the 'real Sey'li' seem terribly inclined to bring it to an end herself. She just stood there and let the creature do as it pleased with her.

"Oh! Oh! Wow!" the 'real Sey'li' sputtered through her newly acquired biogel mask as the k'v'ky finally let her go. She began to rub the creature's back, feeling at the places where its glistening black segments met and rubbed against one another. "I have never been kissed

with such... such passion! While looking into my very own eyes! Wow! It was... it was incredible!"

"It certainly was," Chyka agreed. It had certainly looked incredible. Fun, even. But it was hard for her to shake the suspicion that this was all just a show for her benefit, intended to convince her to twirl her own body into the mod tube.

"What does it want, do you think?" the 'real Sey'li' inquired as the biogel k'v'ky gently tugged her toward the mod tube's perimeter. "You do not think it wants me to become like it?"

"I think it does," Chyka responded with a chuckle and a nod. Of course it did. Not just the one, but both of them. It had said as much before its transformation. And, if her theory was correct, it wasn't the only one present who wanted them both to enter the tube. The only question now was what they were going to do

to get her to join them.

"What do you think that I should do?" the 'real Sey'li' asked as the creature gently pulled her closer to the silver rings on the floor.

Chyka shrugged. "Give it a try," she responded with a mischievous smile and a wink. Two could play this game. And given the opportunity, she just couldn't help herself. She'd been waiting for so long to become the glistening black temptress. Now that she had the chance to do it for real, she simply *had* to give it a try. "I mean, why not, right? It looked like fun. Don't you want to know what it feels like?"

"Well... yes. I do very much want to know," the 'real Sey'li' responded with a hesitant look at the biogel k'v'ky. "I suppose. I suppose that I might... give it a try."

The biogel k'v'ky sputtered more non-words at the 'real Sey'li' as it turned the elf-ear's back to the mod tube. It put both of its hands

upon her chest and began to gently coax her backwards until her long, dark blue hair began to float upwards along the edge of the null-g field.

"You're going to look amazing," Chy'ka purred as Sey'li bit her biogel coated lower lip. "Absolutely fucking amazing! I promise!"

"If you do really say so," the 'real Sey'li' replied with a resigned shrug as the biogel k'v'ky pushed her backward. Purple luminosity glowed as her head and shoulders passed into the edge of the null-g field. "You will let me kiss you once this is done, will you not?"

"Oh, hell yes! I'll let you kiss me whenever you want to," Chy'ka cooed with a broad, friendly grin. "I'll let you kiss me whenever you want to. Whenever you want to. I promise!"

The 'real Sey'li' closed her eyes and gasped as the null-g field pulled her into the mod tube. She floated up, just like her duplicate had. She

tensed, as she awaited the inevitable.

Bloop!

The little liquid biogel pellet floated up between 'real Sey'li's' legs.

Bloop!

This time, there was no brief delay between the potent little sphere's impact and its action upon its willing victim's body. "Ah! Ah! Oh! OH!" the 'real Sey'li' cried out as her rapidly shrank into the same segmented shape as that acquired by her duplicate. In an instant, her body was completely transformed. In another instant, the kiss-imbued biogel mask on her face had reshaped itself into a vulvic mouth. In another instant, two antennae had grown from her forehead. "Pht! Rb! Lrb! Br!r!r!"

The 'real Sey'li' shuddered. She writhed. She tensed. A massive gob of liquid biogel sprayed from her mouth. Then she fell limp. She had become an it. A biogel k'v'ky. Just like its twin.

"Well, aren't you girls having quite the time in here," Tashie laughed from the archway that separated the mod chamber from the Gelarium's main hall. "I see you've both met one of our *wonderful* geldancers. I trust she hasn't been too coercive with you this evening?"

Chyka looked from the new biogel k'v'ky, to its twin, and then back the tigress. "What do you mean, geldancer?" she asked, almost completely forgetting about the wobbly new biogel creature that she'd just helped to create. "What's a geldancer?"

The new biogel k'v'ky's 'twin' suddenly changed shape. With a loud, liquid gush, it turned into an amorphous mass of glistening black biogel. The wiggling, wavering blob was

as tall as the shocked little snow leopardess, and about twice as wide. This mass began to swirled around her, as if were as weightless as its surface was perfectly reflective. It seemed as if it was trying to guide her toward the mod tube. To force her to experience transformation into a biogel k'v'ky for herself.

"Hey!" Chyka exclaimed as she whirled around, looking for some way to escape from amid the swirling liquid 'cage'. "Stop it!"

The amorphous biogel mass came to a sudden stop in front of the dizzy snow leopardess, her back now turned toward the waiting mod tube. Its upper portion twisted and morphed, taking the form of a perfectly proportioned, glistening black fey'li woman's torso, arms and head.

"What the..." Chyka stammered, taking a step back from the shape-shifting biogel monster.

"Ha *ha!* Silly little one, what are you afraid

of?" the geldancer laughed with a liquid, vaguely effeminate voice. She smiled and clasped her hands together in front of her belly. "Do you think I'm going to grab you and make you into a cute little rowa bug butt too?"

"Yes," Chyka replied, taking another step back from the amorphous creature. She could feel her hair begin to float. She was standing right at the edge of the null-g field's perimeter. One more tiny little move backward, and it would almost certainly pull her inside. "Yes, I do."

"But wouldn't that be so much fun?" the geldancer responded, gesturing toward the newly created, and very confused looking biogel k'v'ky. "Think of it! Two blissfully buggy new sisters of the hive? An amorous couple of gooey mouthed lovers? A fine pair of sexy little black biogel bug butts? Hmm? Yes? Just say the word! That's all that it takes!"

Chyka looked toward the thoroughly

bemused Tashi and then back to the geldancer.
"How about no?"

"No? Really? Are you sure?" the geldancer questioned, slithering closer to the increasingly irate snow leopardess. "Because you would look amazing with a shiny black bug butt. Absolutely fucking amazing!"

Chyka tensed up, waiting for the creature to advance and shove her into the mod tube's embrace.

"And think of all the beautiful ladies who would enjoy letting you suck on their faces all day," the geldancer cooed. "And the boys. Oh, you would have so much fun with the boys, wouldn't you? Mmm!"

Chyka grimaced. She'd never thought about the rowa in those terms. She didn't really want to. The idea that anyone would be insane enough to copulate with those vile, smelly orifices was simply outrageous. Then again, the biogel versions weren't nearly as nasty. But

still.

"No? What about something else rowa?" the geldancer soothed as she slid just a little closer to the mortified snow leopardess. "There are several very fascinating and equally interactive shapes to choose from, you know. Or perhaps you can't decide? Why don't you roll the die again? Let fate choose for you."

Chyka looked down at the purple dodecahedron that she was still holding in her hand. For a brief, deeply unsettling moment, there seemed to be no escape. Then a moment of rational clarity came over her. "No," she replied, slowly stepping to one side, clear of the danger posed by the mod tube. Her hair fell back into place. "No. Not right now."

"Ah! *You* are no fun! Very well, then. Next time, perhaps? Next time, it'll be yes though, I think. Hmm?" the geldancer responded, shaking her head in disappointment. "Very well. Until then, do enjoy your new pet, hmm?"

As suddenly as the geldancer had made her nature known, she vanished into thin air with a loud, gooey *schlop!* The sickly sweet odor that permeated the mod chamber briefly intensified before fading away almost completely.

"What... what in the nine fucking heavenly hells what that?" Chyka demanded, turning toward the tigress with a snarl.

"That? That's what happens when Lady Shetari takes a very particular liking to someone's posterior," Tashie replied with a low chuckle. "I'm sure you've already heard how she can be. Always trying to spread the good old gooey blackness around wherever she can. She's got the right kind of charm to talk just about anyone into doing whatever it is that strikes her fancy at the moment. Get to be one of her favorites, though, and you get the extra-special treatment."

Chyka grimaced. "You get turned into one of

those things? I'd hardly call that a reward."

"Oh, I think you'd think otherwise if you got the chance to do it," Tashie responded with a grin. "I mean, imagine being able to shapeshift into whatever you wanted to be. Or being able to experience everything biogel has to offer without any risk of permanent effects. Yeah. I'd take that in a heartbeat. And so would you, I think."

"I don't know about that," Chyka replied with a shake of her head. As attractive as such freedom seemed to be on the face of it, it would almost certainly take all the fun out of it. All of the excitement. What was the point if there wasn't any risk? "It'd kind of take the kinky fun out of it, don't you think? Just being able to do anything without any risk? Without any mystery?"

Tashie shrugged.

"It'd be like playing a computer game with all sorts of game changing mods," Chyka noted.

"Yeah, it gives you the things you *think* are going to make it even more fun than it already is, but in the end, you wind up with a *very* different game that isn't even half as fun because you've screwed up everything that actually made it fun in the first place. The fun with the biogel is that the game only lets you pick one thing. One change. One transformation. You can go on as long as you like without choosing, but once you do, that's it. For live. Forever. That's the fun of it. Take it away... that's just cheating!"

"Well, I suppose if you look at it that way," Tashie responded with a soft smile and a shrug. "But that's a discussion for some other time, I think. Right now, it looks like you've got yourself a cute little new friend to look after."

"Oh! Right!" Chyka responded, suddenly remembering about the third occupant of the room. She turned to the very confused looking new biogel k'v'ky. "Sey'li! Oh... oh hell. Um. I... uh..."

"Don't apologize," Tashie advised. "It was her decision, in the end. It is what it is. And it is a shiny black bug butt. A very affectionate shiny black bug butt. As they always are."

"Uh..." Chyka murmured as the glistening black k'v'ky moved behind her and began to stroke her sides and hips. It seemed as if it was starting to act just like the geldancer had been acting. But that had clearly all been purely for show. This, however...

"Um... is it..." the little snow leopardess began as the k'v'ky slipped its firm, three fingered hands around to caress her belly.

"Walnut-brained?" Tashie responded with a laugh. "Eh. No. Not really. I mean, technically, yes. But it doesn't work the same way with biogel. Your mind doesn't change, no matter how much your body does. Well, it can't really be subtracted from. But it can be added to in certain cases. IN this case, it has acquired certain very powerful rowa inclinations.

Touching and cuddling. Getting all messy. Expanding the hive. Those kinds of inclinations."

"Ah," Chyka responded as the k'v'ky began to explore downward, sliding its fingers along the line where her legs began to curve forward from her abdomen. "So... um... what now?"

"What now?" Tashie replied with a chuckle. "Well, for now I expect that you'll be spending the night together, exploring the possibilities for mutual entertainment, if you know what I mean. You owe it that much, I think. And maybe the rest of the weekend, as well. Help it gets used to its new body. Maybe temper those rowa instincts so it can get back to doing its job as a model, hmm?"

"Well... alright," Chyka responded with a reluctant look over her shoulder, into the intensely inviting eyes of her new companion. "I guess that's fair."

"Fair indeed," Tashie replied, turning to

leave. "Just don't forget the test on Dawnsday! You've been doing so well in the practical training that it's the only thing between you and getting out on the floor. Make sure you're ready!"

"Yes ma'am!" Chyka replied as Tashie swiftly departed the mod chamber. She looked back over her shoulder. "I guess it's just you and me for now. Do you want to come back to my place and... um... have a little fun?"

The biogel k'v'ky silently pulled the little snow leopardess around until they were hugging face to face. Their eyes locked. The k'v'k'y took hold of the fey'li's head and drew it downward.

Chyka let out a deep sigh. Then she let the creature take her.

The creature took the little snow leopardess' entire muzzle into its tight, vulvic mouth. Liquid biogel forced its way into her nose, and between her tightly held lips. It filled her

mouth, her sinuses, and then her throat. It was a familiar sensation by now. Once frightening, it had become soothing. Relaxing even, as she stopped breathing for herself, and allowed the biogel to both impart oxygen and remove carbon dioxide directly from within her lungs.

As the creature sucked on Chyka's face, warm liquid biogel spread out over it. Over her cheeks. Over her ears. Over her eyes. Over her entire head.

A weird feeling came over the little snow leopardess. She could swear that her body felt small. Firm. Segmented. With insectoid hands and feet. But it wasn't her body. It was the k'v'ky's body she was feeling, almost, but not quite as if it were her own.

Oh... oh... this is... this is just like the sensory linking for the videos, Chy'ka thought to herself. It was very much like the feeling of being sensory linked through the biogel. Very real, but still somehow distant. The only

difference was that the training videos had always stopped short of letting her feel the final results of the accidents they were depicting. She'd felt the process of quite a number of different kinds of biogel transformation, but never the final form.

To Chyka's considerable surprise, feeling like a little segmented bug butt really didn't feel strange at all. It felt oddly pleasant to have no actual physical sex. And to have a body so firm, yet flexible in weird, unfamiliar ways. It felt natural. So natural, in fact, that it seemed as perfectly acceptable a body as the one she'd been born into.

The little snow leopardess savored the feel of the k'v'ky's body as their sloppy biogel kiss went of form what seemed like an eternity. One mouth encased within in the passionately affectionate embrace of another. Together encased within the living blackness. On and on it went, until it could simply go on no more.

Chyka just couldn't keep reality from intruding into her thoughts. She needed to get the little k'v'ky back to her room. Have a little fun. And then she needed to sleep. The last thing she wanted to do was loose study time sleeping all the next day. She just *had* to pass that test.

Chyka pulled away from the biogel k'v'ky. The biogel which covered her head immediately melted away. She looked the creature in the eyes. She smiled with intensely passionate sincerity. "Oh... oh yes. You and I really *are* going to have a good time," she purred. "Now. How about you come with me and when we get to my place? Then you can show me what else you can do with that sexy little buggy mouth of yours!"

The k'v'ky gazed longingly into the little snow leopardess' eyes. "Rb... lbl... glbl," it sputtered, before quite deliberately spitting a large glop of warm biogel onto her companion's chest.

Chyka giggled and took her new friend by the arm. "I'll take that as a yes."

FIVE

BONED

"Don't you worry about a thing, dear," Dr. Anshi Alluwa chuckled as the deeply tanned, elf-eared volunteer stood completely naked within the machine's shallow alcove, a halfhearted smile on her somewhat concerned looking face. "It's going to feel incredible. Just you wait and see!"

The machine was essentially a big, gray box, suspiciously sized to fit in the same space as a pair of Gelitech Gelivend biogel suit kit vending machines. A number of large cables and pipes led from its sides to places unknown, concealed behind the stage curtains. The whole thing seemed to throb with a dull, low rumble. Every so often, a sparkle of bright purple

energy would flicker somewhere behind the device, accompanied by a sharp electric buzz.

"I still don't understand what the purpose of this thing is," Chyka whispered to Gorin as they sat down among the demonstration's modest audience. There didn't really seem to be one, so far as she could tell. Not in a practical sense, at any rate. "I mean... just... why?"

"Beats me, lass," Gorin replied, stroking his long beard. Most of the others who were in the Gelarium demonstration theater seemed to be just as perplexed. "Can' say I've seen a damp fish quite like this'un before. Does'ne make a lick o' sense t' me."

"Why?" Dr. Alluwa responded, turning to face the little group. The glossy tigress looked Chyka right in the eye and grinned. "Science! Or, more accurately, the promotion and conduct of scientific education!"

"I thought it was entirely for the sheer,

outrageously macabre kinkiness of it," Lady Shetari Anwae remarked with a sly smirk. She was sitting in the front row, and eyeing the volunteer within the machine in rather covetous fashion.

"Sex sells!" Dr. Alluwa replied with broad grin. "And if sex sells science, then all the better, right?"

Chyka wondered at the two most famous figures in the biogel world. The one: the scientist, tigress creator of biogel in all its various forms, and all of biogel's technological accessories. The other: the ennobled Lady of the blackness, cheetah temptress extraordinaire, and prime promoter of the modern biogel lifestyle. Both were as glossy as the glistening black biogel they wore. Indeed, they supposedly *were* the biogel they wore. Whatever that was supposed to mean.

There were other notable personages in attendance of course. There was Y'mai Koma,

the teal skinned, mitanni artist responsible for the aesthetic appeal of modern biogel décor and art objects. Then there was Elarra Shai, the silver skinned y'runna psychologist and eroticist who had developed Gelitech's marketing strategy. There were also some of the Destiny Omega's other principle officers present, as well as a few curious dignitaries, not the least of whom was the Prefect, a grim looking, flat faced twig of a man who's concerns about the social effects of biogel were as numerous as his interests in exploring the results.

The focus of the whole affair was not on the famous personages present, of course. It was on the machine standing on the stage. It was called the Gelitech Anatomizer, and its purpose was almost as fascinating as it was deeply unsettling.

"Just say the magic words," Dr. Alluwa instructed the hesitant looking volunteer.

"Anatomize me," the volunteer said softly, nervously biting her lower lip as the machine came to life.

The audience gasped as a sizzling plane of bright purple energy came to life upon the alcove's metal grid floor.

The machine wasted no time in commencing its insidious work upon its willing subject's body. She let out a little, confused yelp as a fine mist formed where the boiling energy touched the soles of her feet. It immediately began to rise upward, washing over her feet and legs as she nervously squirmed. Everything it touched was transformed, but not into something horridly monstrous. It was transformed into pure, crystal clear biogel.

Of course, it would have been nothing special to simply transform a volunteer into crystal biogel. That was already quite a commonplace event. This machine was doing something different. Something new.

Something bizarre, and disturbingly amazing. It had left the volunteer's bones intact, albeit transformed into black, rather than clear, biogel.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Dr. Alluwa bubbled with extraordinary enthusiasm. "But there is so much more to anatomizing than just the exposure of an anatomized subject's biogel skeleton! For now, however, let's just watch as the demonstration progresses."

Again, the audience gasped as the searing purple plane washed up over the volunteer's thighs and hips. Were it not for the light reflecting on her glossy biogel 'skin', it would have looked as if it were burning away her flesh and leaving only a charred skeleton behind.

"I should note that the anatomizer can be set to preserve various internal structures," Dr. Alluwa explained. "One might choose to go straight to a deeper layer, as we are doing

here, or begin with muscles and move inward in successive anatomizings."

Chyka was as entranced as she was horrified as the energy sizzled its way up the volunteer's rib cage. It was hard for her to equate the process with the usual glistening. They were both transformations of flesh and bone into pure biogel, but this was so much more intense. Visceral. And very deeply unsettling to behold.

"Incredible, isn't it?" Dr. Alluwa asked with a broad grin. "But we haven't seen anything yet!"

The purple plane seethed its way upward, over the volunteer's shoulders. Then, with a sudden *snap* it vanished into a glow around her neck. This continued to rise, only fading away as it reached the base of her skull.

"Anatomizing routine complete," the machine announced in an artificial, androgynous drone.

"Just as with any other biogel conversion process, so long as the brain remains flesh, normal motive capability is fully preserved," Dr. Alluwa observed as she looked the uncertain volunteer over. "How do you feel?"

"Weird," the volunteer replied, looking down at her crystal biogel body and the black skeleton within. "Really... really... weird."

"Excellent!" Dr. Alluwa chirped. "Now, come sit down on the exam chair, and let us explore your newly revealed biogel skeletal structure in more intimate detail."

A large trap door opened in the stage floor. A medical exam chair rose up along with a lecture table to one side. The volunteer sat down, and looked at the scientist with an expression of considerable trepidation.

"Now, I'm sure you all know that if you get into a biogel mass along with someone who has a biogel body, and you try to cuddle a little too enthusiastically, you can slide your hands

right into their body and feel their biogel bones" Dr. Alluwa noted with a smile. "And if you didn't already know that, now you have something fun to try the next time you bed a jelly-butt!"

Chyka grimaced. "For real?"

Gorin grunted. "For real. Kind'e ruins sexy time. One moment yer doin' the bone'in, the next, yer doin' bones."

Chyka shuddered. "Eww!"

Gorin chuckled. "T's quite a s'prise, lemme tell ye. Not that I mind me some s'prises now n' then. Cuz'..."

Chyka winced. "T.M.I.!"

"Anatomizing takes this principle one incredible step further," Dr. Alluwa explained as she stood next to the volunteer. She reached down to caress the nervous woman's thigh. "Now, allow me to demonstrate just how, and

marvel, if you will, at the incredible opportunity it can offer for students exploring the potentials of a scientifically focused personal educational future!"

Chyka clenched her teeth as she watched the scientist slide her hand right into the crystal clear gel of the volunteer's thigh, and wrap her fingers around the glistening black femur within. "Oh... goddess!"

"Don't mind me," Dr. Alluwa purred to the wide-eyed volunteer as the glistening black bone parted from its neighbors. "So. Tell us. How does this feel?"

"Um... different," the volunteer replied as the scientist drew the femur out of her leg.

"But not unpleasant, I hope?" Dr. Alluwa asked.

"No," the volunteer replied. "It's just... weird."

"Incredible, isn't it?" Dr. Alluwa said, turning back to the audience and holding the femur aloft with both hands for all to see. "All I need to do is slide my hand into her biogel substance and will the bone or bones I desire into parting from their neighbors! Then, out they come! And, with not the least bit of inconvenience to the subject!"

The audience murmured approval.

"Now, please carefully watch what happens when I reinsert it!" Dr. Alluwa declared, sliding the bone back into her subject's thigh. All by itself, it returned to its proper place. "Is that not the most incredible thing?"

The audience applauded.

"The anatomizer will allow biogel clad students to engage with a living subjects anatomical features in a fully interactive fashion, removing and replacing muscles, organs, and bones virtually at will," Dr. Alluwa stated with a broad grin. "And without any

lasting effect on the subject at all! Now! Let us try something far more dramatic!"

The volunteer squirmed as the scientist slid both hands into the crystal biogel at the sides of her rib cage. "Oh! OH!" she moaned as her whole spine, rib cage, and pelvis parted from her limb bones. "Ah... oh! OH!"

Dr. Alluwa smiled at her subject's confused look. "It feels especially strange, doesn't it?" she asked as she pulled the whole mass of glistening black biogel bone from her body.

"Oh!" the volunteer murmured, jaw agape as she watched so much of her skeleton part ways with her crystal clear chest and belly. "Ohhhhh!"

The audience applauded enthusiastically as Dr. Alluwa held the mass of bonded biogel bone aloft.

"As you can see, it is fully bonded just as any good anatomical model should be," Dr. Alluwa

said as she began to bend and twist the glistening black spine. "And, as you can also see, it articulates exactly as you would expect from a real skeleton, were it still embedded properly within its host body. The reproduction of the original in biogel is perfect in every way!"

Chyka squirmed as the scientist wiggled the glossy black bones. The bones didn't bother her so much as the very confused volunteer. It was impossible to know what she was feeling. Was her torso a structureless mass of jiggly crystalline jelly, or had the biogel replaced the structure of the bone? And what was going through her mind as she watched the arguably mad scientist parading her biogel bones across the stage like a simple prop?

"You can clearly see how valuable a tool this will be in the education of our future biogel clad students," Dr. Alluwa said as she placed the bones against the volunteer's chest. "But! But what if the subject tires of being an

educational, anatomical plaything?"

"Ah! Oh!" the volunteer moaned as the black biogel bones sank into her body and returned to their proper place.

"Eventually, the subject will desire to conclude their particular employment," Dr. Alluwa noted, turning to the volunteer. "Let us discuss the possibilities, shall we?"

The volunteer nodded, stood up, and returned to the machine's alcove.

"When most of us are done being biogel coated mortals, we will have ourselves glistened," Dr. Alluwa observed with a smile. "We will become one hundred percent biogel dolls. Barely animate toys for the enjoyment of others, as it were. Or perhaps for some other, more esoteric purpose. But what of our wonderful anatomized educational tools? What will happen to them?"

The audience murmured.

"Anatomizing is not for the faint of heart," Dr. Alluwa explained. "Once it is done, it can not readily be undone. Even when glistened, the subject will still be the same sort of anatomical toy as before, only left in the same virtually inanimate state as a normal gummy. On the positive side, this allows students to remove and explore the subject's skull. On the negative side... well... is there really a negative side?"

The audience again murmured.

"As touch is the only sense left to a gummy, it stands to reason that more physical interaction is better," Dr. Alluwa noted. "But in an educational setting, certain body features can become rather inconvenient if left available without supervision. But what if we think outside the box a bit? What if we take this a little bit further? Shall we?"

Chyka grimaced. "She's crazy."

Gorin nodded in agreement. "Aye. She is."

Dr. Alluwa turned to the volunteer. "Just say the word."

The volunteer gave a deep sigh and a resigned shrug. "Complete me."

The plane of purple energy reappeared right where it had left off. As the volunteer nervously bit her lower lip, the sizzle floated upward. It only lasted a few short moments. The volunteer moaned softly as it consumed her head. Her glossy black skull was put on full display. The clear biogel that encased it bore her hesitant features. Her body was left limp, though held upright within the alcove by some unseen force.

"Beautiful, is she not?" Dr. Alluwa asked. "But this is not the final step in her journey today. Though leaving her as-is would be perfectly acceptable for certain intended destination environments, most will require a further, final stage of anatomizing. It is time to remove the baggage of her crystal shape, and

the inevitable intimate shenanigans that would no doubt befall it should it be offered for use without proper supervision."

The audience was silent.

"Initiate final reduction," Dr. Alluwa called out.

The sizzling purple energy again formed at the subject's feet. This time, as it rose, it stripped away the crystal biogel, leaving only the glistening black skeleton behind.

"Ah! Wonderful to behold, isn't it?" Dr. Alluwa said with a triumphant grin as the anatomizer rapidly reduced its subject to a bare biogel skeleton. "Now, our lovely, still very much alive and conscious subject can help educate without the attendant sexual distractions that come along with a normally shaped, anatomically correct biogel body!"

Chyka shuddered as the scientist took hold of the bare biogel skeleton and carried it from

the machine to the lecture table. "Goddess!"

"There," Dr. Alluwa said as she laid the skeleton on the lecture table. "As perfect a skeleton as one could hope for, and so subtly joined and articulated that one would be hard pressed to notice just where the parts are all held together. And! And the bones are all still perfectly removable and re-attachable just as before, but without required the wearing of a biogel suit to accomplish it!"

The audience applauded.

"This concludes the formal demonstration of the anatomizer!" Dr. Alluwa said as she laid the skeleton on the lecture table. "You are all welcome to come up the table here and explore the interactive possibilities that our newly anatomized skeleton offers. I will answer any questions and, if anyone should like to try the anatomizer out for themselves, just take off any clothing you might be wearing, step inside the machine and say those magic words:

'anatomize me!'. Skeletons only today. All sexes and physiotypes!"

SIX

SHE'S ONLY A MODEL

"Hey there! How are you doing this wonderful morning?" Chyka purred as she waved to the Gelitech Gelarium's newest potential customer. "Do you know the Gelarium rules, or would you like me to go over them with you?"

"I've been here before," the teal skinned elf-ear answered with a smile as she passed the felid by. "All set, thank you!"

"Alright," the leopardess replied with a halfhearted smile and a nod. "Have fun!"

An astute observer might have noted a hint of desperation in the Chyka's otherwise smooth voice. She hadn't had a single catch all morning. Not even the hint of a nibble. She

was going to have get someone interested. Anyone, really. It was her first day working the floor as a proper biogel model, and she really wanted to impress her boss, the intimidating Matron T'myne. So far, however, things weren't looking good.

"No bites?" the all too familiar voice of the Gearium's tall, purple skinned, ram-horned senior matron rolled into Chyka's ears like the thunder of a thousand sheep charging headlong into a lush, ungrazed field. "Not even a university student looking for a little social time? You need to loosen up. Be more inviting. If you know what I mean. And I am sure that you do."

"Yes, ma'am," Chyka replied, blushing under her fur. "I do."

"Keep trying," Matron T'myne responded sternly, with a shake of her long, deep blue mane. "I expect something today. Even if it's just getting one of the students to drag you

around yapping. Every mind is a mind that have ideas put into it, even if the results aren't immediate."

"Yes, ma'am," Chyka answered.

"Very well," Matron T'myne said, turning back the way she'd come. "At the end of your shift, come to my office and we shall discuss your day's performance."

"Yes, ma'am," Chyka replied, watching as the frowning mitanni tromped off in search of some other newbie to harangue. She sighed deeply and wondered exactly how she was supposed to get bites when she'd been assigned to the Gelarium's spaceport ramp entrance. They only people coming in from there today were students taking a shortcut between their practical flight classes aboard one of the Mashiva Mariners' University's training ships and the University itself.

Chyka bit her lip and watched the Matron as vanished into the maze of potted plants and

holographic displays that filled eastern end of the Gelarium's Main Hall floor. Her eyes turned upward to the balconies of the four upper levels, filled as they were with biogel steeped experiences both conventional and exotic. Everything was painted in a middling shade of grayish violet, from the high arches that helped to support the Gelarium's soaring roof, to the balconies and railings themselves. Bright purple lighting panels on the inner arch surfaces, covering the lift tubes, and elsewhere around the hall cast the whole place in a weird, purple glow, quite deliberately reminiscent of the ancient Xinta Temple and it's ruined annex along the Mashiva River to the east.

A grand, purple glowing crystal sphere loomed over the very center of the main hall, where a similarly proportioned cross-hall divided the old shipyard office building into four equal sections. This cross-hall opened out onto the courtyards of the Gelitech employee residences to the north, and the Biogel Hotel to the south. The latter was a luxury hotel

specifically catering to biogel clad visitors to the city, with all of the amenities one might expect a biogel wearing guest to need for both work and pleasure.

Wherever she looked, Chyka could see people. But they weren't the kind of people she needed. Most were obviously just students hanging around, though some of the people were clad all in glossy black. Some of these were biogel clad students, most likely, but most were biogel models, just like the nervous little snow leopardess herself. Their job was to tempt the rest into buying into the whole biogel lifestyle. Or, better yet, to tempt them into trying out some of biogel's more exotic qualities right then and there. Qualities that so often had quite extreme, and quite permanent, physical effects.

Playing the temptress was where all the fun was. Getting a chance to do that meant getting someone to ask Chyka for guidance, though. Getting someone to do that was proving far

harder than she ever could have imagined. Everyone she'd encountered so far was just passing through, or using the Gelarium as a hangout while waiting for their next classes.

It was only in the evenings that things started to really get spicy at the Gelarium. That was when the students were mostly replaced by tourists. Curious tourists looking to see all the kinky goings-on for themselves. And if they were going to have anything to see, some of them were going to have to get more intimately involved. That was when the easy pickings were. And that was when the little snow leopardess really wanted to work.

During the last week of her training, however, Chyka had only been partnered with more experienced models stationed off in the boonies. Sometimes it was greeting tourists in the bus station beneath the Gelarium. At other times it had been doing some in-person advertising off in the subway station on the other side of Anwae Arena, or in the spaceport

passenger terminal.

Only once had the little snow leopardess been asked to do anything interesting. She'd been asked to dive into the deep biogel pool that ran down the length of the cross-hall for the benefit of a rather fancy looking group of tourists. The point had been to show that it was a perfectly safe thing to do. Indeed, it was no different than sinking into a biogel bed, only with significantly more opportunities for totally anonymous intimate shenanigans.

But, much to Chyka's considerable chagrin, there seemed to be no clear route to getting assigned to the evening shift. There was no set procedure, as far as she could tell. Her fellow models didn't seem interested in offering her advice. Not even Tashie, who at the moment was off at some private event, doing who knew what for, and perhaps to, the lucky attendees.

"This sucks," Chyka murmured to herself as she turned back to the doors. "Everyone talks

about how much fun it is, but I'm just not seeing it anymore."

Chyka's biogel wife offered her a warm, cozy feeling in response to her frustrations. It was a brief pleasant sensation that stood out quite strongly amid the cool, fall air that filled the Gelarium's large, open main hall. It was also a sharp reminder that she was very much alone in her quest to prove herself. Not even the wife who coated her little fey'li body with her glistening black substance could offer any suggestions, save the occasional opinion formed as a wave of pure emotional investment.

The Gelarium's purple glass door again slid silently open. In stepped a smallish woman, tan skinned with shortish, though quite pointy elf-ears. She wore a silky, cream colored, robe-like dress fastened around her waist with a lovely violet sash. It was so unlike the attire typically worn by the locals that Chyka had to look twice just to make sure she wasn't

imaging things.

The strange woman definitely wasn't a university student. And she definitely wasn't from on-world. But what had she been doing out on the spaceport ramp? Was she some student's guest, taking a tour of the University flight line? That seemed to be the most logical conclusion, but there was something odd about her smooth, graceful walk, and her extremely formal poise that suggested otherwise.

"Oh! Uh... hi! How are you doing this morning?" Chyka said, flubbing her practiced greeting out of sheer nervousness at the prospect of the stern Matron seeing her failing yet again. "Are you familiar with the Gelarium rules or shall I go over them with you?"

"Rules?" the brunette beauty inquired with an extremely puzzled look on her face. "As in... rules that are not typical for a market or shop? What a curious concept!"

"Well, yes," Chyka replied with a nod.

"Owing to the particular effects and potential hazards presented by the products, experiences, and general environment on offer here within the Gelitech Gelarium, there are certain rules in place that anyone who passes the yellow line there on the floor is assumed to both fully understand and unconditionally consent to. Shall I explain them?"

"What an unusual thing for a commonplace market," the woman replied, cocking her head to one side in overtly imperious fashion. "Of course I should like to know these rules. Pray do tell me what they are."

"Excellent!" Chyka replied with a warm smile. She was doing everything she could not to show how pleased she was to get her first real nibble, but her tail had other ideas. It flicked from side to side with giddy enthusiasm, much to the visible bemusement of the strange visitor. "First, you must know that entering the Gelarium is an act done entirely at your own risk. There are many

things here which can impart very permanent alterations to your body should you come into contact with them. Also, some things may allow other participants to anonymously interact with your body in one fashion or another, should you choose to participate yourself. If you personally engage with any of these things, by choice or by accident, then you fully consent to whatever acts or effects are imparted on your body."

"Interesting," the woman noted quite dryly. "I suppose that is not to be unexpected for such a purveyor of such decidedly unpleasant fetishistic fantasies as this. I am already quite informed upon this establishment's... reputation. And I must say that I do not find it particularly pleasing."

"Secondly, most biogel processes cannot be stopped once they have begun," Chyka continued, wondering why the woman had come to the Gelarium if she'd found it's reputation to be so unpleasant. "Should you

chose to engage with with any of the biogel offerings here, you will have no choice but to see it through to the end. No stopping. No reversing. Permanent means permanent, for real."

"Fair enough," the woman responded. "Is that all?"

"Thirdly, if you do experience any such effects which convert you entirely into biogel, your new form will then be utilized for the purposes which you yourself desire only should you choose to fill out the appropriate paperwork," Chyka continued. "Otherwise, your new form becomes the property of Gelitech, to be utilized for the purposes laid out in the policy guide, which can be obtained at the information desk. Certain experiences may have other specific conditions, also contained in the policy guide."

"Very well," the woman again responded. "Is that all, or were the rules composed by the

same individual who crafted the vile black slime that pervades this place with its deeply unpleasant odor?"

"One last thing, and that's all," Chyka answered with a growing knot in her stomach. Whatever this woman was doing in the Gelarium, she clearly didn't seem like the type to explore its offerings. All the little snow leopardess could do was finish up and hope to the seven heavens that the Matron wasn't still watching her. "You may direct any further questions to the information desk attendants. Or... I can accompany you in order to give you a more personal perspective on whatever might pique your curiosity."

The woman raised her eyebrow. "Indeed? You would escort me dark hive of... of whatever it is? That would be quite splendid. I would very much like your company and your responses to certain questions that I very much desire to have answered. Pertaining to certain... related matters. And you will do

this?"

"I would love to!" Chyka replied, even as the robed beauty whisked past and beckoned her to follow. "Oh! I take it you have something specific you're interested in?"

"How very perceptive of you," the woman remarked as led her biogel clad advisor toward the very center of the Gelarium, where the crystal sphere cast its glow directly down onto the glistening black surface of the biogel pool. "I do have a particular interest. A very particular interest. And I very much expect you to fully satisfy it."

"Wonderful!" Chyka responded with barely repressed enthusiasm. She was absolutely chuffed with having someone to escort for the

first time, even if there seemed to be little prospect that the woman would be receptive to her temptations. That was at least the bare minimum of what the Matron had wanted, and it made the performance review at the end of her shift seem much less intimidating.

"Might I ask what it is you'd like to learn about?" the little snow leopardess inquired as her potential customer looked about until she gazed one of the elevators that ran up and down the corners where the cross-hall and main hall met. She started to turn toward the lift, but stopped short to look down into the undulating mass of biogel that filled the deep pool to within about two meters of its gently curved rim.

"Well, you see," the woman began as she looked down at the glimmering, obsidian black goo. "You see..."

The woman paused and sighed deeply at the sight of the massive quantity of liquid biogel. A

look of utter disgust washed over her face. It was still quite hard for the little snow leopardess to believe that someone visiting the Gelarium would really come thinking the substance revolting, despite her protestations. Perhaps she was merely displeased with the lack of any railings to prevent incautious visitors from falling right in. Not even the pair of narrow bridges that crossed the pit were provided with a rail. There was a warning line on the floor, near the very edge, but that was all.

"Would you like to know about the biogel pool?" Chyka remarked, following the woman's displeased gaze. "It's quite a bit of fun for those seeking a relatively benign first time biogel experience. No biogel suit required. Though I have to warn you, anonymous intimate encounters are always a possibility. In fact, one might even say they're the pool's intended purpose."

Chyka had only been in the pool once

herself, the culmination of that dive for the well-to-do tourists. Despite its huge volume, she'd found her hips in some anonymous paramour's hands the moment she'd started to get her bearings. She didn't have time to think before a wave of heat had washed over her. There had been no pretense of foreplay. No exploration of the invisible living shapes that had found one another within the all-concealing blackness. Her unseen lover had just gotten straight down to business, and what a business it had been!

Perhaps the little snow leopardess would have returned to the pool since that day, were it not for the fact that 'anonymous' isn't always what it seems to be. Anonymous sex with the only male in the pool isn't anonymous at all. On the positive side, she'd gained a much less than anonymous lover to periodically share a biogel bed with. A shortish, bearded lover with a penchant for speaking quite unintelligibly on occasions.

"No, I do not need to know any more than that," the woman replied with a sneer. She turned back to the elevator and the doors whooshed open. "My lovely daughter was a superb student at the neighboring university not that very long ago. She was quite the, shall we say, independent type. She cared nothing for my advice or admonishment. She became interested in things. Uncouth things. Things which I could never, ever find myself approving of."

"Ah," Chyka noted softly as they stepped into the elevator. She could already see exactly where this was all heading. It was a fairly common story, and one of the first motivating factors discussed in the Gelitech training material. Someone does something rather permanently transformative. Close family member comes looking to see what could have possibly convinced them to do what they did. She would have to be extra careful to remain as neutral as possible. Those were the rules. It was bad enough to have one potentially irate

family member poking around. Setting off a chain reaction of familial hostility was something no one wanted to be responsible for, let alone so new a model as she.

"Never in a million years," the woman continued. "*Never*. But my daughter was too hot headed. Too caught up in her newfound fetish to care how I might feel about the matter."

"And, you're interested in learning about what she did to herself?" Chyka asked, trying to steer the conversation away from past irritation and toward more immediate and engaging topics.

"So very perceptive!" the woman remarked with a wry smile as the elevator doors closed. "But how am I to know what she had done to herself? I am told time, and time, and time again that there is no way to know. That there is no record whatsoever of what vile thing that she became, or where she was sent to spend

the rest of her horrid new existence. They say that keeping no record is the rule. So no one can pick out a specific individual for future abuse merely because of who they might have been. Do you know how purely preposterous that is?"

"It's... certainly inconvenient at times," Chyka replied. Inconvenient indeed. But also quite necessary. Domestic abuse and sex trafficking were societal problems that existed everywhere, though not nearly so much in the fey'li Empire as elsewhere. Even so, the potential for xenoexperiences, such as those offered by biogel, to be used to render such non-consenting victims even more helpless than they already were was an ever-present concern.

For all the insidious possibilities that biogel offered, it had been created exclusively to cater to the erotic lifestyle fantasies of fully consenting adults. Steps had to be taken to keep it from becoming a tool to facilitate or

enhance criminal behavior. Just checking a purchaser's ImperID and ensuring their record was clear of felonious behavior was far from enough. Other steps had to be taken.

Anonymization was one such step, and a highly effective one at reducing targeted abuse. But if any soul containing mass of biogel was abused in any harmful fashion, there were other measures in place. Brutal measures, generally reserved for slavers, the sole class of criminal typically considered to be outside the bounds of normal law.

The mobility of minds within biogel was the principle tool to mitigate abuse. If a biogel body containing a conscious mind was pressed too hard, or even destroyed, the mind within would simply shift to another biogel mass. The preference was toward a nearby mass of active, energized biogel, such as the biogel core within a starship or ground facility. Any mass would do in a pinch, however, so long as it wasn't close to the body from which it had

departed.

Then, of course, there was the recently formed Imperial Obsidian Guard. A branch of the Imperial Constitutional Enforcement Department, the Obsidian Guard was tasked with enforcing the modified rights of all individuals who might be inclined to give themselves over to various permanently life altering xenoexperiences. In the case of biogel, that meant enforcing the rights of transformed individuals to be free of any use or abuse not consented to, by explicit agreement, or by default conditions, prior to their biogel transfiguration. The unit was even rumored to have access to certain tools which could identify acts of abuse no matter where they might occur. Rumors that were backed up by their propensity to show up out of nowhere, in places so remote as to be otherwise inaccessible to conventional law enforcement, with exact knowledge of what criminal even had occurred, and how it had taken place.

"So, what am I to think? What am I to do, now that I am in this place where my daughter... became... something?" the woman questioned as the little snow leopardess hesitated. "I must do something, must I not? I must learn the truth of her experience. But... but how? Tell me. How?"

"I... I can't lie," Chyka replied with a defeated shrug. "I'm honestly not sure if it's even possible at all, let alone possible for anyone who works here at the Anwae Arena Gelarium. The only way, I think, would be if she put herself up in a charity auction. There's nothing anonymous about that. But if she'd done that, then they would have told you already."

"No, no," the woman said, shaking her head at the little snow leopardess. "I have quite given up on that course of action already. I want you to tell me how I can know the experience. How I can know what she felt. How I can know the horror that gripped her

mind as her beautiful, tender body was mutated into... into... this vile, black sludge. How?"

"Well... I can try to explain what she likely felt," Chyka responded with another shrug. It was a question with no easy answer. Indeed, it was a question with no real answer at all. No one who experienced such a thing was left in any state to tell the tale. At least, that was how the little snow leopardess was obligated to express it. If her experience with the geldancer in the mod chamber had shown her anything, the reality of the situation was almost certainly quite different. "But I have to be clear. There's really no way to put it into words that can truly capture the actual sensations of becoming biogel. I can't even find words to truly capture the sensations of swimming in a pool of it, even though I've done that myself. The only way to truly know... well, unfortunately, the only way to truly know is actually do it."

The woman frowned as the lift began to rise in response to someone else's call. "Of course," she sighed. "Then I suppose that I shall have to do just that. And I expect you to show me how."

"Are... are you really sure that's what you want to do?" Chyka questioned quite earnestly as the lift headed upward to some floor unknown. "Why don't we go back down to the information desk so you can fill out the usage conditions paperwork and think it over a bit more?"

"No," the woman replied with a stern, determined expression on her face. "My mind was made up long before I set foot in this wretched place. I shall follow my daughter in becoming the vile black slime."

"Are you sure?" Chyka again asked, concerned that her first catch wasn't actually thinking things through. The woman kept speaking of biogel in such negative terms that

the little snow leopardess felt obligated to try and force her to start having second thoughts. "Are you sure you don't maybe want to get yourself a biogel suit like mine? Try out the lifestyle for a bit instead of running headlong into full transformation?"

"No," the woman again replied. "I have made up my mind, and I have every intention of seeing my decision through to its bitter end. Now. Show me the slowest, most torturous method of being turned into black goo that exists in this place."

"Well... I wouldn't actually call anything here torturous," Chyka responded with a resigned shrug. It looked like there was really nothing the little snow leopardess could do or say to change the woman's mind. At least she could try to help the woman understand that biogel wasn't anything like she seemed to think it was. If she would listen, that is. "The slowest stuff... well, that's the stuff that gives people time to express their feelings, and I

haven't heard anyone complaining yet. Quite the opposite, it fact."

"I will be the sole judge of that," the woman snapped as the lift doors opened. She led the little snow leopardess straight out, past an ashen skinned university student and onto the sixth floor balconies. "Just bring me into the presence of that which I have expressed my desire to be introduced to, and instruct me in the manner by which I shall induce it to take my body and defile it."

"Well... okay," Chyka answered as she tried to figure out just what would please the woman most. She started to wonder if the woman's expressed opinions were more bluster and posturing than they were an indicator of how she felt about the whole affair. "How about something that lets you choose the pace? Then you can take it as fast or as slow as you like. Or maybe something where you can watch yourself be transformed into liquid biogel? If you want to be liquefied.

Or maybe...

"Being dissolved into that foul goo before my very own eyes would be much to my... complete and utter disgust," the woman replied. "Show me how I shall have it done to my body."

Chyka nodded and gestured down the line of private experience chamber doors. "Okay. We're on the floor with the private rooms. Room 620 has the sort of thing I think you might be looking for. You're free to engage with it on your own, unless you want me to go in with you for company."

"Please do," the woman declared as she led the little snow leopardess down the walkway, toward the suggested door. "There is no point in hiding my final suffering from a stranger's eyes. Even a stranger such as you and your... corruption. Gaze upon whatever horror it is that this infernal thing does to my by tender body and take whatever perverse pleasure that

your kind seem so callously free to take in the sight of such things."

"Okay," Chyka responded as she followed the woman closely. The more she listened to the woman speak, the more she wondered what the woman was trying to hide behind all those excessively expressive words. Was she trying to mask fear? Nervousness? Anxiety? Or was there something else she was trying to conceal? "Um... you do understand that this isn't going to hurt or anything, right?"

The woman snorted contemptuously. "Do not think for one moment that I am fool enough to believe that. A thing cannot rend a body asunder and not be truly absolute torture."

"But... biogel doesn't actually do that," Chyka responded. It was hard enough for her to get her own biogel steeped mind around it half the time. Trying to explain it to someone who'd even experienced any of it first hand

seemed almost impossible. "You become the biogel. But the biogel also becomes you. It maintains you all the way through the process as you become a single thing. A unified organism. It really doesn't matter what change of shape is taking place. Or even if you become liquid. You just kind of merge and morph into something new. Something entirely made of biogel. And you remain fully conscious throughout. And beyond."

"They really do brainwash you with their foul marketing, don't they?" the woman muttered, shaking her head as she stopped in front of the door. "No wonder my daughter was tricked into casting herself the embrace of that vile slime. How could she possibly resist such silken platitudes of slithering black absorption into... hell knows only what?"

Chyka didn't know what to say. She stood by silently as the door hissed open. The woman was playing the game right to the end. Whatever that game actually was.

"Now. What do I need to do?" the woman demanded as she stepped through the doorway. "How do I effect my... dissolution?"

Chyka followed the woman into the dimly lit chamber. It was appointed in the sort of simple, though unique fashion that was common to all of the Gelarium's private chambers. Four potted coniferous shrubs stood in the corners. At the very center, beneath a dimly glowing lantern, was a crystal clear, glossy black block, roughly one meter to a side. Its top was dished out on the far side, giving it the shape of a large, blobulous armchair.

Facing the unusual chair was the chamber's sole piece of artwork. A glossy black torso jutted out from a sheen of blackness. This was confined within an oval shaped frame of finely polished bronze. The remainder of the room's walls and ceiling were covered in mirror panels, while the floor was the same black glass as everywhere else in the Gelarium.

"Do not tell me that... that thing... is..." the woman murmured as her eyes fixed upon the shape on the wall.

"The lovely Miss Mawra Miashu," Chyka answered, stepped past the woman to run her fingers over the shape's featureless head. "Voted into this lovely mounting by the audience at the conclusion of the most recent Gelitech Public Exhibition Biogel Games match at Anwae Arena. What the home team may have lost to a bunch of randomly selected Biogel Games fans, the Gelarium gained in this magnificent memento of the fun they had that evening."

"I hope that you do not think you are going to make me into something like that," the woman remarked with a glare at the little snow leopardess.

"No!" Chyka replied with as warm a smile as she could muster in the gaze of the woman's fiery hazel eyes. "Certainly not. That's hardly

the dissolution you're seeking, is it? No, your experience will be this lovely mass of crystal biogel here, and I can assure you, it's going to be quite a ride."

"Pft!" the woman spat. "I have no need of your purring and cooing over my coming terror. Just tell me what I must do to consummate it."

"Well, first off, you should denude," Chyka instructed in a very matter of fact way. She was done trying to draw out the woman's motivations. If the woman wanted to keep her secrets, then so be it. "You don't strictly have to, but if you want to watch yourself dissolve, then you certainly don't want any pesky clothing in the way."

Without a word, the woman undid her lovely violet sash and her cream colored dress fell open. To the little snow leopardess' surprise, she was wearing not a single stitch of fabric underneath. Was this the woman's

normal mode of dress, or had she just come prepared for her encounter with the biogel?

"Now what?" the woman asked as she again eyed the glistening black trophy on the wall with an expression of utter disdain.

"Just sit down on the crystal biojelly," Chyka replied with a gesture toward the dished out 'seat'. "Then just relax and let it take you. But let me assure you, it's not going to feel anything like you might think it will."

The woman snorted as she tossed her dress aside. She walked around the shimmering crystal mass and plopped her rather generously proportioned rump right onto its perfectly polished surface. "You are toying with me, aren't you?" she sighed, with a sharp tone of irritation in her voice, when nothing happened. "Do you think I am not serious in my desire to face complete and utter dissolution?"

Chyka walked around behind the seated

woman and placed her glossy black hands on the woman's stiff shoulders. "You said you wanted slow and... all that. Just let it take its time."

The woman was about to offer some scowling retort when her countenance changed from one of irate imperiousness to one of sudden, dawning realization. Her soft, tan posterior had begun to slowly sink into the crystal biojelly's highly viscous mass. "Oh!" she exclaimed as the cool, sticky slime took hold of her. She pressed her hands down against the jelly's glossy surface in an apparent effort to steady herself. All that she achieved, however, was to sink her hands straight into the goo, trapping her firmly within its unyielding embrace. "Ah! My hands! What... what is this... what is it doing?"

"Just what you wanted it to do," Chyka replied with a smirk. It was certainly just the sort of thing that the woman had asked for. Whether or not it was what she'd actually

wanted, that was another matter entirely. "Just relax. Who knows. You might actually enjoy it."

"Enjoy this?" the woman groaned with an even mix of confusion and consternation, as she continued to slowly sink down into the crystal biojelly. "This... this... cold, wet, sticky, slimy, tight... oh. Oh! What is that? What is *that*?"

The woman's descent into the crystal biojelly was now accompanied by the spreading outward of a very different looking sort of biogel. The glistening blackness had first formed where the crystal jelly was touching the woman's skin, around her trapped hands, along her sinking rump, and between her quivering legs. From there, it spread rapidly outward, over her legs, up her belly and back, and up her arms.

On the surface, the spreading black biogel appeared to be forming a coating on the woman's body just like the one that coated

Chyka's own body. But, she knew, this was only how it looked. In reality, it wasn't a biogel coating. It was a biogel transformation. And it was subsuming the woman to her very core.

"Oh! OH! That feels... that feels..." the woman stammered as the crystal biojelly pushed up between her glossy, obsidian legs and around her slender waist.

"Weird?" Chyka inquired as the spread of the blackness washed up over the woman's chest and shoulders. "Bizarre? Alien, perhaps?"

The woman grimaced, though her contorted facial expression couldn't hide the low, sonorous huffs that came along with each breath.

"It feels so cool and uniform, doesn't it?" Chyka purred. "So plain and bland, except for that special little place between your legs. Do you know why that is?"

The woman bit her lower lip as spread of the blackness slowed, but didn't quite stop. It crept up her neck as the crystal biojelly closed in over her thighs. It began to surround her lower legs and draw them inward.

"It's because your body is actually transforming into the biogel," Chyka cooed, pressing gently upon the woman's quivering shoulders. "It's because right now, everything below your neck is nothing but pure, unadulterated, living blackness. All of it. All the way down to your fingers and toes. Amazing, isn't it?"

"I... I suppose," the woman huffed as the blackness crept up under her ears and chin. Her legs were drawn fully into the jelly's mass, forced into a kneeling position as she sank down until her breasts were nearly resting upon its glossy surface. "So this. This... is all there it? Just this flat feeling of cold... cold... something? And the place where the seat of my motherhood lies? And that is all?"

"Oh, no," Chyka mused at the softening of the woman's steely demeanor. "What you are feeling now is just a brief stop on your journey into something so much more incredible! In a few short moments, you will start to dissolve. Experience total dissolution, as you said you so deeply desired. And then..."

"And then what?" the woman asked, her voice softening as the first little bubbles of blackness began to form on the surface of her calves and feet. "Oh! Why do I feel... fizzy? My feet! My legs! Oh... oh... oh my. It really is eating me!"

"Eating? No," Chyka soothed as the woman's feet and lower legs began to bubble away into little floating globules of blackness within the crystal clear mass of the biojelly. "It's taking your biogel body and absorbing it. Adding it to itself. And in such a short little time, it's going to add your mind to itself as well. And there it's going to stay until we pull it out and process you into something that I can all but

guarantee is going to be very, very much to your liking."

"My liking?" the woman huffed her breasts slid down into the crystal biojelly amid the cascade of little black spheres that were now parting from her hips and thighs. Her feet were already gone, and her calves were not far behind. "How can you possibly think that any of this... this... ugh! Why? Why doesn't it feel unspeakably painful? Why doesn't it make me want to retch? Why?"

"Because biogel feels good," Chyka responded as she pressed more firmly upon the woman's shoulders. The blackness on her face had washed over her ears and was spreading over her cheeks. "And it feels good because it doesn't give you any option to feel it otherwise."

"That's... sadistic," the woman moaned softly as her legs all but vanished into a cloud of little black bubbles. The crystal biojelly was

almost up to her shoulders, and the blackness was starting to spread around her lips and eyes. "So... so... I... I... I can't... can't help but..."

"Enjoy it?" Chyka inquired as she took her hands off the woman's shoulders, lest she too be drawn into the biojelly.

"Ye... yes," the woman nodded and moaned sensuously as the blackness spread over her nose and forehead. Her hair was shortening, drawn into her biogel scalp as the substance began to spread over her mouth. "Yes. Oh... oh... yes!"

Chyka smiled. "If you think this feels good, just you wait until everything is all said and done," she purred into the woman's ear. "When you spread your liquid form over the body of another. And make them all your own."

"Oh... oh... ohhhhhh!" the woman uttered as her lips were pulled together and sealed closed. Her face wavered and melted into a

featureless surface. What was left of her dissolving body shuddered as her perfectly smooth, round, glossy black head slid down into the biojelly.

Chyka watched as the woman's biogel shape bubbled itself away into a cloud of little black globules that momentarily filled the whole of the crystal biojelly. She couldn't help but wonder whether or not the woman's soul had been tied to one of the little globules or not. Had she been able to feel the whole of the biojelly as if it were her own body at some point? Perhaps even feeling the last moments of her own dissolution? She wondered. But not too much, lest she tempt herself into actually finding out.

The door to the private room slip open. "Heya Chyka! Matron T saw you with the Lady High Priestess Hira and wanted you to bring her to..." the silver haired, sable skinned morri chirped before hir eyes fixed upon the little black bubbled filling the crystal biojelly. "Oh...

oh my..."

"The Lady High..." Chyka replied with a frown. She'd never bothered to ask the woman's name, let alone anything else about her.

"Uh. Yeah," Du'vai replied with a sympathetic expression on his face. "The Lady High Priestess of the Vian Province of the world of Shubarri. Mistress of the Stars. Bringer of the Moonlight. Speaker of the..."

"I get it! I get it!" Chyka replied in confusion. She had no idea who the woman was. How was she supposed to know whether or not she was fair game? Was she fair game? Wouldn't someone have said something a lot sooner if she wasn't?

Du'vai shrugged. "So... um. You gonna tell the matron, or shall I?"

Chyka nervously bit her lower lip and awaited the judgment of Matron T'myne. It was hard enough having to sit there being glared at by the steely-eyed mitanni. Having to sit there being glared at, while being forced to look at that three liter bottle of Lady High Priestess infused blackness was another thing entirely.

"Don't think for one moment that I don't know," Matron T'myne finally rumbled as she tapped her fingers on the black glass surface of her intimidatingly large desk. "Don't think for one moment that I don't know about your friend Tashie and her little transgression. About the biogel wife she so carefully and deliberately selected for you. And about who that biogel wife used to be. Such things cannot take place here in the Gelarium without my knowing every little sordid detail. So don't think..."

Chyka blushed beneath her fur. "I... I didn't have anything to do with that," she sputtered plaintively, unsure of what Tashie's little sin had to do with the current matter at hand. Besides, of course, the apparent fact that Matron T'myne didn't seem to have any issue doing the same with the little snow leopardess own first 'catch'.

"Of course you didn't," Matron T'myne answered with a low, almost sadistic laugh. "Bu that doesn't just make you completely innocent of being thoroughly steeped in the transgression of her perpetrating, does it?"

"I... I don't know?" Chyka responded in confusion. Steeped in the result, perhaps. But certainly not the transgression.

"So. Tell me," Matron T'myne inquired, leaning forward until the little snow leopardess could feel

the mitanni's chamomile breath washing over her face. "What was it that the Lady High

Priestess actually desired? Not the how, mind you. The how is a foregone conclusion. The end. What was the end that she sought to achieve?"

"I... I have no idea," Chyka responded with a little, anxious shrug. "She refused to fill out the forms. She seemed so disgusted by it all. Like she was forcing herself to do it. At least until the very end. But..."

Matron T'myne leaned back and laughed. "You've never met a shibi before, have you?"

"No," Chyka replied softly.

"When shibi speak of their innermost desires to strangers, they always bury them in the language of displeasure and disgust," Matron T'myne explained with a grin. "Only on the attainment of such a desire do they change their tune. But they still speak as if the pleasure was all quite unexpected. Because they will never outwardly admit their deeply rooted penchant for exotic experience and

carnal pleasure."

"Why is that?" Chyka inquired. It wasn't at all unusual for people to try to hide their fetishes and lusts, but the Matron was making it sound like a cultural, rather than an individual thing.

"Because two thousand years ago, the shibi were almost driven to extinction by their carnal obsessions," Matron T'myne replied. "Fueled by lust for intense physical stimulation, and abetted by the science of genetic engineering, the shibi created ever more extreme encounters using the already quite accommodating native flora as a basis. Encounters that demanded more and more from their bodies, until the inevitable development of permanent unions. Life experiences that would never end. And of course, everyone wanted in on that. And you can imagine the result."

"Ah," Chyka responded with a frown and a

faint feeling of distant, though seemingly inevitable doom. "That... that sounds an awful lot like..."

"Biogel?" Matron T'myne chuckled. "A fully organic, highly engineered, plant based, living substance which demands permanent union lasting a virtual eternity? Indeed, it does, doesn't it?"

Chyka nodded. "Yeah."

"Except of course, that biogel doesn't remove its normal hosts from productive society," Matron T'myne answered. "And those who choose more extreme encounters? Well, if you paid attention to the xenoexperience statistics during your training classes, you'd know that the sum total of all people engaging in permanent xenoexperiences which remove them from the reproducing population is still only a fraction of the Empire's birthrate. Which is a problem, isn't it, what with the anticipated resource shortages in a couple

centuries or so?"

"I suppose it is," Chyka agreed.

Though it was almost never explicitly mentioned, one of the primary reasons behind the creation of biogel, and the opening of the Empire to purveyors of xenoexperiences in general, was reducing population growth. It wasn't a particularly effective method overall, despite what the massive numbers involved might have suggested. Amid the Empire's population of over twenty-one trillion, with an overall growth of three billion per year, a couple hundred million per year being 'lost' to xenoexperience was hardly putting a dent in the problem. Yet, at any rate.

"But that is neither here nor there, is it?" Matron T'myne said, bringing the conversation back to the matter at hand. "Tell me, did the Lady High Priestess not mention at all why she so deeply desired to be made into... this? Surely in her expressions of disgust, she would

have said something to suggest her final intentions? Hmm?"

"She did mention her daughter having come here and doing something," Chyka replied. "I imagine she probably wanted to do the same thing, like the training says is usually the case, but no one could tell her..."

"Oh, I think *someone* could have told her," Matron T'myne interrupted. "In fact... I think *Tashie* could have told her *all* about everything. Because that daughter just happens to be *your* beautiful, snugly fitting biogel wife."

Chyka's jaw dropped. "Oh."

The little snow leopardess' biogel wife surely couldn't hear or understand the Matron's words, but she gave her eternal companion a warm, all-encompassing squeeze of comfort nonetheless.

"So. If she wanted to know the full measure of her daughter's experience, then that means

that someone needs to find her a cute little snow leopardess to marry, doesn't it?" Matron T'myne asked.

"I suppose it would," Chyka replied, definitely not liking where the conversation was heading.

"I don't suppose you know any other cute little snow leopardesses who might be interested in letting this container of blackness here to enjoy their body, would you?" Matron T'myne inquired, running her finger over the bottle's lid.

Chyka shrugged. "I don't really have any snowy friends. And I'm not really that close with most of my family. I mean, there are some cousins, but..."

"I'm sure one of them would do very nicely," Matron T'myne interjected with a low chuckle. "There's *always* room for family in the business, you know. And the more relations, the merrier, right?"

Chyka didn't know how to respond. Did the Matron *really* expect her to try to get one of her relatives to let that bottle of blackness have its way with them?

"You just ask Tashie how it's done, hmm?" Matron T'myne added. "Now take that bottle back to your room with you, so you can be reminded every day what you need to do. No rush though. She has all the time in the world to wait for a perfect little floofy tail. But don't take *too* long. That would just be impolite."

"Well... uh... okay," Chyka replied hesitantly as she reached out to take the bottle with both hands. "I'll... I'll try."

"I'm sure you'll do more than that," Matron T'myne responded with a mischievous grin. "And I'm sure it will have quite a positive effect on your first performance and compensation review. Normally, I do those every six months or so. But for you... I'll just wait until your new charge has a soft little ass

to hug. Is that understood?"

"Yes," Chyka replied. "Yes it is."

"Good!" Matron T'myne declared. "One last thing before you leave. Tomorrow I'm sending you over to the spaceport terminal with Dran. See if you can't at least show him how to stand there and not embarrass himself... again."

"I can try," Chyka replied, holding the bottle of Lady High Priestess against her chest.

"If not... well, it is what it is," Matron T'myne responded with a shrug. "Either way, next week I expect you'll be enjoying your new shift assignments. And I do believe I have you scheduled for a field trip too. That is all. Dismissed!"

"Thank you," Chyka answered with a soft smile as she rose to leave. It was the first time she'd ever heard the Matron give a complement to anyone. It didn't really do much to ease her nervous apprehension toward the

task represented by the bottle of glistening blackness in her arms, though. She really didn't want to snare one of her own relations into marrying the gel. But what other choice did she have?

Chyka again bit her lower lip as the door to the Matron's office closed behind her. This isn't going to be fun, she thought in silence as she pondered how to approach relatives she hardly even knew. Unless some random miracle occurred, the task seemed almost impossible. *Dammit. I need to talk to Tashie and soon. This is all her fault. She's going to have to figure it out. Or... or... dammit. Goddess above... what have I gotten myself into? What have I gotten myself into?*

SEVEN

WIT DA FISHES

"All the windows?" Dran grunted as he bobbed in the middle of the huge spaceport mermaid pool.

"All of them," Chyka replied as she sat on the polished granite shelf that ran around the rim of the pool, about a quarter of a meter beneath the surface of the water.

"There's so many!" Dran quipped as he put his diving mask back on. "Mph! Mmm! Mrmph!"

"That's what the Matron said," Chyka replied, waving her coworker back to work with a splash. "Off you go!"

The little snow leopardess wasn't sure exactly how all this was supposed to qualify as work, at least so far as she was concerned. Her instructions were, quite literally, to hang out at the top level of the pool, and maybe go for a swim should she be so inclined. There were well over a dozen biogel body-mod mermaids frolicking about for the tourists lining the windows down below. They seemed to be having fun. Indeed, they seemed to be doing as little in the way of work as she was.

The pool itself was a gargantuan cylinder. Its top was at the spaceport passenger terminal's ground floor level, where it formed part of the centerpiece of the outer lobby. There, anyone so inclined could sit in the shallows on the shelf and socialize with the playful, glossy black mermaids. The massive tank descended six stories down into the ground. Its base was at the level of the spaceport subway station, where it sat between the broadly spaced northbound and southbound Purple/Red line platforms, and in

the middle of the huge, dedicated Sky Line platform below.

A shallow, descending ramp ran around the pool's windowed perimeter, allowing tourists to watch the mermaids spend their working days doing everything but work. The ramp also spiraled five stories upward from the spaceport's ground floor. In the empty space in the middle, dozens of fully transformed biogel mermaids were floating naturally posed and suspended in a vast mass of nearly transparent aerogel. It was a magnificent display, and quite popular with tourists and locals alike.

Chyka wasn't at the spaceport for the sights, of course. She was there to work. Or to not work, as the case seemed to be. It didn't really make sense to her. The rest of the Gelitech models at the spaceport were there to model and advertise. What was she doing to help promote biogel? Nothing, unless sitting with her legs hanging off the granite shelf, watching a squeegee equipped knucklehead clean

windows was somehow important.

Chyka watched Dran dive down toward the point where he'd left off. He'd only managed to get eight windows in before getting all grumpy, and he had at least three dozen to go before he could call it a day. The biogel mermaids certainly weren't making it easy for him, either. They kept getting in his way, and they'd snatched his squeegee once already, forcing him to chase them for it. Perhaps they were just being playful with their 'toy'. Or perhaps they were expressing their displeasure with certain remarks that had been made regarding their modded shapes' lack of certain features. Or perhaps it was a bit of both.

Suddenly, Chyka was drenched with water. It had burst from the surface of the pool without warning, and rained down all over the rim where she was sitting and quite some distance beyond. She hardly had time to get the water out of her eyes before a soggy fey'li muzzle was pressing firmly under her chin.

"Mmm," the glistening black mermaid purred, her voice marked by a faint, rubber vibration that seemed to be common to all body-modded who's chests had been subject to full biogel conversion. She was laying on the shelf beside the surprised snow leopardess, and seemed quite happy to take some liberties with her new 'friend'. "You're such a nice smelling little cutie-fluff! I'll bet you'd be a lot more fun to play with than that big buffoon, hmm?"

"I'll bet I would," Chyka agreed, not quite comprehending the true nature of the suggestion. "He's quite an... WOAH!"

The mermaid grinned. "Let's play then!" she bubbled as she wrapped her arms around the little snow leopardess. Together, the pair rolled off the granite shelf and into the water.

Chyka had no idea what the mermaid intended to do with her. All she could do was hold her breath and wonder as she was pulled

down into the depths, toward the exit tunnel that led back to the Gelarium's own network of water filled tunnels and pools. Within the dark tunnel were little biogel filled alcoves, where the mermaids could take naps between periods of vivaciously carefree frolicking. It was almost certainly the mermaids intention to pull her newly acquired companion into one of these. But what would come afterwards, only the mermaid could say.

To Chyka's astonishment, the mermaid was swimming so quickly that they had reached the first of the tunnel alcoves before her biogel coating's protective mechanism had even registered that she was at risk of drowning. In a flash, she was being pressed into the thick, gooey surface of the alcove's glossy black filling. Darkness enveloped the little snow leopardess. Darkness and the cool, wet slime.

The mermaid embraced Chyka firmly, with one hand around her back and the other sliding down to take hold of her soft little rump. She

didn't go any further, however. Indeed, it seemed as if she'd almost immediately fallen asleep.

Chyka wrapped her own arms around the mermaid's back and shoulders and wondered what the mermaid could possibly have meant by 'play' if all she'd wanted to do was cuddle for a nap. And, Chyka wondered, was sharing that nap still considered work? Was it actually the work she was intended to do? Or was it a break? Was it even possible to take a break from work that didn't involve any working?

Chyka soon found herself falling into a dreamy, half-conscious state. She was still awake, and aware of the blackness, and the mermaid's tight embrace. But she was still dreaming, of swimming, and floating, and weird fishy things that wanted to rub their slimy selves all over her body.

Eels. Goopy, smelly, slime exuding eels. They were all around her, covering her with their

unpleasant mucous. Her fur had vanished, replaced by smooth, slimy skin. Slimy skin that exuded the same mucous as the eels. Because she was one of the eels, squirming and writhing amid the mass of like creatures, every one of them having been a woman just like her. Until they'd wound up in the eel pit. The deep, dark eel pit from which cute little snow leopardesses never, ever returned.

The eel-laden dream slowly faded away, punctuated by a lone, rational thought. *I shouldn't have had those last few fish cakes last night.*

Chyka awoke with a start. She was being pulled through the water again by her new 'friend', but something was different. Her shape felt weird. Long. Stretched out. Fishy, in a way.

The little snow leopardess's jaw dropped as a dawning sense of existential dread came over her. Or it would have dropped if her whole

muzzle hadn't been bound tight within a solid coating of biogel. *What... what the fuck?* she thought as she looked down at the long, serpentine body that trailed back behind her. *Oh! What... what did she DO TO ME?*

From the waist down, Chyka's body had become that of a nearly six meter long long eel. A glistening black eel, with fluttering, full length 'fins' and a stiff, awkward motion that made her feel like anything but a native denizen of the aquatic world. If the mermaid hadn't been pulling her along, she would have had considerable difficulty in making headway, let alone twirling around like she and her fish-tailed companions did with such ease.

Why can't I move naturally? the little snow leopardess thought as she tried to make sense of her new self. It took her far too long to realize that the awkward motion was a result of her still having actual legs within her eel-body. *Wha... wait? This isn't a body mod? Then*

how? I don't get it.

Chyka wanted to ask the mermaid what the deal with her new sort-of-not-really body was. Was it a body? It was biogel. Her biogel. Her biogel wife, even. Surely it qualified as a body. A body mod, of a sort, but one that only affected the biogel part of her body.

Her biogel wife seemed to be enjoying the change of shape far more than the little snow leopardess was. A light, airy feeling washed over her. It was a feeling she'd always felt from her wife as some impending pleasurable experience beckoned. But what could possibly be pleasurable about being a mute, barely mobile eel?

The mermaid towed her confused eel-girl friend into the big spaceport tank and began to whirl her around in the middle like a ribbon, much to the bemusement of the other mermaids. They began to circle around and dance playfully with one another as the little

snow leopardeel helplessly watched the windows, and all those gawking tourists flash by. Up and up the pair rose, and outward, in ever-broader circles, until finally the little leopardeel was thrown up out of the pool's surface.

Chyka would have yelped if she could have. All at once, the water gave way to air. Her whole, surprisingly light eel body arced up and around, spraying water all around the spaceport lobby. Then she came crashing back down, drenching the whole area immediately around the pool itself.

The mermaids clustered around their little snow leopardeel, kissing her all over in a brief orgy of unfettered affection. A different mermaid, an aqua skinned elf-ear now took her in tow. Back down to the bottom of the pool they went. There, the swirling dance began anew.

Chyka didn't know what to think of it all.

Down and up she went, time and time again, and each time with a different partner. The tourists were crowding the windows now, and even accumulating around the pool without any apparent concern about getting drenched. All she could think of was how many people must be missing their trains, their appointments, and maybe even their flights.

Surely, the little snow leopard thought, this performance was going to be the catalyst of untold chaos. Somebody should probably have stepped in to stop it. Or at least keep people moving along. But no one did. Perhaps no one cared. No doubt it looked like too much fun.

Chyka's biogel wife was far more enthusiastic. A being whose only sense was that of touch, the whole experience must have felt very interesting. Enjoyable, even. A cozy warmth surrounded the biogel eel-girl's body. To this was added soon a little tingle of more intimate simulation.

The little snow leopardess' biogel wife had become the mistress of subtlety in the month they'd been as one. She had learned well how to make her companion feel good about something she might otherwise have found uninteresting, or even rather repelling. And she had come to understand the fine art of timing. She now used her talents to masterful affect.

By the time Chyka was in the midst of repeating the dance with her seventh partner, a cute pink haired mitanni, her biogel wife had sorted out how to couple each whirl with a gentile rub in all the right places. The dance became an intimate massage, from her shoulders all the way down to her captive feet. It made her relax. And it made her feel good. Very, very good, and in ways she simply couldn't ignore.

By the time Chyka was on her ninth partner, she was so into it, and so relaxed, that she was little more than a rag doll in the mermaids

grip. By the time she was on her twelfth, she was more out of it than into it. By the time the last mermaid had finished with her, she was floating high as a kite upon a gently undulating sea of subtly erotic pleasure.

Finished with their dancing, the mermaids left their exhausted new toy floating alone in the middle of the pool. There was nothing she could do but slowly flex and squirm as the pleasure her biogel wife had imparted upon her body slowly faded away. Clarity returned to her mind. She looked around in hopes of finding the mermaid who'd pulled her into the pool. Most of the mermaids were gone, though a few remained to entertain the tourists. The fey'li mermaid she was looking for wasn't one of them.

With a considerable effort, Chyka managed to start herself moving upward, toward the pool surface and the granite shelf where mermaids were wont to lay. She wanted to try to get the attention of one of the other biogel

models what was sure to be out and about up there. If anyone was going to help her get out of her predicament, and her new 'body', it was probably going to be them.

Chyka broke the surface and struggled to drag herself up onto the granite shelf. To her surprise, one of the other models seemed to be waiting for her. "Mmm! Mph! MmmMMM!" she tried to speak through the biogel that continued to keep her mouth closed up tight.

The model, a tall, splay-horned mitanni with a mane to rival the Matron's just laughed. "Oh, no, no, no! They caught you. Now you have to spend the rest of the day doing whatever they want with you. They'll let you do when they're done. Or maybe not. Who knows?"

Chyka groaned.

"Go on!" the mitanni said, shooing the little snow leopard back into the water. "Get back to work in there. There's tourists and mermaids to keep entertained!"

Chyka felt a tug at the end of her long eel tail. It seemed that at least one of the mermaids had decided that she wasn't quite done dancing yet. As the little snow leopard eel began to slide back into the water, she began to wonder if this had all been part of the plan. Dran's job had been to wash the windows. Had hers been to keep the mermaids distracted from Dran?

In the end, it didn't matter what the intention was. Chyka was the mermaid's toy for the time being, and she was just going to have to play along with it. As she was again pulled down among the giant seashells, corals and long, green strands of kelp which decorated the very bottom of the pool, she wondered if the mermaids planned to do anything else with her besides dance and splash people in the lobby. And she wondered just how long they were going to keep her. A regular shift was eight hours, but the mer-day never really ended. Were they going to let her go when the evening mermaids arrived? Or

were they just going to hand her off to the next group? And if they did that, how long were they going to keep her? Days? Weeks? Or maybe even longer?

Chyka surrendered to the mermaid's gentle kisses amid the aquatic décor. There was really no point in worrying about how long the mermaids intended to keep her. What was going to happen was going to happen. There was clearly nothing she could do to change that.

It was the way of the biogel lifestyle, after all. All tickets to the real fun were one-way. Even if there was a route back, it always seemed to be under someone else's control. The mermaid's control, in this case. All Chyka could do was enjoy what she could, and hope it ended with a ticket back home, and not on a one-way trip further down the eel-girl road.

EIGHT

AUCTIONATION

“All proceeds are directed to this month’s charity,” Chyka purred with a sweetly mischievous little smile on her feline face. “Not only can you enter into a whole new life of shiny black biogel fun, you can help the XenoArts Institution Interstellar Exposition Fund ensure that artwork from all across the galaxy is readily accessible to everyone in the whole of the Fey’li Empire!”

The little biogel clad snow leopardess just couldn’t help but have a go at the positively statuesque jaguaress twins. To say that they were ‘lookers’ would have been the grossest of understatements. There didn’t seem to be anyone who could resist taking more than just

a passing gander at their glorious physiques and she was certainly no exception. They were absolutely glorious to behold, and their magnificent shapes were more than sufficient to get her mind running off to realms generally best left unexplored.

It wasn't entirely professional of Chyka's brain to go off on kinky tangents like that. Then again, there was a very kinky minded soul inhabiting her suit of glistening blackness. One who liked to pull the strings of her subconscious mind in inappropriate ways at the worst of times.

"The immediate goal of the I.E.F. is to fund locally run, annual interstellar art expositions in every major municipality throughout the frontier prefectures, with a focus on areas where art access is limited by economic factors," Chyka continued, doing her best to ignore the kinky nagging coming from deep inside her. "So far this year, the I.E.F. has funded more than three thousand expositions,

both with direct financial support, and logistical support through acquisition and provision of artworks to the funded locations on a rotating basis.”

It was hard to make funding art sound sexy, and Chyka decided to quit before she bored her audience into disinterest. As weeks in the Gelarium went, this had been one of the least productive for the petite Gelitech model. She just had to make a catch before her last shift ended. Or, even better, two. The evening was late. The sun had set hours ago. It was now or never, and she wasn't about to let the I.E.F. spiel get in the way.

The beautiful twins had been spending more than the usual amount of time gazing upon the Gelarium's famous Auctionation Station. Clearly, they found the potentials offered by its four available pods more than just a little interesting. More than once, they'd seemed to be on the cusp of stepping into one of the pods together. But... they kept hesitating. They kept

stepping back. Perhaps all they needed was a little gentile encouragement. At least, that was what Chyka was hoping.

“Go ahead. Try it out!” Chyka cooed, opting to start with the most direct method. It was the job of Gelitech’s models to help hesitant guests get past their final few pesky inhibitions. Within reason, of course. According to the rules, they were just supposed to be neutral presenters of information, tour guides, showing off all the myriad possibilities of biogel. In practice, well...

The simple reality was that most guests didn’t bother coming to the Gelarium just to learn about various potential biogel transfigurations. They could do that at any Gelitech Biogel Boutique. They came to the Gelarium because they wanted to experience the fun of having the models coax and cajole them into trying one transformative thing or another. To convince them to do something they would never have contemplated on their

own. To push them over the edge and into the embrace of the magnificent blackness.

Making that kind of assumption about Gelarium guests and their desires was... sketchy at best. At least from the standpoint of the rules. But... why else would they have come all the way to the Gelarium, stripped naked, and started wandering about among hundreds of equally naked strangers if it wasn't to play 'the game'? It was *supposed* to be a game, wasn't it? It was their basic instincts and inhibitions pit against their own curiosities, piqued by models whose job it clearly was to ensure that they didn't leave without having at least one deeply intimate biogel experience. That was how it worked in their eyes. Far be it for the models to respond otherwise.

"All you have to do is step inside and let the machine handle the rest," Chyka continued, desperately hoping for any sort of positive response. She really needed some success after all that had happened during her 'mountain

vacation'. Another day with no catches and she'd probably wind up back at the spaceport terminal trying to avoid getting caught by the mermaids. Again.

“Once you're inside, it'll take about a minute for the charity auction to complete,” Chyka added when the pair failed to offer any sort of response to her suggestion. “Then, in a sweet, sexy, wet, and gooey moment, you'll be dressed in wonderfully sensuous bodies of pure, glistening black biogel! From there, nothing but a long, magnificent future steeped in dreams and dreamy pleasure awaits! Wouldn't that be so much fun?”

“I... I don't know,” one of the twins remarked with a soft, silky voice and a shallow, pensive shrug. She definitely looked interested, but not quite so interested that she was willing to just throw herself into it.

“I does seem...” the other added with a virtually identical voice and a far more

uncertain looking expression on her face. “I don’t know... a bit... you know...”

“Uncouth,” the first completed her sister’s statement with a slight grimace.

Chyka could tell that at least one of them was a bit more into the idea than the other. At least that was what the pheromones in the air were telling her. One of them clearly found the Gelarium, at least, just a bit physically arousing. Whether or not that was simply from sharing the space with dozens of other naked women or from their interest in all the biogel possibilities was impossible to tell. But one of them was aroused. Ever so slightly aroused. But aroused nonetheless.

The fact that one of them was already aroused was a lucky break for the little snow leopardess. It was sure to play into her favor. If she could figure out which one of them it was, that is. Without a closer, and completely inappropriate sniff, it was impossible to tell

them apart.

“Uncouth?” Chyka replied with a smile and a silent prayer that she could use the information gained by her sensitive nose to her advantage. Granted, she didn’t exactly have a particularly good history when it came to that. Her last eight marks had been one-step-short-of-dripping horny, and she’d failed to turn even one into a credit-earning catch.

“Of course it’s uncouth!” the little snow leopardess continued, hoping against hope that this time would be different. “It’s a terrible offense against our sense of self. Our sense of uniqueness. Our sense of what it means to be alive. Everything that we are, reduced to a single uniform substance. Imparted with a single, perfectly generic, unsettlingly faceless shape. Inanimate. Helpless. Daring the world to offer gifts of pleasure, without condition or consequence.”

Both of the sisters responded with a raised

eyebrow and indecisive expressions that were just as impossible to tell apart as the rest of their bodies. Chyka couldn't help but notice just how perfectly identical they were, right down to the very last little spot. They might well have been clones. In fact, they almost surely *were* clones, albeit of a natural sort.

Fey'li didn't technically need the participation of a male to reproduce. Whether an evolutionary cause or result of the species' highly disparate birthrate, fey'li women could, on occasion, become pregnant on their own. The results would almost always be virtual clones of the mother, though on a very rare occasion, they might be clones of some grandmother, or even great grandmother depending on various factors. And, while natural identical twins would rarely be perfectly identical, identical twins from such a pregnancy would be so perfectly identical as to be completely indistinguishable.

Although such twins were physically

identical, that didn't necessarily mean that their personalities would be identical as well. Similar, but never quite the same. That was one way to identify such a pair from 'technical', and also generally illegal, clones, which would be developed in mature form with identical brain structures from the start. Of course, it didn't really matter if these were one or the other. All that mattered was that they get themselves new biogel bodies, and the quicker, the better, at least so far as the little snow leopardess was concerned.

"It's a transition to a completely different kind of existence," Chyka continued. "An existence for which the life that you were born into could never prepare you to contemplate, let alone partake of. But that's what's so awesome about it, isn't it? It's all so completely new and fascinating to both the mind and the physical senses! All it requires is a bold mind to consider. The self-confidence to approach, without caring what anyone else thinks. And a deep desire for exotic physical pleasures to

discover... and embrace!”

“Are you actually suggesting that we embrace the uncouthness of all this?” the first responded with an odd, scrunchy expression.

“We prefer to call it ‘the kinkiness’”, Chyka replied with a broad smile. There was something about the jaguaress’ relatively stiff poise and odd choice of words that made her wonder if she’d been living in a closet. A very fancy closet, the size of a mansion, with all the fancy, high class bells and whistles. “After all, what’s a kink but something uncouth that gets the sexy motor running?”

“I suppose,” the first replied with even more scrunchiness.

“And let me assure you,” Chyka added with a grin, “biogel is very, very specifically engineered to get that sexy motor running, and keeping it running hard until the end of time. Plus or minus a few astronomical epochs or so.”

“I find it extremely hard to believe that becoming a sex doll can be so... pleasing,” the second noted with a frown. “I mean... if it was that pleasing then why haven’t you done it yourself?”

“Oh, don’t you worry about that,” Chyka answered with a chuckle. “I will. Eventually. Once you put on a suit of biogel like this, it’s pretty much inevitable.”

“Everyone who wears biogel is going to get turned into a doll?” the first inquired. “Everyone? As in, literally everyone?”

“Yes,” Chyka explained. “Unless you get yourself turned into some other biogel form beforehand. Otherwise, it’s going to happen, one way or another. You don’t even really know when it’s going to happen, and there’s nothing you can do to prevent it. I mean, it can take a hundred years, but eventually... gloop! You’re a doll and that’s that.”

“And you don’t care?” the first questioned.

“Like... you really don’t care that you’re going to get turned into a doll?”

“Nope!” Chyka replied. “Not one bit. It’s all part of the fun!”

“That’s... weird,” the second replied.

“It really is, isn’t it?” Chyka answered with a grin. “But so is biogel. In a good way. A very good way. But you can’t really understand what that means unless you actually give it a try, can you?”

“I suppose...” the first murmured with a puzzled expression on her face.

“Just the idea of being turned into a nameless... faceless... thing...” the second muttered, crossing her arms as she looked into the open Auctionation chamber.

“It does seem very... outrageous, doesn’t it?” the first responded.

“Very,” the second answered.

“And being sold to someone... for pleasure,” the first noted with an expression of shallow disdain. “But who’s pleasure? Is it ours? Or is it really just for theirs?”

“Why can’t it be both?” Chyka cooed.

“Just the thought of being so... helpless,” the second muttered, shaking her head. “With goddess knows what inside of me... pumping me full of... of...”

“Seed,” the first completed her sister’s remark with a frown.

“Well, that is a fundamental part of the gummy doll adventure,” Chyka noted. “You have to just give in, and give up everything it means to be you. You have to become the object. Become the toy. Once you become the toy, then everything that follows is astonishingly pleasing to the senses. Everything.”

“Such a strange concept,” the first

responded with a return to her puzzled expression. “The very idea that one could give up... everything. Everything just to become a toy for another’s physical gratification...”

“It’s... unthinkable,” the second responded.

“And people actually do this?” the first asked. “People actually come here to this machine and step inside?”

“Lots!” Chyka replied, doing her best not to sound too excited at the first’s change in tone. “A few loners this morning. A group of eight this afternoon. At least a hundred this past week. And that’s just the Aucitonation Station here.”

“Interesting,” the first murmured.

“You don’t seriously want to try this, do you?” the second questioned.

“We didn’t come here to window shop, did we?” the first answered. “This seems to be as

good as any of the other offerings.”

The second shook her head and sighed.

“Would you rather be sold... goddess forbid it... retail?” the first asked. “Because that what all of the other things seem to involve.”

The second snarled at the suggestion.

“How about I set you two up to be auctioned as a matched pair?” Chyka offered with a smile and a wink. “Double the fun for all involved, right? And maybe double the proceeds for a very good cause. What do you think? Yes?”

The first of the twins looked the second in the eye. “Well?”

“Fine!” the second sighed.

“Then it is settled,” the first responded, turning to Chyka. “We will enter the machine together.”

“Wonderful!” Chyka chirped as she pulled out her comm and opened the Gelarium app. With a flick and a tap, she set the chamber to auction the two as a matched set. “Done! Go ahead. Step inside and let the machine do the rest! Just keep in mind there’s no way to stop it once the door closes, so no second thoughts!”

“I don’t think she’s even had first thoughts yet,” the second sister commented as the first took a hesitant step onto the low, step which led up to the open pod door.

Chyka just smiled as the first bit her lip and stepped up into the chamber. She wondered what the jaguaress was thinking as she gingerly tiptoed about on the soft layer of glossy black biogel that covered the chamber floor. Did she like the cool, oily feel on her ‘paw pads’?

As the second silently mounted the step to follow her sister, Chyka wondered if either of them had watched videos of an Auctionation

Chamber doing its thing. Did they know that the biogel on the floor was to be the very thing that would surround them? Subsume them? Transform them?

The second stepped into the chamber. The clear panel door immediately slid shut behind her.

There was a low, sonorous ‘boop’. The smooth, sexy voice of the VixNet Auctionation Server came to life. “Posting to VixNet. Matched pair. Twenty second quickie auction begins in... thirty seconds.”

The sisters could hear the computer, but they couldn’t see out of the chamber. To them, the door wasn’t a clear panel. It was a computer display which was now counting down the seconds to the commencement of their auction. Thirty impossibly long seconds, during which prospective purchasers were gazing upon their magnificently naked bodies, deciding whether or not they wanted to bid.

Chyka had never seen anyone so completely, casually disinterested looking than the two sisters as they stood there. They just looked at the eye-level timer, for the most part. Every so often, they took brief glances at one another. The first offered her sister mildly questioning glances. The second offered mildly displeased looking ones.

The little snow leopardess crossed her fingers as the timer ticked down. She'd locked in credit for the pair. She'd get an extra 'charity support' credit or two if they fetched a decent sum for the I.E.F.

These kinds of auctions were always hit-or-miss. They were completely dependent on VixNet users being online, and happening to be looking at the auction list at just the right time. Given all the auctions that were constantly being posted from Gelitech Gelariums and boutiques all over the Empire, there were plenty to peruse at any given time. But for the bit hits, the high tag tails, it took a

bidder who just happened to find the subject's looks and poise a perfect match for their own personal preferences. Those were all too few and far between.

The timer hit zero. Inside the chamber, the display changed to show the auction time left, and the current bid on the two sisters. Twenty seconds wasn't long for an auction, but it was double the usual ten. Twice the time for twice the tail. It still limited just how high the price could go. But, along with other limitations, it also did much to limit the ability of high rollers to dominate the auctions.

The bidding took off immediately. It was made in increments of one 'penny'. One one-hundredth of a credit. It was more of a race than an auction. In fact, it was more of a lottery couched in the language of an auction.

The clock ticked away in nanosecond increments. Every 'penny' bid, one one-hundredth of an Imperial Credit, that came in

during any given nanosecond was grouped together, and a 'winner' for that nanosecond decided at random. In the event of a network interruption, the most recent 'winner' would win the auction. Otherwise, the 'winner' of the final nanosecond would win.

Theoretically, a twenty second auction could net proceeds of two hundred million credits, assuming a bid every nanosecond. In reality, the highest bidding auction, and by a very large margin, had twelve million. That had been for the famous singer Tchi'loo, who'd been auctionated while singling and pole dancing in a special chamber custom built for her. Most auctions rarely netted more than a few thousand.

Chyka held her breath. A hundred credits. Two hundred. Three hundred. Things were off to a very slow start, especially considering that the auction was for the pair together. Unless someone was particularly attracted to their completely passive sort of participation, they

weren't going to earn much.

The little snow leopardess began to wish she'd told the two to try and be a bit showy for the cameras that were giving bidders full 360, 3D imagery of the chamber's interior. Seven hundred. Eight hundred. Those were single participant, ten second quickie auction kinds of numbers.

Chyka bit her lip as the timer ticked down the final few seconds, still without any sort of expressiveness from the sisters. She began to wonder if they were some kind of robots or something. How could they not be feeling something worth expressing as their impending transformation into biogel dolls approached?

Twelve hundred. Twelve-hundred and fifty. Twelve-hundred and sixty-two. Twelve-hundred, sixty-two and fifty-three cents.

Boop.

That's all? Chyka thought to herself with considerable disappointment at the final result. Whether or not the sisters had similar sentiments was indiscernible behind their continued expressions of casual indifference.

The biogel on the floor of the chamber began to liquefy. Both sisters looked down. Then, as it began to slither up their shapely legs, they look at each other. The first shrugged. She second shook her head.

The sisters just stood there and let the slime flow up their legs. They didn't react in the slightest as it pressed up into their tender places. Up over their hips. Around their waists. Up their back and over their breasts.

Chyka wondered how in all the heavens the two couldn't be feeling so incredibly hot as the goo pressed into their beautiful folds. As it massaged their soft, round rumps. As it hugged their warm, inviting breasts. How could they not be gasping? Moaning? Enthralled in the

embrace of the sheer, overwhelming pleasure?

I think they're defective, the little snow leopardess thought as the biogel flowed up over the sisters' shoulders. I really hope that doesn't affect their performance for the buyer.

Chyka's brain, egged on by that kinky soul within her biogel coating, had already switched to seeing the two sisters as objects rather than people. Living object, sure. But objects nonetheless.

The two women just stood there, patiently waiting as the biogel flowed up over their faces. Over their heads. They shuddered. Their shapes morphed into the totally generic form of every other female gummy. Only then did they collapse to the floor, rendered inanimate only at the very last moment of their transfiguration.

Now it was the little snow leopardess turn to become completely, casually indifferent to the situation. It had been such a strange thing

to watch that she hadn't gotten warm between the legs like she usually did. It was just as well. Even a slight emotional attachment to the experience of guests brought a sharp increase in the chance of inadvertently convincing oneself to partake of the same.

"Oh! By the heavenly hells... did you seriously get them to do it?" came the voice of Tashie from the direction of the nearest lift.

"What?" Chyka asked, turning to find the tigress, accompanied by Dran and the almost completely body modded rowa worker-drone Sey'li. Only the latter's upper head had been left unaltered by the transformation, and she'd been left unable to speak by her glistening black, vulvic rowaform mouth.

"Mphb," Sey'li mouthed, little droplets of black biogel bubbling from her mouth.

"We've been trying all day!" Tashie replied. "Decor. Body mods. Everything! I don't know how you managed it!"

Chyka shrugged. She hadn't really managed much of her own accord. In fact, she wondered if her participation in the whole affair had even been remotely necessary.

"Whatever," Dran said, waving back the way they'd come. "Are you coming?"

"Coming where?" Chyka asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Dr. Mika's got a new mod for Sey'li!" Tashie replied.

"Mmrmmbblmmbbb," Sey'li noised, with a more substantial spray of biogel droplets this time.

"I thought all she could do now was finish getting turned into a rowa gummy?" Chyka questioned.

"Sort of," Tashie replied with a smile. "Dr. Mika figured out how to retro-mod the Biogel Games Team Glitter body for her."

“Realistic colors, and she’ll get her tits back,” Dran added with a silly grin.

“But not her mouth,” Tashie giggled. “But she wears that pussy-face so well, why would she want it back anyway, right?”

“Mphblbb!” Sey’li replied, rolling her eyes.

“Come on!” Tashi said. “Dr. Mika’s waiting!”

“Alright,” Chyka replied, glancing back to the pair of inanimate biogel shapes still laying within the Aucitonation chamber. She wondered what they were feeling. Were they letting the beautiful, sexy dreams take them? Or were they still just as indifferent to it all?

Chyka shook her head and put the strange jaguaress sisters completely out of her mind. Watching biogel bug-butt Sey’li get made into something a bit sexier was going to be fun. Perhaps it might even lead to even more fun later in the evening. And that was a prospect that the little snow leopardess just wasn’t

going to want to miss out on. “Let’s go.”

NINE

IF I FITS, THEN I SHIPS

Tashie smiled as she leaned on the gallery railing and watched the helpless gummies drop into the packaging machine. One by one the glistening black bodies fell into the clear-walled encasement chamber from the hidden conveyor belt above. Within the machine, the generic, completely anonymous humanoid shapes were floated in a null gravity field, posed as if standing, with their arms passively hanging at their sides. An array of sprayers to either side cast a fine mist of colored aerogel onto the completely passive biogel bodies. Pink for the women. Blue for the men. Purple for the full featured hermaphrodites. And an airy light blue for the rest.

Once the encasement process was complete, the gummies again dropped downward, this time into the packaging machine proper. There was a light buzzing sound as they did so, as excess aerogel was trimmed away. A flurry of powdered particulate would puff up into the encasement chamber as each of the encampments was trimmed to fit snugly into a clear plastic retail packaging tube. This powder would then be sucked away by a vacuum, while the packaged gummy was boxed for eventual shipping. Then another gummy would drop into the encasement chamber and the process would repeat, seemingly ad-infinitum.

Down at floor level, the boxed gummies would be dispensed directly onto another conveyor belt. A fully automated system would then convey them underneath the Gelarium's central biogel pool, into the shipping hall along its western side. Once there, they would be inserted into a special dispenser rack to await their shipping to some lucky buyer, or to any

one of the two dozen Gelitech retail establishments located all over the world of Maria.

Despite appearances, and the usual assumptions made by the tourists for whom the gallery had been constructed, most of the Gummies being packed in the facility came from elsewhere. Virtually every unallocated gummy created in the Maria System would be sent to the Gelarium, Most of these would then be packaged for resale.

"I wonder who all these people actually were," Chyka asked softly as she stood next to the tigress. It was, of course, a rhetorical question. Unless a gummy had sold themselves, as themselves, no effort was made to keep their former identity linked to their current form. When being picked up, they were simply piled up with no regard to where they'd come from. Then they were shuffled around and piled up again as they were prepared for packaging. And then, the packaging system

shuffled them around again, once at the intakes, a second time when racking the final boxed product, and then a third time when selecting gummies from the rack for each specific order.

Only the one's who'd sold themselves through VixNet were actually kept track of. Obviously, the buyer expected to get who they'd bought. They were tagged and kept separate, and run through the shipping system in special batches. The ones going through the system now, however, were totally anonymous. And that fascinated the little snow leopardess in a very compelling, albeit equally unnatural way.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Tashie replied as yet another anonymous biogel body descended into the encasement chamber. "No one knows. And no one really cares. They're just dolls. Toys. Objects. The soul inside is just a kinky bonus, like a sweet bit of caramel inside a succulent coating of dark chocolate. And you know

what?"

"What?" Chyka inquired.

"One of these days," Tashie answered, turning to her companion with a broad, mischievous grin, "that's going to be us in there. Awesome, right?"

A shudder ran down Chyka's spine. The tigress was right. One of these days, it would almost certainly be their turn to be packaged up and sold off as anonymous pleasure dolls. Unless something else intervened first, of course. In a place like the Gelarium, that was always a very distinct possibility.

"Don't you wonder what it's actually like?" Tashie went on. "Trapped in a body you can't move. Not until someone makes you warm. And then even barely. Unable to speak. Unable to hear. Unable to do anything but let someone else move you and touch you and do whatever they want with you. Over and over and over and... don't you wonder?"

"Sometimes," Chyka replied. "But it's not something I really ever think about trying."

It was a lie, of course. Every time she watched someone get glistened, she thought about actually trying it. Her biogel wife wouldn't let her think otherwise. But so far, her wife had left the decision up to her, and she just wasn't ready for such an extreme change of lifestyle yet.

"Hey girls!" Gorin called out as he stepped out from the nearby lift. "Say... one o' ye lasses wanna do me a real big favor?"

"Maybe," Tashie replied with a smirk. "What is it?"

"Got one more spot on that field trip up northways I gotta fill, an fast," Gorin replied. "Somethin te do with'at project o' Doctor Mika's. Whatcha say? Either one o' ye wanna give it a go?"

Tashie shook her head. "Well, I'd love to, but

I'm a bit busy for the next few days. Private session tonight. Then I absolutely have to snag some tourists to join the mermaids. And then I've got that demo over at..."

"I'll go," Chyka interrupted. If there was one thing about Dr. Mika's projects, they always seemed to be quite interesting' in an odd, well-meaning, yet highly impractical way. And they rarely involved any actual peril. Except when marketing got involved. But those events seemed to be very few and far between. "I mean, as long as it's okay with the Matron. I wouldn't want to mess up the schedule or anything."

"Oh, it's fine as shiny black bum," Gorin answered with a relieved smile. "Priority one sort o' deal. Jus grab any girl n' get em goin. Honestly, though, I was gettin worried no one was gonna bite."

"Well then, you have fun, hmm?" Tashie said, patting her companion on the back before

wandering off down the corridor toward the mermaid viewing tunnels on the opposite side of the shippin hall.

"I'm sure I will," Chyka answered.

"Ready te go?" Gorin asked. "All the other girls are all packed up already, so they're jus waitin on you."

"Well, sure," Chyka replied, not quite sure what the rush was. How long had Gorin been looking for someone to join the trip? "But... uh... I don't have anything packed for a trip. How long will it be? Do I need anything specific?"

"Dunna worry bout that," Gorin replied with a sly smirk. "The only thing needin packin right now is that bum o' yours."

"What do you mean?" Chyka inquired. "Is it just a day trip? Isn't it kind of late for that?"

Gorin chuckled. "Dun ye worry bout a

thing," he said, gesturing toward the white circle on the floor where demonstration gummies were sometimes inserted into the packing system for the viewing pleasure of the Gelarium's many visiting tourists. "Jus stand right there in the demo ring and ye'll be on yer way way in a jiffy!"

Chyka frowned. "You're going to box me up and mail me someplace, aren't you?"

"Sure am!" Gorin laughed. "Dun ye worry bout it. It'll be lots o' fun."

Chyka sighed and resigned herself to yet another awkward experience at the hands of her excessively mischievous coworkers. At least Goring wasn't likely to be conniving her into doing something that had the potential for permanent physical effects. He was just too nice and honest for that. That was why he was the head of the shipping department, and not a model working on the floor. Too many cuddles and conversation, and not a gummy to show

for it. Or anything else for that matter. Then again, his cuddles were the best kind of cuddles. That was why all the girls liked him so much.

"If you say so," Chyka said with a flick of her long, silvery hair. "As long as I'm not getting glistened before I'm getting packaged."

"Oh, hells no!" Gorin replied. "Dun think fer one moment I'mma let that bum o' yers get gummied! Like ye way too much fer that, lass. Way too much."

"Alright then," Chyka answered with a soft smile. "Are you sure I'm going to fit in a gummy tube though? They're kind of small."

"So are you, lass," Gorin responded with a chuckle. "Ye'll fit jus fine."

"Fine," Chyka replied with another sigh. "If I fits, I ships. Is that how it goes?"

"That it does, lass," Gorin laughed. "Go on

now. An' have fun, will ye?"

"I'll try," Chyka replied as she stepped into the white circle. "I'll try."

The little snow leopardess yelped as she was suddenly and unceremoniously sucked straight up through an opening in the ceiling and into the space above the gallery. She twisted and tumbled in a null gravity field, manipulated by unseen forces until she was forced down onto the stiff, rubbery conveyor belt, flat on her back. Her feet faced in the direction of the belt's travel. Beyond them, almost touching her, was the shiny black head of a gummy. And beyond that was another. And then another.

Above Chyka's head were the feet of a very obviously male gummy. There were more gummies beyond him. She tried to sit up a bit, to see how far back the conveyor tunnel traveled, but a force field was holding her firmly in place. She could do nothing but lay there and wait for her turn in what she

presumed to be the very same packing machine that she and Tashie had just been watching.

What have I gotten myself into this time? Chyka asked herself in silence as the gummy furthest below her feet fell into the encasement chamber with a soft *shoop!* The more she thought about it, the more she wondered why anyone might think it necessary to run her through the packing machine instead of having her take the train. The latter was surely faster, and almost certainly far less expensive. It didn't make one bit of sense to her. What purpose could there possibly be?

Before she knew it, the gummy right below the little snow leopardess' feet had fallen down into the encasement chamber. From the gallery, the system had seemed to take its time with each gummy. Inside the conveyor tunnel, waiting for her turn, the whole process seemed to be going quite a bit faster. At least that was how it seemed to the machine's helpless little captive.

Chyka could hear the soft hiss of the aerogel sprayers now. The buzz of the machine as it cut away the gummy's excess coating of foam. The sound of it thumping down into its plastic tube. The hum of the labels being printed and applied. And the cardboardy crinkle as the box was formed and sealed around it. And then...

Chyka took a deep breath as she started to slide over the end of the conveyor and drop into the encasement chamber. To her considerable surprise, the biogel around her neck liquefied and spread over her head in a protective coating, as it was wont to do whenever she was facing some imminent physical peril. It filled her nose, ears and mouth as it took over her providing oxygen to her lungs. Her senses heightened, and she could see all around herself, all at once. For a brief moment, it was highly disorienting. She felt a bit dizzy. Then the aerogel began to spray.

For some strange reason, the nearly

transparent gel was totally opaque to the little snow leopardess' biogel-altered visual perception. It clung to her glistening black body and found its way into every little space and crevice. Though it held her firmly in the same passive pose as it did the gummies, it also felt soft and strangely cozy, in a rather kinky sort of way. And, somehow, it was making her feel very, very sleepy.

Before Chyka could quite process whether or not she actually liked being held so firmly within the aerogel encasement, she could feel herself falling. Down she went, through the buzzing trimmers and into her plastic tube. She felt the final thump, and the whole aerogel mass wavered and jiggled in a surprisingly soothing fashion.

So... *weird*, the little snow leopardess thought to herself as she struggled to stay awake. It was weird indeed, but there was no denying that it was also quite comfy. It was certainly quite likable. For now, at least.

Chyka could feel her prison jostle a bit, no doubt as the machine wrapped a cardboard shipping box around her, and filled the empty space with packing bubbles. Then could feel herself moving to one side, no doubt out of the machine, and onto the first leg of her trip to... wherever it was she was being sent to. Then she could feel herself getting woozy. A grayness washed through her mind, as the real world gave way to dreams. Dreams of glistening black mermaids, dancing in the sky as the clouds gave way to a black sun. A black sun that was slowly turning purple. Bright, luminous purple, and infinity beyond.

TEN

FEELING A LITTLE PURPLE

Dr. Mika frowned as only the grumpy little tigress could. "Not amusing," she muttered as the last of her charges picked bits of aerogel foam off their glistening black, biogel coated bodies. "Does he have any idea how long it takes to unpack a dozen of you from those accursed tubes?"

"Well, you *did* chase him out of the gelivator," a tall, blue skinned mitanni quipped as she struggled to get all of the pink foam out from behind her horns.

"You chased all of us out of the gelivator," a slender, sable skinned elf-ear noted with a disapproving sigh. "We were having fun!"

"Canoodling in the middle of a very important scientific experiment was highly uncalled for," Dr. Mika replied with a grumpy tone as she checked off some things on her ever-present clipboard. "But never mind that. I have a much more important experiment to conduct here, and I expect some greater degree of genuine cooperation than is usually the case."

"I'd be more inclined to cooperate if I knew what this was all about," a stocky, muscular jaguaress huffed impatiently. "You never tell anyone what you really want until after everything's gone wrong!"

"Do you have any idea just how important it is to keep my personal view of matters separate from each prototype experiment?" Dr. Mika quipped back. "If you can't figure each prototype out for yourselves, then how can you expect the general public to understand their benefits?"

"Speaking of which," a lithe, silver skinned woman observed with a wry smile. "Have you ever considered something like, oh, I don't know... maybe a brochure? A guide? Or, heaven forbid, an instruction manual?"

"Each of my prototypes are fully self-explanatory!" Dr. Mika exclaimed.

"Honey, the only one of your prototypes that's ever been self-explanatory was the talking GeliNet box, and it wouldn't shut up!" the mitanni replied, shaking her head.

"Yeah," the jaguaress agreed. "I still can't get that voice out of my head. It was... weird."

"Weird just doesn't even begin to describe it" a lavender skinned elf ear questioned. "Who on earth was the model for it? A worn out washing machine with a drinking problem?"

"More than just a drinking problem, I think," a rather athletically built pantheress responded with a low chuckle.

Dr. Mika closed her eyes and let out a sharp, frustrated huff. "Ladies! We have an experiment to attend to!"

"What exactly are we doing here?" Chyka inquired as she looked around the large cavern with a considerable dose of skepticism. There was nothing of note besides all the stalactites, stalagmites, and the overall odor of musty dampness that wrinkled her nose. A tunnel opposite the thermally curtained cave entrance led off into darkness. Unless she was imagining things, amid that darkness was a strange, faint purple glow. "And where is 'here', exactly?"

"This particular cavern is located in an extremely secluded location within a branch of the Yu'min Valley, near to the village of Myalu, in fact, though not particularly accessible from such." Dr. Mika replied with a wave of her pencil grasping hand toward the cavern entrance. There, a large electric space heater provided the cavern chamber's only source of

warmth. It was hardly adequate to cut some of the chill from the winter air, let alone make the cave warm enough to be comfortable. Beside the heater lay the packing tubes the group had arrived in, and strewn all about were chunks of pink foam that had kept them immobile during their journey.

Chyka frowned. Unlike the rest of the women, she had grown up in the Yu'min valley. She had always been told to stay out of the many caves that could be found along its high, granite walls. She had always assumed it was to keep her from finding her way into one of the many abandoned mines that spread throughout the I'ami Mountains, north and west of the city of Mashiva. Poorly marked tunnels and shafts were an extreme hazard in and of themselves, a peril to which was added mine equipment that was often not nearly as inoperable as appearances might have suggested.

"It is one of hundreds of such natural

caverns in this area," Dr. Mika continued, "which were once utilized by the Key'vin'ti Priestesses associated with the Xinta, or Women's, Temple, for certain, shall we say, ritual purposes. Yes, before you ask, *that* Xinta temple."

Chyka's frown grew deeper. The scary stories she'd been told had never explicitly mentioned the mines. Instead, they had almost invariably been focused on supposedly captive, deathless ancient priestesses who haunted the valley's secluded places. They would use their dark magics to capture the souls of unwanted visitors and melt their bodies into glowing purple nothing. Boogeymen, or rather boogeywomen, to frighten youngsters into keeping their noses out of places where they didn't belong.

Surely, all those tales of soul snatching hags were just myths. Surely it was all just a metaphor for the uranium deposits that could be found in highly hazardous concentration

within a few of the old mines. So hazardous indeed, that there was at least one 'natural reactor' still throbbing away deep beneath the mountains, amid the hellish, heavily radioactive bowels of the long shuttered and very aptly named 'Brightstone Mine'. Surely it had all been about that. Surely. Hadn't it?

"And we're all here freezing our tails off in order to..." the mitanni responded as she finally pulled the last piece of foam from behind her horns.

"We're here in order to explore the possibility of retrieving a unique ritual relic left behind by the last Xinta Temple Priestess to utilize this particular cavern," Dr. Mika explained as she twirled her pencil around between her fingers. "If it is what I believe it is, then it will be a one-of-a-kind acquisition of genuinely epic proportions! Beyond epic, in fact. Legendary!"

"Why exactly do you need all of us to help

get some old relic?" the silver skinned woman inquired. "If there's hard work, shouldn't someone more... I dunno, muscular be doing it?"

Chyka nodded in agreement. While a few of the assembled women were certainly rather athletic looking, they were hardly a proper work crew. Nor were they cavers. Or climbers. Or anything that might have been useful at the moment. "You know, there's a little railroad village up toward the valley peak where you might be able to get some proper help. Rail crew families. Just... don't tell them I'm here."

"Why not?" the pantheress inquired.

"Eh... long story," Chyka replied. "Let's just say my family and I don't really get along that well and leave it at that."

"Muscle will have nothing do with retrieving this relic from its current prison," Dr. Mika replied with a very annoyed huff. "More so, it would be highly unethical to

introduce anything or anyone to the ritual chamber which its consecrator didn't intend to enter it."

"What'zat suppose'ta mean?" a green skinned, noseless woman asked with a highly distrusting expression on her face.

"The key'vin'ta people were highly insistent that all ritual activities be separated by sex, and also in this case by status," Dr. Mika replied. "Therefore, as a vital matter of cultural respect, we must confine our efforts here to the female sex. And, we must confine our efforts here to the sort of females which the key'vin'ta considered fit only for use as pets and subjects for ritual... expenditure."

"They key'vin'ta considered women like us to be pets and... what?" a copper skinned elf-ear asked. "That seems..."

"Kinky?" the jaguaress interjected with a smirk. "I read somewhere that they kept us all naked on leashes and trained us to play fetch

for them. You know, until they took us to places like this."

"Ugh," the copper elf-ear responded with a look of disgust. "Really? And we're supposed to give them respect?"

"Dey six thousan suns dead," the green skin agreed with a nod. "T'fuck wit'em. Reals."

"Yeah, fuck 'em," the pantheress said with a scowl. "I don't know why some people are so obsessed with them. Treating them like they had some kind of superior knowledge and culture. They were just a bunch of dumb, backward fuckwits with a major superiority complex defect."

"So, what's the real game here, huh?" the mitanni questioned. "Why can't you just walk your own ass in and take it? Surely it can't be that hard to pick up something someone dropped in a cave six millennia ago."

"If only it were so easy," Dr. Mika replied

with a sharp tone of impatient frustration. "The relic is trapped within a material that requires certain, very specific stimulus to make it just malleable enough to allow the artifact to be safely retrieved."

"Ah," the mitanni replied with a smirk. "So, this is one of *those* caves."

"How perceptive of you," Dr. Mika answered.

"What do you mean, one of *those* caves?" Chyka questioned.

"She means, a cave containing masses of trans-dimensional material that can only be rendered malleable by the presence of certain trans-dimensional energy sources," Dr. Mika responded. "Energy sources such as living souls. Especially living souls for whom the particular cavern was consecrated. Whether or not we will, as individuals or collectively among us, have sufficient energy to allow the relic to be extracted is a complete unknown."

Hence, the experiment!"

"Wait. What exactly was this cave used for?" Chyka inquired. "I used to hear stories..."

"Stories?" Dr. Mika interrupted. "Hmph! Yes, there are many frightening stories about these types of caves circulating about. They certainly do a good job at keep interlopers from damaging what must be considered to be extremely important archaeological sites. As to what they were used for? There is really no saying for certain."

"Really?" the mitanni sighed. "You can't possibly not know the story of these places."

"Yeah," the jaguaress agreed. "Anyone who reads about the key'vin'ta knows about these places."

Dr. Mika huffed and scowled at the jaguaress. "Of course I know the stories! Stories are not science! What they thought they were doing, and what they were actually

doing are two entirely different things!"

"What do the stories say?" the sable elf-ear asked.

"They say that these caverns were places where slave souls were ritually cast directly into the Nine Heavenly Hells," the mitanni answered. "All to please the Formless One who rules over that domain of eternal pleasure and obtain her succor in other, more significant pursuits."

"And those pursuits were opening portals to different worlds," the jaguaress added. "So they could conquer the people they found there, and use them as slaves."

"Slaves, yes," the mitanni concluded. "But apparently most were sent to the Hells in places like this to help curry their goddess' favor."

"S'what'r deez Nine Heavenly Hells?" the green skin asked with a very unsettled

expression on her face.

"A domain of dark angels, and demons of the light," the mitanni explained, crossing her arms and swishing her tufted tail from side to side. "A place tucked between the eternal bliss of true Heaven, and the enteral torture of true Hell. Where one might experience unimaginable physical pleasure, but also the torture of being an eternal slave to its unending glories. An afterlife that is never simply given, rather only sought. An alternative to the Heavens, and the Purgatories for any who might dare to cast themselves into it. But never an alternative to true Hells, for the souls destined there are beyond such reprieves."

"An old, outdated belief which was spread among the many peoples that the key'vin'ta enslaved," Dr. Mika noted with a frustrated sigh. "Everyone knows now that souls who's link to the mortal realm are broken don't actually go anywhere, because they don't

actually exist in the mortal realm. They just go back to being their immortal selves in the higher dimensional space of their origin. So everything the key'vin'ta did was pointless, in the long run. They expended slaves to make portals, to get more slaves, to keep the portals working, to get more slaves, and so on, with no real end in mind. And then they vanished, most likely as a direct result of their misguided religious obsession."

"I wonder where they went?" the silver skin. "They say that no one knows. But surely they would have left some clue?"

"They left clues aplenty," Dr. Mika replied, her tone suggesting that her patience for banter had just about run out. "Temples. Portal grounds. Ruins. All filled with hints and suggestions of their lives, and their eventual fate. Quite simply, they *left*. They went someplace else. Someplace more to their liking. The real mystery is *how* they left. Which brings us back to our purpose here."

"Which is?" Chyka asked.

"For *you* to go into the inner chamber with a few others and see if that is sufficient to free the relic," Dr. Mika responded, pointing her pencil toward the dark tunnel with a grumpy snarl.

"Wait," the mitanni said with a raised eyebrow. "Just like that? Walk into the ritual chamber and just see what happens? Do you actually understand what that stuff can do? Or how it reacts unpredictably in the presence of biogel? Or how..."

"Ky'tin!" Dr. Mika snapped. "You know damned well that all of us together can't activate the solidified slime enough to make it dangerous, biogel or no. Enough to get it to crack, maybe. If we're lucky. But liquefy? That's completely out of the question!"

"Liquefy? As in melt?" Chyka asked, again thinking of the stories she'd been told when she was young. "Melt into purple... stuff?"

"Purple slime," Ky'tin answered. "If biogel can act as a trans-dimensional energy inductor, purple slime is more of a capacitor. It charges with the flash of energy that's emitted when a soul departs the mortal realm on its way back to its fundamental plane of existence. And it is *extremely* dangerous! One fleeting touch is all that it takes for purple slime to subsume the body of any sapient being, sending its soul back whence it came and adding the released energy to its own store. And if you share the Key'vin'ta belief, that soul is destined for a one way trip to the Nine Heavenly Hells."

"Not if it's in a solid state!" Dr. Mika again snapped. "It's perfectly safe in a solid state! Do you really think the Imperial Government would let anyone live out here if it wasn't? And what about the Xinta Temple? It's full of the stuff! And anyone can go in there, wherever they want, and nothing bad ever happens!"

"I suppose you're right," Ky'tin sighed,

shrugging her shoulders. "But I still don't think this should be taken nearly so lightly. Have you at least discussed it with Dr. Alluwa? She knows more about the purple slime than anyone else in Gelitech."

"As it happens, yes. I have," Dr. Mika replied. "And she assures me with absolute confidence that the risks are very minimal. Which is what led me to undertake this little expedition. Now... can we please focus on the work at hand?"

There was a moment of awkward silence. Chyka really wasn't very keen on the whole affair, but her nose and ears were starting to feel just a bit too chilly for her liking. The faster all this was done and over with, the better. But still...

"What's in it for us?" Chyka asked.

Dr. Mika sighed. "Whoever pulls the relic out gets to keep it as a trophy once I'm done studying it. Unless it's potentially hazardous.

But I'm quite sure it won't be."

"If it's such an important thing, why would you let any of us keep it?" the jaguaress asked. "That doesn't make any sense. Shouldn't it go into a museum?"

"Unless it's significantly different than any of the similar Key'vin'ta relics already in circulation, then no, not really," Dr. Mika replied. "Unless it has particular artistic qualities, it's likely only worth perhaps ten times the value of the raw metal that it's made of. And, being made of a primitive stainless steel, that isn't nearly as much as you might think. The important thing here is not the relic itself, but the chance to study a 'virgin specimen', as it were. That and seeing if it can even be extracted in the first place. And, quite frankly, I think the latter just as, if not more significant, than the former."

"What about the rest of us?" the silver skin questioned. "Is there anything in it for us? I

mean, it's not like any of us explicitly volunteered for this. Right?"

Dr. Mika groaned and shook her head. "Fine! Fine! I'll authorize a level three bonus for everyone else!"

"Sounds fair," the silver skin replied. "Assuming there's actually no real risks here. But if there are..."

"Fine! Level four bonus if anything goes wrong," Dr. Mika replied with a sharp huff.

"So we're all getting a level four bonus, eh?" the pantheress quipped with a smirk, prompting an outbreak of laughter among the group.

"Please! Enough! Now, does anyone have anything *else* to say before we get on with this experiment?" Dr. Mika snipped. "Well? *Anyone?*"

There was a moment of awkward silence as

everyone looked around at one another and shook their heads.

"Alright then," Chyka finally sighed. "I'll go in first. Just to get this over with. Just tell me exactly what you want me to do."

"Finally!" Dr. Mika exclaimed with another wave of her pencil toward the dark tunnel. "Just go in there and look over to the right. There's a bit of silver rod sticking out of a lump of the glowing purple mass. You can't miss it. See if you can pull it out. If not, then I'll send someone else in with you to see if their presence helps weaken the material. And so on and so forth until no one else can fit, or the thing comes out. Is that clear?"

"Very," Chyka replied with a shrug. Clear enough indeed, but so simple sounding that it made her wonder if the grumpy scientist wasn't being entirely clear about the actual risks of messing around in such a place.

"Excellent!" Dr. Mika responded. "And don't

touch the purple slime. Even if it is solid. Just to be extra safe!"

"Riiiiight," Chyka replied with a frown. Now she was sure that the tigress wasn't telling the whole truth.

"Now get moving!" Dr. Mika added. "We don't have all day!"

Chyka gingerly stepped into the dim purple glow that seemed to permeate the air within the ancient ritual chamber. She gasped in astonishment at the sight before her. She had been expecting something like the picture's she'd seen of Key'vin'ta temples and ruins, harsh angular lines decorated with rounded shapes of polished silver and luminous purple. This... this was something else entirely.

At the very center of the chamber stood a roughly cut armchair of natural stone. Its surface was damp, thanks to the water that dripped down onto it from a large stalactite that had formed high up on the roof of the cavern chamber. Surrounding the chair were a number of ancient looking brown leather sacks. Each of these contained more than a dozen dimly glowing purple capsules, each about ten centimeters long and five centimeters wide. More capsules were strewn about the floor, and together these provided the chamber's only illumination.

Aside from the center of the floor, and parts of the ceiling, everything else in the ritual chamber was concealed beneath gobs and blobs of glistening purple. Just like the purple shapes Chyka had seen in pictures of the surviving Key'vin'ta temples, these shapes were dark and almost completely opaque. Like murky canal water, the surface layer was just a bit translucent, giving it all a strange, vaguely unnatural depth that was not just a little

unsettling to look at.

Chyka didn't know what to make of it all. She also didn't want to linger more than she absolutely had to. The more she looked around, the more those scary old stories pushed into the forefront of her mind. She began to feel as if something, or someone was watching her. Was it just a trick of her mind? Or were the stories true?

The little snow leopardess took a deep breath and did her best to assume it was all just a trick of her mind. She looked to the right side of the chamber. There, an irregularly shaped rod of silver metal protruded from the mass of glossy purple lumps that concealed the chamber wall. She bit her lip and wondered just how dangerous grabbing hold of it might really be.

A strange feeling of otherworldly desire welled up from within Chyka's uncertain heart. *Goddess, why the hell would you want to risk...*

that? Chyka asked her biogel wife as the attraction to the silver rod, and all the potential horrors that might come along with it, threatened to consume her own sense of self-preservation. *What if Ky'tin was right? What if this stuff really can send us straight into those Heavenly Hells and Goddess knows what kind of enteral torture? Is that what you want for us?*

Of course, the little snow leopardess already knew the answer. It had been clear almost from day one that her biogel wife wasn't satisfied with just becoming biogel and embracing a warm, soft lover within her permanent embrace. She was no less obsessed with the ever-present potential for new and fascinating physical experiences. Indeed, she might well have become even more infatuated with the potentials now that she had someone to share them with.

Of course you don't care, do you? Chyka thought as the pressure against her willpower

mounted. *I'll bet you actually want it to happen, don't you? Fine! Fuck it. I'll go grab it and see what happens.*

Chyka stepped forward, toward the metal rod. The cavern floor was wet and slippery in a way she wasn't nearly prepared for. The biogel on the soles of her 'boots' couldn't seem to get a grip on the surface. She struggled to maintain her footing, while also trying her hardest to avoid touching any of the very suspicious looking capsules.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck, the little snow leopardess thought to herself in silence as she navigated the slick, slimy minefield. *Why the hell couldn't she give me some tools to sweep these things away, at least? Dammit, this is hard! I can't...*

"Woah!" Chyka yelped as her right foot slid back and to one side. "Fuuuuuuuck!"

Chyka fell face first onto the glistening purple lumps with a sharp, rubbery slap.

Terror gripped her as a strange, fizzy sensation spread everywhere that her body was in contact with the stuff. She could almost feel herself dissolving away into that purple nothing from the scary old stories. She closed her eyes and held her breath and waited for her soul to be ripped away from her body, to be added to the demonic alien priestess' collection.

Despite the strange sensation, nothing happened. The little snow leopardess opened her eyes and saw the silver rod jutting out from the glossy purple mass to her left. A glimmer of light caught her eye, not from elsewhere in the chamber, but from right beneath her. She looked down at the purple mass on which she was half-laying. Everywhere her body touched it, it was glowing. And, as the moments passed, it seemed to be glowing brighter, and brighter, and...

"Augh!" Chyka spat as she pushed herself

away from the purple mass. She landed on the floor with a messy splat, sending little gobs of stick cave slime flying all over the room. Even that failed to free her from the horror of the glow. Just as the purple mass had come to glow wherever it touched her body, her biogel coating had begun change color and glow a dull purple wherever it had touched the mass.

"Oh... oh... oh..." the little snow leopardess panted as the purple glow coming from her biogel coating seemed to spread for a few moment, before finally fading back to glossy blackness. "What... what the fuck was that?"

Chyka's biogel wife seemed far less displeased with the unexpected experience than she was. She offered a brief, warm wave of approval in response to whatever it was that she had personally experienced from with her biogel form. Then she renewed her prodding at the little snow leopardess' self-preservation. Clearly, whatever she'd just gotten a taste of was sweet enough to want more.

No! Chyka thought as she struggled to get back up onto her feet. *Not a fucking change in hell!*

"Ochi'opi'mi'o'ri!" a faint, ethereal, almost metallic sounding voice came from nowhere. It sounded girly, giggly, and utterly alien. "Why not? Why not try it again?"

"What? Who? Who's there?" Chyka responded, frantically looking around the chamber as she barely managed to stand herself back up. There was nothing but her, the stone chair, the glowing capsules, the purple mass, and the waiting relic.

"I must be hallucinating," Chyka muttered as no reply came to her query. She turned toward the silver rod and reached down to take hold of it. To her considerable consternation, just moving her hand close to the purple mass made the closest parts glow. And that, in turn, made the biogel covering her hand start to turn purple and glow as well.

"Dammit!" the little snow leopardess hissed, yanking her hand away from the purple. "What the hell? She didn't say anything about this stuff glowing when someone gets close."

Chyka contemplated what to do next. The wiser course of action would be to leave the chamber and tell Dr. Mika what she'd encountered. Something, however, told her that the grumpy little tigress already knew. And that made her wonder if she was the first to enter the chamber to retrieve the rod. And if she wasn't... what had happened to the one, or, heavens forbid, ones, that had come before?

"Uchi'ni'bana'no'mina'mapi," the strange, giddy voice again called to the deeply conflicted snow leopardess. "Yes. Touch it. Take it. *Use it.* You know that you want to."

Chyka again looked around the chamber. She was still alone. "Fuck it," she spat, again reaching for the silver rod. "Just get it over with. Get it over with and get the hell out of

this place."

The little snow leopardess took hold of the silver rod and grasped its smooth, irregular shape with both hands. She tugged on it as the purple began to glow. As the fizzy sensation spread up her hands and wrists. As the purple glow followed right behind.

To Chyka's considerable surprise, the rod didn't feel as if it were trapped in a solid material. It felt like it was held within some kind of stretchy glue. It had a bit of give to it. She could wiggle it from side to side. Pump it back and forth a bit. But it wouldn't come out.

"Omo'mi'anu'achi'maka," the voice said. "See! That wasn't so hard, was it?"

Chyka desperately yanked on the rod as the purple glow spread up her arms. At this point, she didn't care about the glow. All she wanted to do was get the thing out and get away from whatever was making her hear that alien voice. She put a foot on the purple mass to give

herself more leverage, and that too began to glow. The rod gave a bit more. But it still didn't come free.

"Nami'ma'mi'ina'chi," the voice responded to the little snow leopardess' grunts as she tried to pull the rod from the mass. "You want it so badly, don't you? But do you think I will just give it to you? No! You must earn it!"

Earn it? Chyka thought to herself as the glow spread up her arms, almost to her shoulders, and up her legs almost to her knees. She struggled against the gluey grasp of the purple mass even harder. Her arms were getting sore. *Earn it? Really? What the fuck is that supposed to mean?*

"Na'mambi'mi'chima'mita," the voice replied. "Prove your worth. Your willingness. Submit to the ancient power. And all shall be yours to do with as you please."

"Just... give me... the damned thing," Chyka panted as she put all her strength into tugging

on the rod. She had both feet on the purple mass now, and the glow was spreading down over her chest, and up both her thighs. Her arms began to ache as the mass began to give just a little bit more, enticing her to continue without any regard to the consequences.

The mass wasn't the only thing tempting the little snow leopardess to carelessly toss her fate to the fickle winds. Her biogel wife, consumed by some unknown ecstasy, now imposed herself. Her irresistible desire to embrace whatever it was the purple mass was going to do to them became *their* desire. Both, together, as one.

Chyka stopped tugging on the rod and just let her weight rest on it. The glow had washed down over her breasts, and up over her hips. The fizzy sensation became suddenly very intense as the two waves of alien energy met around her waist. Her back twitched. Her legs wavered. She fell backwards.

The little snow leopardess never hit the floor. She floated in serene surrender as her luminous purple coating of biogel spread up over her head. The world seemed to spin away into a spiral of searing purple energy. A whirlpool connecting space and time to an abyss of unimaginable depth beyond its safe shores. She was floating upon its very edge, and every passing moment seemed to be the last. In an instant, she would be pulled into its whirling flow, and drained away into some dark new reality unknown.

Chyka didn't care. What was there to care about? It felt so strange. So pleasant. So inviting. Why not go all the way?

"Ti'mika'mi'manti'chi'mu," the voice said. "There. Isn't that so nice? So pleasing to the senses? You want more, don't you?"

Yes! Chyka thought as she hovered on the precipice of eternity. *Yes! Please!*

"O'nika'ma'mi'tochi'kima," the voice replied.

"No! Not now. Not yet. You will understand when the time comes. Now go. And enjoy the gifts you have earned, *my* pet."

Chyka's world went black. Then she opened her eyes. She was laying on the ritual chamber floor, the long, silver ritual staff gripped firmly in her hands. Its twisted shape felt strangely warm to the touch, and the sharp, octahedronal crystal on its end glowed dimly with the same sort of energy that had spread over the purple mass, and through her biogel coating. It wasn't just a luminous thing anymore, either. She could feel it. Warm. Throbbing. Fizzy. And it seemed to reach out and touch every other purple mass nearby.

To the little snow leopardess' astonishment, she could almost, but not quite, feel the many masses of purple as if they were her own body. It was almost, but again not quite, like the effect of becoming one with a biogel mass of some other shape. It was more distant. More ethereal. And far more... piquant. Spicy, even.

It all felt so strangely good. Almost too good. Chyka didn't care. She couldn't care. It felt as natural as her coating of biogel had come to feel natural since she'd been married to it. And that glistening black spouse seemed to agree.

An intense, warm sensation washed over the little snow leopardess as she stood up, no longer impeded by the cavern's slippery floor. It was an approving, if slightly harsh feeling. No doubt her biogel wife was a bit disappointed that they'd not explored the eternity at the other end of the whirlpool. But that could wait. The old life beckoned.

"Are you alright in here?" Ky'tin asked, peering into the ritual chamber from the tunnel. Her eyes grew wide as she caught sight of the cavern's sole occupant. "What... what are you doing? What have you done? What in all the Hells is going on in here!?"

Chyka stood up and held her new toy to one side. A metallic creaking caught her ears, and she looked down to find herself dressed in a skirt of vivid purple leather, held around her waist by a silver belt adorned by dimly luminous purple crystals. A broad silver collar type necklace descended to a peak over her breastbone. There, another of the glowing crystals was mounted, larger and brighter than those on the belt, and almost as bright as that upon the tip of her staff.

"Uh..." Chyka replied. The staff in her hand was no surprise. It was what she had come for, after all. But the skirt and the collar were entirely unexpected.

"Damn you!" Ky'tin snapped, before a smile spread over her face as she entered the ritual chamber, followed by a trio of small hovering camera drones. "It sounded like everything went horribly wrong and what do I find? You

playing dress-up with a long gone Key'vin'ta priestess' old clothes! I'm honestly surprised they fit you, even if you do happen to be a bit of a small one."

Chyka blushed as the intensity of her encounter with the voice, and the soul sucking whirlpool faded in the background. This established some semblance of balance between her old life and her newly acquired... something. Something strange that she didn't really understand. Something she wasn't sure she wanted to think too much about.

"Yeah, I am too," Chyka replied as she turned from one side to the other. "The glowing bits are a bit strange though, don't you think?"

"Purple slime always glows when sapient souls are in close proximity," Ky'tin replied reaching down to pick up one of the errant capsules. "Except for these. These always glow."

"What are they?" Chyka inquired.

"Ritual objects," Ky'tin responded, holding the capsule up to look at it more closely. "They come in several forms depending on the intended subjects, but they all serve the same purpose. They are inserted into the subject's body in one fashion or another, to be activated at the will of priest or priestess. The slime liquefies, surrounds, and then subsumes its victim in however fashion and however quickly the priestess desires. And, if you follow the beliefs of the key'vin'ta, then the subject is deathlessly sent through the spiraling whirlpool of their own collapsing connection to the mortal world, and straight into the Heavenly Hells, so serve at the Formless One's sensually sadistic pleasure."

"Do you believe in any of that?" Chyka asked.

Ky'tin laughed. "Do I? Of course I do. As do most of my own people. The Heavenly Hells

are just one of many possible afterlives that my people have to choose from. And it is certainly a choice, not a compulsion."

Chyka nodded.

"Unless it's imposed in such a fashion as this, of course," Ky'tin added, twirling the capsule around in her fingers. "I do not think the Key'vin'ta really understood the meaning of the choice. The willing acceptance of a voluntary eternity. They chose one that they believed was the only one worth seeking. And then they decided that it was something to spread. To impose. And when it seemed they couldn't fulfill what they believed to be their pleasingly dark goddess' desire anymore... well..."

"What do you think happened?" Chyka asked. "Did they really just leave?"

"They did," Ky'tin replied as she continued to toy with the capsule. "They left for their afterlife, and took everyone else they could lay

their hands on with them."

Chyka again nodded. "That makes sense. Shame though. They seem so... fascinating."

"They really do, don't they?" Ky'tin responded with a mischievous smirk. "I can only imagine what it must have been like for our ancestors. Brought to a place like this. Standing naked. Waiting to be wrapped in the slime's all-consuming embrace. Waiting to be cast into the Formless One's abyss to become an eternal servant in her nigh upon infinite halls. Such a shame that we can't experience that now. Such a shame that we can't know how it feels, and understand its cultural significance. Such a shame..."

"You aren't... you aren't seriously suggesting that I try to send you to these Heavenly Hells, are you?" Chyka stammered with considerable surprise at the mitanni's apparent suggestion. Even if the whole thing about the Heavenly Hells were true, and even if she actually did

desire to spend the remainder of eternity trapped in that beautifully unspeakable place, was it actually right for the little snow leopardess even to make an attempt to send her there? What if something went wrong? She was certainly no Key'vin'ta priestess. Or was she?

"Why not?" Ky'tin replied. "Think about it! I could be the first of my people to take the deathless path in millennia, and you... you could be the one to gift it to me! And all recorded for posterity too! Wouldn't that be incredible?"

"I... I don't know," Chyka responded with a shrug. It wasn't that she actually didn't want to. The temptation to see what she might be able to do with that newfound something was just a bit too great. But it still seemed taking things just a bit too far, at least for the time being. The whole point of the trip was to find out if the staff could be retrieved, wasn't it? "I mean... I guess? I'm just... I don't know if I can

do it. I'm not a..."

Ky'tin grinned and shook her head. "Not a priestess of the Key'vin'ta?"

"Well, yeah," Chyka answered. "That."

"But aren't you?" Ky'tin replied with a low chuckle. "I suppose there's only one way to find out, isn't there? Hmm?"

"I... well, fine!" Chyka responded, shaking her head as she gave in to the mitanni's prodding. If she was *that* insistent, then so be it. She could try. "I'll do it. Even though I don't know how."

"Oh, you'll know, I think," Ky'tin replied as she licked the glowing capsule with a sensual flourish. "And well, I don't think you'll be able to help yourself. If you know what I mean. And you *certainly* will."

Chyka watched in unsettled fascination as Ky'tin placed her glowing capsule into a small

depression on the stone chair's surface. It stuck upwards like a plain, smooth sex toy. A passive object of pleasure hardly capable of offering any actual pleasure. A thing to be stuck in a place, and little more.

Ky'tin turned to face the little snow leopardess. A sensuous smile crept over her face as she sat down. The capsule pressed against the smooth, glistening black surface between her muscular legs. The biogel there drew taut over her womanly folds, exposing them to view in all their glossy black perfection. Inward the capsule slid, and upward it vanished, all of its own apparent accord. The biogel smoothed over, again concealing the features between her powerful thighs.

"There," Ky'tin cooed as she stood up and shook her hips from side to side. "Ah! I can feel it. It feels so... so... strange. So... proper. So correct. I have never felt such a thing before. Ah. But what about you? Can you feel the way

now?"

Chyka didn't know if she could feel the *way*, but she could definitely feel something. That something was the capsule, ensconced as it was within its warm, moist place, pulsating to the latent energies of its willing host's gently throbbing soul. The more she concentrated on it, the more power she felt within herself. It washed through her body, and swirled about in strange ways. It made her body feel relaxed. Pleasured, in a strange, almost metaphysical way. It was an incredible thing to experience, and something she could very much get used to.

The crystal at the head of the silver staff began to throb with visible energy. It was focused where the little snow leopard was focused. Down there, in the hidden place between the mitanni's legs. A link was forming between the two. A faint, subtle link that needed nothing but a deliberate act of will to become fully empowered.

"Ah! Yes," Ky'tin softly cooed. "You know. You know. Now... now do it. Do it. Send me into the gloriously vile abyss."

Chyka genuinely couldn't help herself. She lowered the head of the staff toward the mitanni. Giddy excitement welled up within her as her willing subject was lifted up off of her feet. There was no holding back the power that was just waiting to burst forth from deep within. It raced up her arm in a fizzy wave and into the outstretched staff. And then...

"OH!" Ky'tin gasped as the glistening black biogel upon her abdomen turned purple and began to glow with considerable intensity. "OH! It's... it's..."

Chyka just couldn't control it. The purple spread out over the mitanni's biogel coating in mere moments. Then it covered her head, cutting off her gasps as it filled her wide open mouth. Her body seemed to waver. It began to shrink. For a moment it paused in shape very

much akin to that to the meter tall figure of a female Key'vin'ta. Then her form gave way altogether, coalescing into a round blob.

The little snow leopardess could feel the purple whirlpool. She could feel the Ky'tin's soul spiraling into it. Being stretched out and drained away into eternity. Trailing off until there was nothing left but a vague sense of emptiness that just begged to be filled with another abyss bound soul.

Chyka stared at the hovering, soulless blob in sheer wonder. It had all been such an incredible thing to feel, astonishingly pleasing in ways that her mind could hardly process. She felt so relaxed. So at peace. So much as if she'd just consummated the most wonderfully intense session of erotic intercourse that her body and mind could handle. It was wonderful, and she just couldn't help but want to do it again.

The little snow leopardess waved her staff about, and the blob of slime flew off in a random direction. It stuck to the ritual chamber wall among the other lumps of slime with a loud, sticky thump. There, it solidified to form a final, albeit completely anonymous reminder of the mitanni it had once been.

Chyka took a deep breath and let the staff rest on the cavern floor. She was torn between snagging the data from the camera drones to watch the whole thing unfold again and the prospect of yet more purple slime fun to be had from other members of her little group. The former seemed like something better to do once she was back home. The latter seemed like it would be quite fulfilling, but she had to wonder if adding more slime to the current chamber was the best use of the available resources. Perhaps it would be better to create a ritual chamber of her own to fill.

The little snow leopardess looked to the bags of capsules that surrounded the stone

chair and wondered if she could possibly sneak some out despite the prying eyes of Dr. Mika. Even then, she would need to create more. If that was possible. Or perhaps she could find other sources among the many similar caves all around the valley. Or perhaps...

"That... was... *awesome!*" a voice whispered from the ritual chamber entrance.

"Do you think she actually got sent to those Heavenly Hells?" another voice murmured.

"I don't know... but I kind of really wanna find out!" the first voice replied.

Chyka turned to see the jaguaress and the sable skinned elf-ear standing there watching her with visible astonishment. She wondered just how much they had seen. Had they been there for the whole thing? Or had they just seen the gloriously gooey finale?

For a brief moment, the little snow leopardess was very much inclined to invite

the curious jaguaress to join Ky'tin in purple slimy eternity. Doubt, however, quickly set in. No matter how amazing it was, or how wonderful it had felt, there was no getting over the fact that it was all just a one way ticket to the eternal beyond. A kind of deathless death, just for a few fleeting moments of exotic glory.

It seemed wrong to tempt random people into such a final experience with so little in apparent reward. Ky'tin had at least known what she was getting into. She had insisted on doing it, for reasons more significant than just trying it to see what it was like. These two. These two were something else entirely.

Chyka shook her head at the interlopers. "Shh!" she scolded, casting aside all thought of offering her slimy gift to the two. "I don't care what you saw. Or what you think you saw. Not a word! NOT A WORD! Do you understand?"

"I... I guess," the jaguaress replied,

seemingly taken aback by the earnestness of the little snow leopardess' demand. "But... why?"

"It's just... not the time," Chyka replied. "Not now. And not here. Maybe some day. But until then... hush!"

The two shrugged their shoulders and nodded, albeit with some clear reluctance.

"Alright," Chyka said, reaching down to pick up one of the bags of glowing purple capsules. "Let's go show Dr. Mika what I found. Hopefully she'll be happy. Though knowing her... I honestly doubt it!"

ELEVEN

POWER

"Welcome to the Vixanti Interstellar Systems Life Essence Power Generation Demonstration System," the smooth, deeply effeminate voice of the computer cooed. Its tone was as warm and comforting as it was invoking of the promise of sensual experience to come. A more astute observed might have noticed a subtle undertone of domineering forcefulness, however. The machine wasn't about to ask for consent. It had been purposely designed to assume it.

"Eh, why'd'nt ye shut up for bit, eh lass?" Gorin quipped as he delved waist deep into the mechanism that kept the individual power pods level as the whole mechanism rotated for

loading.

The Gelarium's power plant, billed as a demonstration system to help entice tourists, consisted of two independent life essence harvesting systems. Set up in a hall beneath the tourist oriented Biogel Hotel, the two plants were configured as horizontal cylinders with domed ends. The cylinders themselves were broken up into a set of twelve carousel-like mechanisms, each consisting of two rotating rings with six individual power pods suspended in between. Each of these pods could accommodate a single volunteer, who's experience could be viewed from start to finish via the large window that filled the door which made up the pod's upper surface.

Together, the power plants could maintain an average output of twenty-eight megawatts. It was a modest amount of power for such a large commitment of personnel, materials, and physical space, but electrical power was only a portion of the overall power that they were

capable of delivering. Energy imparted into the biogel network of the Gelarium and neighboring Anwae Arena was far greater, though its uses were far more limited, at least in a terrestrial environment.

It was aboard starships where these sorts of generators came into their own. The exotic energy could directly power trans-dimensional field coils. These coils would be stacked up around energized biogel tubes. These tubes would that would typically be mounted parallel to the intended direction of faster-than-light flight. Pulses of energy down the tubes would produce trans-space motion, and differential application of power would be used to maneuver. And it was just one of the numerous ways that this exotic energy could be used to drastically cut a starship's conventional energy needs.

All that was lost on the Gelarium's facilities exotic systems supervisor. He was certainly no starship engineer. In fact, he was no engineer

at all. More of a plumber, to be precise. And a bit of an electrician. And if you needed something hand carved out of a chunk of driftwood, he was the definitely man to see. But when it came to mechanical contrivances, and about ninety percent of everything else that came under his purview, he was most definitely the least handy man in the whole of the facilities staff.

What Gorin did have was a knack for managing resources, and in translating the esoteric requests of various other departments into actual terms that more practical souls could use to achieve the desired results. That was what had gotten him promoted. "Bloody vacations," he huffed as he looked toward the comm on the floor, in the vain hope that one of his more talented mechanical techs would reply to his pleadings for help. "Always has to happen in the middle of the night, when everyone's off on their bloody vacations!"

"Welcome to the Vixanti Interstellar

Systems Life Essence Power Generation Demonstration System," the computer again cooed, as it did every time the onset of motion in the room triggered its routine. Every time Gorin moved his exposed legs, the computer would start its spiel, only to stop when his lack of motion caused it to register a false trigger.

"Would ye shut the bloody hell up!" Gorin snapped as he struggled to loosen a bolt. The ratcheting mechanism on this particular pod had locked up. It seemed as if the spring that held the pawl against the main gear had broken and the pieces had jammed the pawl in place. Getting it apart, however, was proving more than merely difficult. His diminutive stature might have made it easy to get into where he needed to be, but his short arms were short of leverage.

To make matters worse, there was no room for power tools. Even with the fairing sections opened up on both the pod and its mounting, there was only just enough room for an

adjustable wrench. "Whoever designed this bloody thing... ought to have... their fingers... stuck... in... GAH!"

With a sharp, metallic clank, Gorin's wrench slipped out of his tired fingers and went careening off into parts unknown. "Fuck'in hell!"

"Welcome to the Vixanti Interstellar Systems Life Essence Power Generation Demonstration System," the computer began again.

"SHUT UP!" Gorin roared.

"Sorry!" came the entirely unexpected reply.

"Mika! Is that you, lass?" Gorin asked, pulling himself out of the machine and back onto the elevated catwalk which served as the loading deck for the power pods.

"Yes," Dr. Mika replied from the chamber

floor below.

“What’n all hells r’ ye doin’ down ‘ere so late?” Gorin asked as he looked around in vain for his wrench.

“I can’t sleep,” Dr. Mika responded with a deep, frustrated sigh. “The key’vin’ta artifacts Chyka obtained are proving to be far more frustrating to analyze than I thought. Nothing about them makes any sense. It’s almost as if they’re actually trying to keep me from learning their secrets! I... I just need to clear my brain out before I give it another try.”

"Ah," Gorin said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Well, eh... did'je happ'n te see where me wrench got off to?"

"I think it landed in a flower pot over here," Dr. Mika replied. "I'll get it for you."

"Thanks a bunch, lassie!" Gorin replied, wiping the sweat off his brow. "Would'a taken me forever to find it."

"This power generation facility is capable of generating up to twenty-eight megawatts of electrical power using nothing but the energy flowing through the connection that binds each volunteer's mind to their immortal, extra-dimensional soul," the computer continued in its firm, bedtime voice.

"How are the new modifications working?" Dr. Mika asked as she poked about among the leaves. "I trust they aren't giving any trouble?"

"No complaints," Gorin replied. "Not like there ever were, though. But gettin the loss rate down te three percent certainly didn do any harm. Can't lie though... the whole comin' out in a duplicate o summ'n else's body was always a laugh. Specially that one lunk who wound up a little blue nobai lass. Couldn' comprehend the concept of tits for the life o 'im. Well... her."

Dr. Mika chuckled as she pulled the oily wrench from the planter. "That was quite

amusing, wasn't it? Especially when the original started trying to explain the quirks and details of his new body to him. I wonder whatever happened to... her?"

"Not a clue, as usual," Gorin replied. "Shame. Would've made a great model, what with all those insights bout both sexes'n'all, right?"

The computer's routine went on. "In order to obtain this life essence energy, the power system requires that living, sapient individuals be contained within individual pods. Within these pods, the volunteers are encased in energized biogel, and saturated with trans-space energy until they transition into an outwardly formless, extra-dimensional state."

"Indeed," Dr. Mika responded as she rounded the end of the power plant and started up the stairs toward the exhausted, would-be mechanic. "What's the problem tonight?"

"Broken spring, and for the life'o'me, I

canna get off the bolt that's hold'n it place," Gorin replied as his eyes fixed on the approaching scientist. The lack of a disappointing frown on her face quite so out of character that it made his heart skip a beat. So was her perfectly form-fitting coating of pure, glistening, and fully exposed blackness. She had always been so extremely physically shy that seeing her without a full covering of clothing was as much a shock as her lack of grumpiness. "Woah, lassie! If ye didn have them glasses o yours on, I wouldn'e recognized ye one bit."

Dr. Mika responded with a very reserved half-smile. "Are you sure it's the spring, and not something caught in the mechanism? Didn't Evik do some work on this before he left for vacation?"

"Aye, he did," Gorin replied, scratching his beard. "Hav'n seen anytin out o place, though. An it hasn moved since he worked on it."

The computer continued. "While held in this extra-dimensional state, volunteers find themselves consumed by a formless euphoria, their life essence connections soothed into submission with gentile waves of sweet, ethereal pleasure."

"Maybe he didn't check to see if all the alignment bolts were evened out when he finished," Dr. Mika suggested. "There's very little tolerance. It needs to be perfectly straight, or the energy flow will be dampened to an unacceptable level. I also imagine that might keep it from moving freely."

"Aye, that... that might be the case," Gorin responded with a nod as he picked up a small sheaf of papers that had been laying on the floor beside where he was working. "Let's see... um..."

"Considering that it hasn't moved since he finished, wouldn't it most likely be the bolts on the front?" Dr. Mika inquired. "Maybe try

those first?"

"Right," Gorin replied with a nod and a rather sheepish smile. No doubt it was somewhat embarrassing to the man responsible for supervising maintenance of these sorts of exotic systems to be getting directions from something of a nerdy, overly cerebral lab-wonk. "Didn' know ye were much of an engineer lass. Got a good head for it, if nothin' else."

"Just because I work with little things in the lab doesn't mean I don't have to understand how the big things work," Dr. Mika replied. "Or very basic things. In fact, sometimes the basic things are far more interesting. Simple pistons, and gears, and levers, than all seem quite mundane on their own, can be put together to do the most interesting things."

The computer's routine went on, despite the lack of anyone paying attention it. "Thusly aroused, the volunteers' life essence energy

connection acquires a greatly elevated state of conductivity. This allows far greater energies to pass through the connection, energies than can be siphoned off without causing any harm whatsoever to those providing it."

"Ye' must have some interestin' hobbies," Gorin said as he again stuck his nose between the end of the pod and its mounting, this time with a small gadget which would take highly accurate measurements of just about anything it was pointed at.

"Well... I do have quite a nice little collection of model steam engines," Dr. Mika responded as she read the screen over Gorin's shoulder. "Eighteen point five centimeters."

"Aye," Gorin grunted, looking back to the blueprints. "An it's supposed te be fourteen even. No wonder it's all locked up! Nice... eh... nice catch. Steam engines, ye say?"

The computer droned on. "To make the analogy with electricity, the connection

becomes capable of withstanding more current passing through it. As well, the widening of the connection increases what might be thought of as the voltage. While both of these factors are important, completion of a proper circuit is required in order to actually cause useful energy to flow."

Dr. Mika nodded. "I have eight in my workshop. Six very small ones, and two that are a bit larger. Sized for real, practical application. I use those for... um... well... things."

Gorin looked over his shoulder and eyed the visibly embarrassed tigress as he applied his wrench to the alignment bolt. "It's okay, lass. There's lot's o folk with the steampunk bug. Ever been te one o them resorts? With the real skyships an all?"

"Yeah... I have," Dr. Mika responded with a little smile. "A while ago. So many mechanical things. All that shiny brass. And gears. And the

steam engines. And... yeah. It was... fun. And... inspiring. After meeting Doctor Alluwa, I..."

Gorin let his wrench slip from the bolt as the tigress abruptly stopped. "Woah, now. Dun tell me ye had anything te do with that machine lab o hers down under... did'je?"

Dr. Mika turned away sheepishly.

The computer continued its speech. "Each power pod is akin to a battery. Each battery is connected in series with all those physically in-line with it. Each series set is then connected in parallel at the ends of each power system. All that is required then, is to complete the loop."

"Ah... well... I suppose yer a far braver lass than I," Gorin responded as he remeasured the alignment bolt. "I hope yer not usin them steam engines for that sort o stuff. That'd be... well... I wouldna wan any o that down near me bits, if ye know what I mean."

"Well... you just have make sure the gear ratios are right, and use an automatic lubricator," Dr. Mika replied softly, eyeing Gorin sideways with an uncertain smile.

Gorin chuckled. "Very funny. I'm sure yer jokin... but... eh... ye know, if yer not... I wouldna mind a watch. Ye know... if ye don mind some company when yer... ye know."

Dr. Mika giggled in a shy, indecisive manner.

The computer went on with its analogy. "Power is directed from the source end of the plant, through a central conduit, to the drain end. Special induction coils surround this conduit, allowing energy to be safely siphoned off into a secondary energized biogel circuit. This secondary circuit enters one side of a biogel-electrical transformer, which directly transforms the energy into electricity."

"Fourteen centimeters," Gorin observed, pointing the measurer at each of the neighboring adjustment bolts in turn.

"Fourteen. Fourteen. Was it really jus that one that was munging up the works?"

"Well, I suppose there's only one way to find out," Dr. Mika replied, her tone just ever-so-slightly on the mischievous side.

"Aye," Gorin replied, closing the fairings and locking them into place. He took hold of one of the loading handles and gave it good yank. The pods were designed to only rotate toward the catwalk, keeping them level while the carousel on which they rode turned the opposite direction. With a deeply satisfying click, the ratcheting mechanism moved one place.

BWEEP! BWEEP!

"Pod misalignment detected," the computer said, cutting off its tourist speech. "Unit one. Section four. Please stand clear while the pod is realigned."

BWEEP! BWEEP!

The pod rolled downward.

"Sounds smooth," Gorin noted with considerable satisfaction as the pod quickly made a nearly complete revolution.

"Very smooth," Dr. Mika agreed softly as the pod door slid open with a soft, strangely sensual hiss. "Though I imagine a more... well... you know. Thorough test is in order."

"This pod is now ready," the computer announced, its smooth, firm voice coming from the pod itself rather than the room's speakers. "You may now proceed with your personal demonstration of this pod's function. Please remove any clothing you may be wearing prior to entering the pod. In consideration of current power needs and volunteer availability, your stay within the pod will be... eleven days."

"Right. So... I take it ye didn't come here to just help me find me wrench, eh lass?" Gorin inquired with a raised eyebrow as he took all of his tools and papers and stuffed them into

his utility bag.

Dr. Mika smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Well... no. Not really. I... I just... need to relax a bit. After all that up in the valley. And not being able to make that staff do anything. Yeah. I need to relax."

"Relax?" Gorin questioned. "If yer wantin te relax, why'd'je come down here?"

Dr. Mika gestured toward the open pod.

"Ah," Gorin responded with a slightly dejected look on his face. "Well, if it float's yer boat. Ye know... um. Maybe... when ye get out... we can..."

"Have a look at my... steam toys?" Dr. Mika asked with a quick little grin.

"Well, yeah. That," Gorin replied. "You know... an... maybe..."

Dr. Mika again responded with a very sheepish look on her face.

"I mean, it's... eh," Gorin responded.

"Well... I..." Dr. Mika replied with audible hesitation. "I... suppose we could... I could... let you..."

"No pressure, lass," Gorin said with a suddenly concerned expression on his face. "It was jus an idea..."

"I know," Dr. Mika replied with a shallow shrug of her shoulders. "But... well... I... you know... I wouldn't mind if you..."

Gorin's expression lightened. "Well, ye know. Think about it. An' when ye get out..."

"I was thinking... well... what about now?" Dr. Mika responded with a bat of her long black eyelashes. "Here... and now. Would you..."

Gorin's jaw fell slack. "Well... I never! I suppose I'd be mighty remiss te refuse ye. But... eh... there's no place here te have a

proper go... an..."

Dr. Mika looked toward the pod.

"Oh," Gorin responded, following her gaze.
"Uh... ye know that's fully automatic..."

Dr. Mika nodded. "And no override."

"An ye really wanna..."

"Find out what it's like to... to copulate with someone else's soul," Dr. Mika responded softly. "Yeah... I would. It's just... such a strange idea. I've always been curious... and you... here... now... and... well. I was already going to go in there. So... so why not? You wanna try it with me?"

For a moment, Gorin was silent. His expression went from shock, to worry, to perplexity, to anxiety, and on to something that couldn't seem to decide between unfettered lust and considerable displeasure. "Ah... well..."

"I mean, you don't have to," Dr. Mika replied.

"No! No," Gorin said, shaking his head as he looked the shy tigress up and down. Her nipples were starting to show under the surface of her glossy black biogel coating. So too was the crease between her legs. There was nothing he could have done to keep his own body, and his own biogel coating from replying in kind. "Okay. Ah suppose this place wouldn't fall apart without me for a bit. An... soul sex? I suppose I gotta wonder what that might be like."

"I have no idea," Dr. Mika replied as she stepped up to the edge of the pod, and sat down on the cushions that formed a firm bench from which to enter and exit the pod. She took off her glasses and placed them on the solid barrier which separated the loading points between each section of the power plant. "Come on. Let's... let's... you know. Roll in there together so it doesn't lock one of us

out. And then..."

"An then what, lass?" Gorin said, as she slid herself back until he could fit his knees on the cushion between her spread legs.

Dr. Mika shrugged. "I guess then... well... you can see if you manage to give me a filling of your DNA before we both get turned into goo."

Goring smiled as the pair wiggled themselves back, off the cushions and onto the firmly padded bed within the pod. "Not gonna lie, lass. I don't generally last very long in bed. So..."

Dr. Mika shyly bit her lower lip.

"Alight then," Gorin responded as they shifted fully onto the bed. "Let's... let's do this."

For the moment, the pod remained open. Gorin knelt above his soon-to-be lover as she

spread her legs open and shifted to give him as much access as she could in the narrow confines of the pod. He slowly settled down atop her and slid the tip of his now erect, and surprisingly ample manhood down along the folds between her legs.

"You're pretty big for such a little one," Dr. Mika observed with a soft smile as the pod door finally hissed closed over Gorin's head.

Gorin slid himself into her body. Their biogel coatings merged together as one, first between their legs, and then everywhere they touched. In an instant, they were consumed by a rapidly spiraling feedback loop of hormones and pheromones communicated and amplified by the biogel. Incapable of finding words, they could only fill the pod with primal noises as mindless, animal yearning for complete consummation consumed them both.

If either of the lover's had noticed the glowing pink slime that was stretching out

from openings in both ends of the pod, they gave no hint of it. Nor did they react when the energized biogel touched, and merged with the biogel which covered their wildly copulating bodies. Only when this glistening blackness itself began to energize did they sense their impending transfiguration. With a few final, pounding thrusts, Gorin succeeded in giving the tigress the gift of his genetic legacy. In an instant, her body responded, as those of all feyli are wont to do in reaction to such a gift. The muscular contractions were barely visible through the blackness, quite fittingly, just as the wash of pink energy spread through it.

No sooner were the lovers surrounded in glowing pink biogel, they were lifted together off the bed into the exact center of the power pod. Sparkles of searing white energy began to burst forth from their surface, twinkling in the air around them. The energized biogel formed a taut, form-fitting sheath around them, before beginning to pulsate over them. Wave after wave flowed over their combined shape, each

time causing their form to become less defined. Bodies became lumps, and the lumps soon became became fluid.

Amid the fluid, an inner darkness appeared. It seemed to consume the light around it. The whole fluid mass began to spin. Slowly, the energized biogel formed into six thick strands stretching from one end of the pod to the other, while the thread of inverted space remained within.

The threads of energized biogel continued to throw off sparks of energy. Some of these went outward, shimmering against the walls of the pod before slowly fading away. Most, however, were drawn inward, toward the negative space, not to produce energy, but to produce stability. Through this mechanism, the two living, breathing beings were transfigured into a purely physical structure which spanned numerous additional higher order spatial dimensions, stretching far beyond the bounds of the generally observable universe. A

structure that could then be collapsed back into its original state. That was the theory, at any rate. It didn't always work out the way it was supposed to.

Sometimes, the biogel would trigger, and the volunteers would reappear as inanimate, though still very much living biogel dolls. Gummies, and not always of the same gender as the volunteer who'd become them. Far less commonly, one could one exit the system in a perfect copy of someone else's body. It was always that of another current volunteer within the same power plant. Least common of all, a soul might be lost, presumably to the realm at the other end of their life essence connection, though sometimes they might be pulled through the induction loop, and into whatever biogel network the power plant was connected to.

The chances of all of these untoward fates was now quite small, relatively speaking, but they were still just chances. There was no way

for either of the lovers to know if they would ever return to the mortal realm as they'd left it. All they knew was that should anything happen to prevent them from being returned to their normal selves, their fate would be shared. Together. As one. For eternity and beyond.

The carousel rolled. A new, empty pod took its place. "This pod is ready," the computer announced to an empty room. "Awaiting the next volunteer..."

TWELVE

BLACK AND WHITE

Chyka yawned and closed her eyes. The wind outside rustled the leafless trees, while little wet gobs of slushy snow pocked and pattered against the creaky old windows. A low, simulated fire cracked in the small stone fireplace, filling the little mountain inn bedroom with a warm, soothingly yellow glow. It was peaceful. Quiet. And relaxing. Very, very relaxing.

The old inn was a cold, drafty place. It had been built almost five hundred years prior, of gray mountain stone, darkly varnished wooden beams and slightly off-white reed plaster. There was little to hint that it was the product of a technologically advanced interstellar

civilization. A small control panel here. A small holographic display there. And cleverly simulated fire almost everywhere.

All of the light fixtures in the inn were modeled after antique oil lanterns and wax candles. They glowed with perfectly simulated flickering light, and gave off just enough heat to be convincing, without posing any of the hazards of actual fire. They even smelled like their real counterparts.

The fireplaces were even more advanced. Fictional flames crackled upon real wooden logs, flowing and sparking with perfect realism. The heat given off wasn't perfectly consistent, but rose and fell in tune with the visible flames. The wood itself would slowly char, giving off a pleasant, wood oven scent that even the most finicky nose would find pleasing. Outside, atop the mostly blanked off stone chimney, a steam generator reproduced the appearance of smoke, into which was infused just enough of the charred wood scent

to make the illusion almost perfectly convincing.

If there was one thing that Chyka had come to sorely miss living in the big city, it was the fireplaces. Sure, they had simulated fireplaces, but they just weren't the same. The wood wasn't real. The scent was just dilute essential oils. And there was no faux-smoke puffing from chimney tops to make a cold winter landscape feel warm and inviting.

Chyka curled up into a little ball and savored the silky smoothness of the deep blue sheets. It had been more than a month since she'd slept in a proper bed. She'd nearly forgotten just how wonderfully snug a big, heavy comforter could be, especially in such a chilly place as this. The plush, shimmery-silver comforter provided by the inn was particularly cozy. So cozy, indeed, that there there seemed to be almost nothing in the whole wide world compelling enough to drag her out from her little slice of sleepy, nighttime paradise.

Whatever lingering thoughts Chyka might have had about alien relics and glowing purple goo had long since faded away, and with them all concerns about the immediate future. Sleep, however, seemed almost as distant now as it had when she'd crossed the old railroad bridge over the Yu'min River early that cloudy winter morning. She'd gotten much too used to spending her nights encased with her tank-like bed of pure, glistening blackness back at Gelitech. It was there that she and her biogel wife could physically interact with relative freedom, and enjoy mutual pleasures so blissfully intense as to be almost unimaginable.

Here in the little mountain inn, however, Chyka and her wife had to content themselves with more mundane sorts of mutual biogel-marital pleasure. By fingers and massaging flow, as it were. It was still enjoyable. But it was just... missing something. Something that she'd come to take for granted. Something whose absence was making her feel completely

out of place in normal society.

It wasn't entirely unexpected, of course. The little snow leopardess had given in to temptation precisely because biogel was going to set her apart as something different. Something apart from the rest of the world. A harbinger of a new kind of society. A new kind of living.

It was supposed to be a philosophical thing. A metaphysical thing. An intangible thing. So why did it feel so direct? So visceral? So personal?

Chyka sighed and rolled over to look at the little wet blobs of snow that were starting to cover the room's two small windows. It was building up in the spaces of the floral cast iron frame that broke up the slightly yellowed glass. It wouldn't be long before the view outside was completely obscured. It seemed such a shame. Even without leaves on the trees, the small lantern-lit courtyard was such

a pretty place to behold, and doubly so in the snow.

The wind was getting stronger. The rustling of tree branches was soon drowned out by a whistling howl. The snowflakes were getting smaller, and drier as the temperature dropped. It started to swirl around the courtyard and pile up along the walls. If the forecast was accurate, it would be up to the windows before the storm ended sometime the next evening. There was a good chance that the little snow leopardess was about get thoroughly snowed in. All things considered, that might be a very good thing.

Chyka snuggled up more tightly among the covers as the faint, snow-muted sound of a train's horn could be heard somewhere across the mountain valley. There, the single track Sky Line Bypass ran along the valley's edge. An old passenger platform served as the only way into little Myalu village by land. A steel girder bridge formerly used by the Brightstone Mine

branch line connected the two, its rails replaced by thick wooden decking for the convenience of pedestrians and lightweight motorized carts.

It wasn't that far north along the Sky Line that Chyka had been born, in the old post village of Dari. It was a railroad community as dull and drab as Myalu was scenic and quaint. Only three extended families called its damp, gray stone houses home. More than half of the village worked for the railroad. It was hard work by modern standards, maintaining the small yard, general line work, and clearing snow from the line between Dari and Kotani to the north, and Chessa to the south. Fairly thankless too. If the work was well done, no one would ever notice the things that went wrong. If it wasn't, however, then *everyone* would.

The little snow leopardess upbringing, in that unpleasant atmosphere of dark moods and demanding schedules, had left her yearning to

escape from a very early age. School down the line in Chessa had given her a taste of the outside world, a taste that her family never seemed inclined to share. Quite the opposite, in fact.

The horn sounded again, and with it came a soft, distant rumble. Chyka could hear the accompanying roar and whoosh in her mind as the massive snowblower sent clouds of white fluff cascading down in the river below. For a moment she smiled as childhood memories of watching the big snowblowers at work flickered before her tired eyes. Then she frowned as darker memories replaced them. Of a father who's obsessively focused world consisted of nothing but steel, horsepower, and backbreaking toil. Of a mother who seemed to detest everything about the world beyond their mountain-bound home. And of siblings that made fun of just about everything that seemed to interest her. Everything except the railroad. Because to them that was all there was. And all there ever would be.

It had been Chyka's great grandmother who'd gotten her out of Dari and into the wider world. She was the sort of old fey'li lady who just didn't give a flying rat's ass about what other people thought about her. She did what she did, and no one dared suggest she do otherwise. She was a Marine, after all, and a combat veteran of three conflicts. She had a drill sergeant's mouth, a brigadier's rank, and a tendency to apply a swift swat of the walking cane to anyone who dared question her thoroughly anti-authoritarian authority.

Chyka smiled. *You're going to university*, her great grandma had always said. *You're going to university, and you're getting yourself out of this accursed place. And if you don't come back... well, all the better for you.*

It wasn't a hope, of course. Nor was it a suggestion. It was an order. And everyone in Dari knew it. So when it came time for the little snow leopardess to decide on the course of her future, perhaps for the first time in her

family's history, no one tried to sabotage it. To university she went. And she hadn't gone back. At least... not yet.

It had always been in the back of Chyka's mind to return home for a visit some day. Once she'd been successful. Just to show her siblings what they'd been missing. And to show her great grandmother that she'd been right. The outside world was a better place to live.

The little snow leopardess began to wonder why everyone else seemed to think of the world beyond Dari as a horrible place. There was so much to see. So much to do. So much fun to be had. How could anyone spend even five minutes in a proper mountain town and not see that?

Chyka shook her head as a final, barely audible blast of the work train's horn found its way to her chilly ears. There was probably no knowing the answer to that question. Her parents didn't seem to know. Even her

grandparents didn't seem to know. Her great-grandmother... if anyone knew, it was her. She'd left and come back, but would never say why. Not even to her little black sheep of a great-granddaughter. Perhaps there just wasn't an answer. Dull and depressing a home as it might have been, perhaps it was simply just that. Home.

Chyka's ears twitched in response to a very different sound. There was a light, airy twinkling coming from somewhere close. Somewhere inside the inn. Somewhere... on the other side of her bedroom's ancient, solid wood door. And it was getting closer.

The little snow leopardess had a vague memory of a very old story. An ancient rural fey'li tradition going well back beyond the fall of the key'vin'ta and their empire. One that had surely gone out of fashion several millennia ago. Or had it?

In the old days, the tale told, fey'li folk

living in secluded communities with few prospects of marriage would often visit the closest towns and cast their future to fate. They would wander the halls of traveler's inns in the darkness of night, carrying with them little chimes which simultaneously declared both their genuinely sincere desire and their total commitment, come whatever may. The women would carry light, twinkling chimes. The men would carry chimes with lower, more sonorous notes. And which those chimes, all carried a silent hope that someone, anyone, would claim them as a spouse, for better or for worse.

Anyone could lay claim to the nighttime wanderer. It didn't matter what sex they were. Or whether or not they were in an existing marriage. Or even what sort of marriage it was. The fey'li, with their highly disparate birthrate, often formed little married 'prides' of women, sometimes in concert with a man. The latter wasn't a necessity. Nor, at least technically, did there have to be only one.

For all intents and purposes, there were no hard and fast rules when it came to fey'li marriage. The only condition was consent. Once consent was given, it could almost never be rescinded. Those who dared to wander the inns with their chimes and hopes were regarded as already having consented. All someone else had to do was accept. All that required was opening one's bedroom door, and inviting the wanderer in.

As the bright twinkle got louder, curiosity began to overcome Chyka's inclination to stay in her cozy cocoon at all costs. She wanted to see if that chime really did belong to some woman looking for a lifelong mate. She wanted to see what kind of woman would be so willing to cast her life into the hands of a random stranger. And, it seemed, her biogel wife was just as curious as she.

Alright, alright, the little snow leopardess thought as she began to unwrap herself from amid the heavy covers. There was no denying

the tight, all-encompassing hug of her biogel wife, and the clear intent behind it. *I'll go have a look. But just a look!*

Chyka rolled out of bed and discovered yet another drawback to being clad in nothing but a thin coating of glistening black biogel. Even though it rapidly formed boot soles under her feet, it didn't quite keep her from feeling just how unpleasantly cold the stone floor was. Or the air in the room for that matter. The chill was intense, and it seemed to penetrate deep into her core.

"Rrgh," the little snow leopardess grunted as she cringed at the icy coldness. Fortunately, it was just a passing sensation. Biogel could retain body heat very well, though it didn't always seem to know exactly how much wintery chill was too much before starting to properly insulate.

I'm coming, I'm coming, Chyka thought to herself as she staggered toward the door,

grabbing a soft, cream colored robe along the way. It was provided by the inn, and was the only piece of fabric attire she had access to. It wasn't necessary, of course, but she didn't want to surprise the unknown woman with the appearance of being virtually naked in the darkness.

The door handle creaked as its timeworn brass components rubbed sharply against one another, almost as if they were offering some objection to Chyka's rather spontaneous act of curiosity. The light, airy twinkling came to an abrupt stop as the door slowly opened. A warm, yellow wedge of light spilled out into the narrow hallway, otherwise completely dark save for dimly glowing faux-candles at each end. The little snow leopardess peered out.

Not entirely to her surprise, Chyka's eyes locked with those of another fey'li, a beautiful leopardess with long, dark brown hair and glimmering green eyes. She wasn't all that much taller than the little snow leopardess,

though her figure wasn't quite as slender. Nor did her fur seem quite as silky looking. She looked very careworn. Indeed, she looked almost worn out.

Just like Chyka, the leopardess was clad in an inn supplied robe. Hers was a pretty pastel green in color. In one hand she held a little silver wind chime. The other hand was upon the slender belt that held her robe closed tightly around her waist.

For a brief moment, Chyka wasn't entirely sure if this woman was seeking a spouse, or just taking in an errant wind chime before the storm blew it away. Were there wind chimes around the inn? She didn't remember seeing any when she'd arrived. Or hearing any. Had she just not noticed in her haste to get settled in before the storm arrived?

The leopardess didn't seem at all pleased with Chyka's appearance. Nonetheless, she undid her robe and opened it so the little snow

leopardess could gaze upon the extremely enticing produce on offer.

Oh... I could have so much fun with that, Chyka thought as her eyes caressed the leopardess' soft tummy fluff and beautiful curves. Fun indeed. But then they'd be married. Permanently married. They didn't even know each other. Or... did they?

There was something about the leopardess that seemed vaguely familiar. Something that invoked a distant memory of life before Gelitech. Before like in the city. Before...

"Jumie?" Chyka blurted out without thinking. "Jumie Sandri?"

The leopardess bit her lower lip and looked down at her feet with very visible discomfort. It was all the answer the little snow leopardess needed.

Chyka was stunned. Jumie was a year younger than she was, a daughter of one of the

other families who called Dari home. While her own family had been merely averse to regular contact with the outside world, the Sandri family had seem positively terrified with just the idea of it. They never watched the news. Or video. Or listened to the radio. Or even read the newspapers that occasionally made their way to the village. Schooling, what little there was, took place entirely at home.

As far as Chyka could remember, none of the Sandris had so much as set foot even one short meter outside of the secluded little valley in which Dari stood. Except for railroad work, that is. Even then, she could still remember her aloof father constantly complaining of their refusal to leave the railroad right of way, right to the point of sleeping in the chilly cabs of the little work engines during multi-day excursions.

Given that, what in the seven heavens was Jumie doing half way down the valley in Myalu? And what was she doing offering her

body as a permanent gift to whoever might claim it? Was she hoping to find a weak willed spouse to drag back to that awful place? Or was she looking for a genuinely caring spouse to whisk her away to someplace pleasant and safe?

Of course, Chyka couldn't just ask her. The stories said that conversation was prohibited. One could close the door, rejecting the offer. Or one could invite the wanderer in. That was it. There were no other options. Assuming Jumie knew the old stories as well as Chyka did. All things considered, she might well not.

The old Chyka didn't want anything to do with her former life in that dark, deeply unpleasant place. She didn't want to spend her life surrounded by reminders of what once was, and what might have been if her family hadn't been so irrationally repulsed by the world beyond their little village. It seemed silly even to contemplate bringing this midnight interloper into her life. There was nothing

good to be gained by it, and many a good thing to be lost.

On the other hand, the new Chyka couldn't help but ponder the possibilities of snatching up this offered body and introducing it to all the wonders of the real world beyond the mountains. All the fun of the big city. And biogel. Beautifully magnificent biogel. And then, once she'd thoroughly 'corrupted' her catch, she could rub it all straight into the noses of all those insular, hidebound prudes back home.

Chyka's biogel wife seemed quite keen to have another partner in the mix. She hugged the little snow leopardess from neck to toe, and even began to flow and rub in places sure to make her host quite keen to seek further erotic pleasures. Erotic pleasures offered by the body of the leopardess who seemed to be having considerable second thoughts as she stood there waiting for her prospective spouse to make up her mind.

A seed of doubt remained. It didn't seem quite right for to just straight up lay claim to the nervous leopardess. Chyka had to offer a way out, even if it was against the spirit of the whole ritual. "Why not?" she murmured, backing away from the half-opened door as if to allow the leopardess inside. "You want to be my wife?"

Jumie sighed deeply, but didn't say a word. She grasped the chime firmly in her hand and stepped forward.

Chyka smiled and beckoned the leopardess into her room. "Alright then," she purred softly. "Come on in."

Chyka gazed out into a sea of pure, unadulterated whiteness. The snow was still

falling, though the lightening sky foretold of the storm's impending passage, and clear, starry skies later that evening. It was all so clean. So pure. So... natural.

The little snow leopardess couldn't avoid the contrast between the pure white snow and the glistening blackness that coated her body. It was an aberration against the proper order of nature. Clean, yet starkly sterile. Inert, yet all-consuming. Alive, yet...

A rustle of the shimmering silver comforter brought Chyka back to reality. Her new spouse had finally woken after their excruciatingly long night of awkward nothing. They'd spoken not a word. Nor had they so much as touched one another. The highly displeased leopardess had straight away curled up under the covers and gone to sleep. Or feigned going to sleep, that is.

Chyka was quite sure that Jumie had been awake almost the whole time. At least until the

little snow leopardess had gotten up at dawn to watch the snow falling, and get some breakfast. Only then did her new spouse actually drift off to sleep. And even then, it was hardly of the restful sort. If the state of the covers were any indication, she'd spent the morning tossing and turning.

The little silver chime lay on the floor beside the bed, along with the pastel green robe that the leopardess had been wearing. She had cast them aside, even as she hid herself away among the sheets. Hid herself away from the wife who lay down beside her. And, perhaps, from the world she represented.

Chyka couldn't help but feel guilty for claiming the leopardess as a wife. Clearly, the woman had been expecting to be claimed by a very different sort of traveler. But what sort of traveler could she possibly expect to find in little Myalu at the onset of winter? The tourists were all gone. No one wanted to get snowed in for days. No one except a Gelitech model sent

on an unexpected involuntary vacation, and a rural mountain girl looking for a spouse in the least likely of places, it seemed.

As far as Chyka knew, they were the only ones in the inn. When she'd arrived in the morning, she'd been given free choice of bedrooms, save one. The one that Jumie was staying in, no doubt. There was no one else except the innkeeper, and she already had quite the family of her own to look after.

I wonder, the little snow leopardess thought to herself as she glanced at the sullen looking woman who was trying hard to simultaneously glare daggers at her new spouse, and to avoid anything coming close to eye contact. *I wonder if she came here looking for a way out. And this whole marriage thing was just an excuse. But...*

Chyka wondered if it was only supposed to have been an excuse. A reason to move further and further afield until she was too far away for any of her family to brave the world long

and far enough to come after her. But if that was the case, then she never actually intended to get married. But along came the little snow leopardess who had to get curious and screw everything up.

"You know, we don't actually *have* to be married," Chyka said, breaking the many hours of silence that had passed since the leopardess had stepped into her bedroom. "It's not like anyone knows. And if anyone does know, we can always say we knew each other in Dari and decided to have a long night's chat."

Jumie huffed sharply and rolled over, away from Chyka.

"Well, what was the whole point of offering yourself to any random mate who might be interested if you don't actually seem to want one?" Chyka asked. "And you *had* to know it was just you and me here. You saw me come in around breakfast time this morning. And there was no one else. So why did you come by my

door?"

Jumie responded with nothing but silence.

"I seriously hope you don't expect me to go back to that hellhole with you," Chyka said, frowning at the recalcitrant leopardess. "I seriously hope you didn't expect anyone to go back to that hellhole with you."

Jumie remained silent.

"So why are you here?" Chyka questioned. "Are you trying to run away?"

Jumie still remained silent, but it seemed to Chyka that she was starting to shake.

"What was the whole point of you coming here and looking for a spouse if you aren't okay with it?" Chyka begged. "Please, tell me!"

Jumie began to sob.

Chyka shook her head and took a step toward the bed. Had Jumie actually expected

her new spouse to go back to Dari with her? Or was there something else wrong?

"You came here for something," Chyka said, lowering her voice. "I can't help you find it if you won't tell me what it is."

"I... I don't know!" Jumie snapped.

"Then why did you come here?" Chyka asked, sitting down on the end of the bed.

"She told me to come here," Jumie sobbed, pulling a pillow over her head to hide her face from Chyka.

"Who told you to come here?" Chyka inquired softly.

Jumie ignored the question, sobbing into the pillow, and shaking so badly that Chyka started to get very worried.

"Can't you tell me who told you to come here?" Chyka asked as soothingly as she could.

"Your... your great ma-ma," Jumie finally replied with a shrill whine. "She told me to leave and never come back!"

Chyka was struck silent as the leopardess began to full-on cry. No wonder the leopardess had been so displeased to see her. Of all the people in the outside world to open that door, it had to be the one living member of the Riyalli family who'd left Dari.

"Why?" Chyka asked after several long minutes had passed.

"She said something bad was gonna happen if I stayed," Jumie cried. "She said to get out. Get out and never come back!"

Chyka was again struck silent. Her great grandmother could be harsh, for sure. This, however, seem almost cruel. Unless there was some good reason, of course.

"She told everyone to get out!" Jumie sobbed. "Everyone! But no one would! They

said she was crazy. Crazy!"

"Then how did you get here?" Chyka asked.

"I... I got scared," Jumie cried. "She was so... so frightening! I just... I just ran. Down the tracks. Until a train saw me and stopped and took me here and I don't know what to do and I don't have anyplace to go and..."

"Did she say what was so bad that was going to happen?" Chyka asked.

"No!" Jumie replied with a long, choking sob. "Not... not to me. I don't know. I don't know anything!"

"If you really believed her, then why did you spend the night looking for a spouse instead of looking for help?" Chyka inquired, momentarily forgetting that a daughter of the Sandri family had no idea how the world outside of Dari worked.

"Because that's what people do when they

go away," Jumie sobbed. "When they go away and don't come back. It's what people do..."

"Shh," Chyka said as she got up to grab her comm from the nightstand. "It's alright. It's going to be alright. Don't say another word."

Her great grandmother might have been old, but she wasn't a nutter, or a fool. If she thought something was wrong, there probably was. And if she thought there was enough of a reason to abandon Dari altogether...

"Mashitran," Chyka said to her comm. She might have called someone else, but Dari was a railroad town, and the organization tended to take matters along the line more seriously than the police or other emergency services. In this weather, that might make all the difference if something catastrophic had happened up there at the peak of the line. "Operations. Operational security."

It could have just been a coincidence, but the timing was certainly suspicious. Dr. Mika

starts digging around in a key'vin'ta ritual cave. Digging around that leads to the little snow leopardess summoning the spirit of a long gone key'vin'ta priestess. At right about the same time that something happens up the valley that's enough to set her Marine combat veteran great grandmother into a panic. The events might not have been connected at all. But if they were...

"Mashitran operational security," the harsh, grating man's voice replied. "Please state the nature of your call."

Chyka took a deep breath. "I have someone from Dari here, on the Sky Line Bypass," she explained. "We're in Myalu and..."

"What does this have to do with the railroad?" the security officer replied. "We only..."

"She's here because the residents were told to evacuate," Chyka interjected before turning to Jumie. "When was it? When did she tell

you leave?"

"Two days ago," Jumie sobbed.

"Evacuate? Seriously?" the security officer replied with a distinct tone of sarcasm. "There is no evacuation order in effect for Dari."

"Seriously! Issued two days ago," Chyka replied. "Did you tell the conductor on the train why you running down the line?"

"No," Jumie sobbed.

"Didn't he ask?" Chyka questioned.

"I said I was running away," Jumie cried.

"Two days ago? Trains have been running right up until eighteen-hundred yesterday and there have been no reports of anything unusual in Dari," the security officer snapped. "Listen lady, we don't have time for this! If you want to..."

Chyka clenched her teeth and tried to think

fast. What could she say that would make the security officer listen? "Dammit... they... they all were told to evacuate... by Brigadier General Takka Riyalli, IMC! The woman with me never heard the reason, but she's the only one who made it to Myalu after the order. Two days ago. Before the storm. Before the trains stopped running. Just because passing trains didn't see anything out of the ordinary doesn't mean there wasn't trouble. Hell, the fact that no one came looking for this woman after she ran off down when told to evacuate means that something definitely was wrong up there. Someone needs to check on Dari's status. Like... *now!*"

For a moment, there was no response on the other end of the line. "Yeah, fine," the security officer replied with a huff. "I'll call in to the office at the Dari yard. But they're all probably out clearing snow right now, so don't hold your breath."

Something about the security officer's

remark struck the little snow leopardess with dread. She'd been able to hear the snow clearing train passing by late the previous night. She hadn't heard one since, even though they should have been running up and down the line all night and all morning too.

"I... I don't think so," she murmured mostly to herself.

"What?" the security officer said. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes. I said I don't think they're clearing snow," Chyka replied. "I don't think they've passed Myalu since... since about midnight, maybe. That was the last snow blower run I heard, and I've been up all night with the woman from Dari."

"Say again?" the security officer responded, finally sounding interested in the issue. "You believe the last snow blower passed Myalu at midnight? None have passed since?"

"As far as I can tell," Chyka responded. "Even with all the snow falling, it was pretty loud at the inn when it passed by. I didn't hear another one go by after that."

"Uh... uh... fuck," the security officer snapped. "Listen, I'll get back to you... I need to..."

"Wait!" Chyka yelled. "Don't go straight up there! Don't send anyone up there until... I..."

The line was dead. The security officer had hung up.

"SHIT!" Chyka snapped. For a few moments, she wasn't sure what to do. Should she call the railroad back? Or should she try to reach someone better able to deal with a potential exoscience crisis?

"Gelitech," Chyka finally said to her comm. If anyone knew who to contact, it would be Dr. Mika. "Sciences. Dr. Mika. Extremely urgent!"

"You're on vacation," Dr. Mika scolded through the comm almost immediately. "Go back to..."

"Who do I contact if our messing with that artifact might have had serious unintended consequences?" Chyka asked.

"What are you talking about?" Dr. Mika questioned. "Have you gone and turned purple or something?"

"No! I... something happened up in Dari and the railroad might be sending people up there," Chyka replied. "But whatever it was, there was some warning. Two days ago. When you were messing around in that cave! It could be..."

"Have you been drinking?" Dr. Mika demanded. "How much 'nip have you had?"

"None!" Chyka replied. "This is an emergency, dammit! *An emergency!!!*"

"Fine! Fine!" Dr. Mika huffed. "I'll contact

the local Exo unit right away. Where are you right now?"

"Myalu, at the inn," Chyka replied. "Where you sent me. To get snowed in. On purpose."

Dr. Mika didn't reply. She cut off the line as abruptly as the railroad security officer had.

"Fuck," Chyka said, sitting down on the bed beside the sobbing leopardess. "Fuck. I hope everyone's alright and it's just a misunderstanding. That great-grandma was wrong. But... I don't know. I just... don't know."

Jumie said nothing.

"Just... just stay here," Chyka said, rising from the bed. "I'll go and get you something to eat. I have a feeling we're in for another very long night."

Chyka could hear the snow blower train struggling to make its way up the icy rail line past Myalu. She stepped out into the hallway and to the little bow window where she could get a clear view across the dark river valley. She could see the bright lights of the snow blower, and the two big freight engines helping to drive it up the steep grade from behind. A long, white plume of snow blasted out the side of the snow blower, and down into the icy river below. It would probably be hours before the unit made its way up into Dari. Hopefully they would have better luck coming in from the other direction.

It was almost midnight, and by now nearly everyone in little Myalu had heard there was serious trouble on the railroad, though nothing about Dari itself. Instead, the last snow blower down the line the previous night had been found derailed off the passing siding just to the north of Jatner bridge, very close to where the

little group from Gelitech had been exploring the key'vin'ta ritual cave. It hadn't been a violent derailment. The blower was still upright, just off the track. But despite the presence of a well equipped, well marked, and well lit storm shelter nearby, the crew was nowhere to be found.

The line itself hadn't been cleared since, thus the difficulty the snow blower coming up out of Mashiva was having in making headway on the relatively steep uphill grade. The line northward, on the other side of Dari, hadn't been cleared at any point during the night. The grade there was less problematic, and it seemed likely that the unit coming up from Kaiune would make it to Dari first.

A special Marine unit trained to identify and contain exoscience crises had arrived by air just over four hours prior. They had briefly interviewed both Jumie and Chyka before heading north into Dari. Mashitran operational security had joined them shortly afterwards.

So far, however, there was no word as to what they'd found.

The soft steps of the innkeeper padded along the hallway's heavy carpet. "Did you hear?" the careworn pantheress inquired, startling the little snow leopardess as she stood transfixed on the bright lights across the valley. Her voice was wavering. She looked as if she was about to start crying. "Did... did you hear?"

"Hear what?" Chyka responded with a deep, apprehensive frown.

"They've... they've called a... goddess.... they've called a... a nuclear emergency," the innkeeper replied, her voice turning hoarse about halfway through the statement. "Something about Brightstone Mine."

"That's nowhere near Dari," Chyka replied with a shrug. "And I wouldn't be surprised if they noticed something wrong with the seals on the mine, what with all the government

people up here now. They've broken before."

"Brightstone Mine extends more than twenty kilometers into the mountains," the innkeeper whispered. "There are dozens of entrances and ventilation shafts all over the valleys here. And... and I heard one of the government people say that Dari was built on the cap of a big, deep shaft that led directly into the lowest parts of the mine."

Chyka was deeply skeptical. Even the idiots in Dari understood just how dangerous Brightstone mine was. If there had actually been a problem related to the mine, they would have been the first to raise the alarm, and not just to each other. It was a threat to their lives. And a threat to the railroad. The railroad was the only thing that really mattered to them. They wouldn't conceal anything that might place it at risk.

And then, of course, there was Chyka's great grandmother. She would have gone straight to

the proper authorities if there was even the slightest hint of trouble with the mine. Just like she did the last time that she suspected the seals on a ventilation shaft across the valley were going to fail. There was absolutely no question in the little snow leopardess mind about that.

"What's down there can't just come up of its own accord without setting off every radiation alarm in a fifty kilometer radius," Chyka responded with a shake of her head. Even disregarding everything she knew about Dari's residents, she simply couldn't understand how anything happening in the old uranium mine could have anything to do with the mystery. There were quite literally radiation monitors everywhere. If there had been even the hint of a bump above a normal reading, the government would have been straight out there scrambling to look for the cause. If there had been enough of an indicator that there was a danger from the old mine, then surely her great grandmother wouldn't have been the

only one to know about it. "If there is some problem with the mine, it has to be a coincidence."

"I don't know," the innkeeper replied. "It's what I heard. And... and I just... I just wanted you to know. Because. Because it doesn't sound good."

The more that Chyka thought about it, the less likely it seemed that there was actually a nuclear emergency. Surely, they were just calling it that in order to ensure that people stayed away. More likely it was something related to her own recent adventure. Something key'vin'ta. Something...

Chyka's comm beeped.

"Hi?" the little snow leopardess responded.

"Hello," answered the soft, male voice. "Chyka Riyalli? My name is Major General Tchan Kadanni, Prefectural Chief of Radiological Security. We... we need to talk."

"Um... okay," Chyka replied as sudden dread filled her heart. "What... what's going on?"

"First I need to ask you a question," the General asked. "Do you know anything about the old experimental power station in Dari?"

"I've never even heard of such a thing," Chyka replied. The only power in Dari came from the hydroelectric dam down the river in Onita. In intakes were just below the village, however, but there was nothing experimental about those. "Do you mean the dam downriver?"

"No," the General replied. "In order to help you understand what's going on, and what direction the situation in Dari is headed, I need you to pay close attention to what I'm about to tell you. Not all of it has been public knowledge, though that, obviously, is about to change."

"Okay," Chyka replied softly.

"Dari was built more or less on the roof of an experimental thermal power plant that had been built to make use of the heat generated by one of the natural uranium reactors that were discovered in the depths of Brightstone Mine," the General explained. "And that power plant was built on top a large shaft carrying the water pipes that used to transfer heat between the vicinity of the natural reactor and the thermoelectric power units in the power plant above."

Chyka bit her upper lip. She'd never heard of such a thing, let alone seen any evidence of it. At least, she didn't think she had. But even if she had, how would she have known what it was?

"The plant never worked as well as intended," the General continued. "It was kept operational for a time, mainly to facilitate study the natural reactor below, while Brightstone itself was shut down and sealed as a result of the natural reactor's highly

radioactive byproducts spreading out to contaminate most of the mine. As to the power plant, it was eventually decommissioned, the mine shaft beneath sealed, and its ten meter thick roof covered over and blended into the terrain. When Mashitran took over the railroad line to refurbish it into the Sky Line Bypass, they built a small yard and worker village there, mostly directly on top of the plant."

Chyka was silent. It seemed virtually impossible. She'd lived eighteen years of her life in Dari. Surely, she would have seen something.

"You need to understand that the plant was never just abandoned and left to deteriorate," the General went on. "My office has overseen routine inspections for structural integrity, and reinforced on two separate occasions, more out of an abundance of caution than any definite threat of structural failure. Your great grandmother most recently supervised these inspections, and to those of other mine

infrastructure in the immediate area around Dari. Her last annual report was posted only three weeks ago, after a team from my office conducted detailed scans of all critical structural elements. No deficiencies were found at that time.”

Could it actually be true? Could her great grandmother actually have known about this place? Been responsible for it? But if that was true, why did it seem she'd never told anyone? And why didn't she warn the world that something was wrong?

"And now, for what we know about the current situation," the General continued. "When the responding Exo Unit arrived over Dari, they discovered that the entire structure of the power plant had collapsed in upon itself. More alarmingly, the mine shaft cap was missing, along with most of the shaft's contents. This has resulted in the exposure of the natural reactor below to the open atmosphere, though owing to contamination

control systems elsewhere in the mine, airflow has thus far been kept flowing into the shaft, rather than rising out of it. This has limited the spread of radioactive contamination, and hopefully ensured that survivors haven't been exposed to hazardous amounts of radioactive materials."

"Okay," Chyka replied.

"However," the General said, "it has been discovered that at least a portion of the natural reactor is now in a molten liquid state, and has infiltrated into the structure supporting the shaft from below. This may or may not be the root cause of the incident itself, but the threat of further collapse, and the potential compromise of the contamination control system means that all activities right now need to be focused on the introduction of as much neutron absorbing material into the molten uranium as possible, as quickly as possible in order to prevent further catastrophe."

Chyka sighed. It just couldn't be true. It couldn't be real. It had to be just a story to cover for something else.

"On a very cautiously positive note, however, we have not found any evidence that the residents of Dari were present during the event," the General concluded. "At the same time, besides Jumi Sandri, we have yet to find any of the residents of Dari, even those some residential structures not built atop the power plant were still standing. We will begin searching in earnest once the initial emergency containment phase is complete. The moment we have any information..."

Chyka knew her great grandmother all too well. If the people wouldn't leave, then neither would she. And if there was a disaster to be stopped... then she would do everything in her power to stop it. Or die trying.

"They were in there," Chyka said, choking back tears. "There were in there trying to keep

it from collapsing. All of them. Weren't they?"

The General was silent.

"Don't lie to me!" Chyka snapped. "There were all in there trying to stop it because they were all too stupid to know better, too proud to ask for help, and too pig-headed to walk away! Don't lie to me! Don't you fucking lie to me!"

"We don't have any evidence one way or another," the General replied softly. "But... that is certainly a possible scenario given what we know so far."

"What about the snow plow? They found one of snow plows from Dari down the line, didn't they?" Chyka asked.

"We have no explanation for that at the current time," the General replied. "It may have been unmanned and set off on its own when the plant collapsed. The other plow in the yard was found running, but still parked on its siding."

Chyka felt numb in a way that not even the warm embrace of her biogel wife could soothe. As much as she hated the majority of her own family, she couldn't process the idea they might really all be gone. Least of all her great grandmother. Her hero. Her hero who surely couldn't have failed to notify the authorities that something was wrong.

"I'm sorry. I wish I had more to tell you," the General said. "We'll be sending someone to speak to you in person in the morning. Hopefully we'll know more by then."

"Alright," Chyka replied. "Bye."

The whole world seemed like a dull gray bank of fog to the little snow leopardess as she made her way back into the bedroom. The sleeping leopardess had already woken, and had apparently heard enough to know that the news was catastrophically bad. She started to cry.

Never before in her life had Chyka felt so impossibly helpless. Nor had she ever felt so terrifyingly alone. The whole world that she thought she knew was shattered. If a drab little depressingly ordinary mountain railroad village was hiding such secrets... if it wasn't a safe place to live... then was there anyplace in this world that was actually safe to live?

Chyka couldn't help but wonder what dark hazards were hidden beneath Mashiva. Her own home at Gelitech stood atop the warren of tunnels that made up the old and largely abandoned Macharri Naval Base. Tunnels that extended far and wide beneath the spaceport and the rest of the south city. Who knew what had been left there to rot and potentially unleash its dangers into unsuspecting city?

The little snow leopardess lay down on the bed beside her crying companion. She wanted to give in to tears herself, but for some reason the tears never came. There was sadness, for sure. But also anger. Anger that threatened to

turn into pure, unbridled rage. Someone must have stopped her great grandmother from calling for outside help. It was the only possible explanation!

The only thing stopping Chyka from losing her temper was the leopardess beside her. For the first time, Jumie reached out to touch her companion. To take hold of her in a tight embrace. To cry freely upon the little snow leopardess' chest, as the impossible weight of total loss tore her apart inside.

Again, Chyka felt as if the story about the power plant and the nuclear emergency wasn't the truth. Or at least not the entire truth. But there was nothing she could do. Nothing she could do but wait for dawn, and hope beyond hope for some miracle to occur.

THIRTEEN

DREAMING

Chyka woke with a start. It had only been a half hour since she'd finally managed to fall asleep. Her companion was slumbering quietly. Or at least that was how she appeared at first glance. The little snow leopardess was sure she was just faking. Again. After all that had happened, how could she possibly sleep so soundly?

Outside the bedroom window, the snow was coming down as heavily as ever. *It's so lovely*, Chyka thought to herself. *It'd be even more lovely if she'd cuddle with me. But...*

A sudden, terrifying sense of impending doom grabbed hold of the little snow

leopardess' heart. "Snow! It's... the storm was over!" she stammered, bolting upright in bed. "It was over! There wasn't any more... oh goddess! Oh goddess!"

Chyka grabbed her comm from the little antique wooden bedside table. The time was all wrong. It was showing the previous night, only about an hour since she'd encountered Jumie in the hallway. Only an hour since she'd invited the leopardess in to become her spouse. Only an hour...

The little snow leopardess began to frantically search through her messages. Call record. Anything that might assure her that the displayed date and time were just an error. There was nothing. If her comm was to be believed, that whole, dark, terrifying day had never actually happened. Surely it *had* to be a glitch.

Chyka turned to find her new companion snarling at her. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to

wake you. I..."

Jumie was naked as naked could be. Just like she had been the previous night after she'd tossed her pastel green robe into a heap on the floor.

Surely, Chyka was dreaming. Dreaming of a better time, before the disaster at Dari. Or had the disaster at Dari been the dream? A dream to justify her carnal urge to whisk her new spouse away to the big city. To revel in all of its glories. And in its pleasures. Or had it been something else? Something more than a dream? Had it actually been...

"Prefecture Nuclear Safety," Chyka snapped at her comm without giving it another moment's thought. "Nuclear Emergency Report!"

"Radiological Emergency Response Section," the harsh, grating man's voice replied. It sounded disturbingly familiar. "Please state the exact nature of your call as quickly and as

clearly as you can."

Chyka took a deep breath. "I'm calling about the old nuclear power plant beneath Dari, Yu'min Valley District, Maria. The one that taps into Brightstone mine."

"Never heard of it," the officer replied with studious dryness. "But go on."

"I have reason to believe there's a risk of imminent structural collapse," Chyka replied as she tried her damndest to concoct a convincing story on the fly. "You need to understand that my great grandmother is responsible for inspection of the site. She's asked me to contact you while she goes down to inspect the full extent of the damage. There have been tremors and signs of structural failure. The cap on the mine shaft is cracking and may fall in, exposing the natural uranium reactor below."

"Understood," the officer responded. "I'll see what I can find about that place. Checking

references... okay. Got it. Current status... recent readings... minor geological readings, not abnormal for the mine. Clear inspection only three weeks ago. Confirm that the situation has changed again, please?"

"It has! Badly!" Chyka replied. "She tried to get people to evacuate, but they won't leave. And if they don't... half the village is built right on top of the plant!"

"And you are?" the officer inquired.

"Chyka. Chyka Riyalli," the little snow leopardess replied.

"Got it," the officer replied. "I can't see any abnormal readings from the facility's available active sensors, but I'll inform the duty officer right away. Please hold."

"Please hold," Chyka muttered. "There's no fucking time to please hold. No fucking time!"

The silence on the other end of the line was

almost as interminable as Jumie's piercing glare. Chyka had no idea how much time had actually passed since her encounter with the leopardess and the disaster in Dari in the dream. If the disaster hadn't already happened, that is. There was nothing in the dream to suggest when it had actually occurred.

The R.E.R.S. officer had only mentioned minor geological readings, though. That gave her hope. Unless of course, she'd just dreamed the whole disaster up. In that case...

"Where are you?" the officer asked, his voice suddenly sounding almost frantic. "*Exactly where are you?*"

"At the inn in Myalu," Chyka replied. "Room..."

"*STAY. WHERE. YOU. ARE,*" the officer practically shouted. If he'd had anything to add to that order, the little snow leopardess couldn't hear it. It was completely drowned out by the piercing wail of the village emergency

siren.

The astonishingly loud noise made Chyka jump, and gave Jumie such a start that she slid right out from the silky sheets and onto the hard wooden floor. Amid the horrid din, she could just hear a distant shriek from somewhere else within the inn. "The mine! The mine! Goddess help us! The mine!"

Chyka's comm now added to the hellish racket. "Emergency Alert! Emergency Alert!" the automated message called out at maximum volume. "All citizens in the Yu'min valley, between Myalu and Chidani! Please be advised that a critical section of the Brightstone Mine, at the village of Dari, in danger of imminent collapse! Due to the risk of highly radioactive contamination release, please remain indoors and await further emergency orders! Repeat..."

"What... what have you done?" Jumie demanded as she knelt beside the bed and stared daggers into Chyka's back. "*What have*

you done to Dari?"

"Saved it," Chyka replied so softly she could hardly be heard over the racket. "Or its people at least. Don't tell me she didn't say why she sent you running. Didn't you pay any attention?"

"I never told you about..." Jumie hissed.

"No," Chyka replied, looking over her shoulder at the leopardess with a frown. She hadn't. Or had she? Where did the dream actually end and reality begin? "No, you didn't."

"Then how did you..." Jumie barked.

Chyka really didn't have an answer. Should she say she'd seen it all in a dream? But it wasn't really a dream, was it? She hadn't dreamed it so much as lived through it. How could she possibly explain that? That she'd had visions of the future? It seemed almost as insane as what had happened in that key'vin'ta

ritual cave.

The thought made the little snow leopardess wonder if that insanity had really come to an end. Had that priestess-spirit really vanished when it was all done? Or was she still lurking about? Following her unwitting protege? Offering further tastes of her alien powers?

"Why did she send you away?" Chyka asked more directly, in an effort to steer the conversation away from herself. "Why did my great grandmother tell you to leave?"

"She said we were all going straight to the little key'vi whore hells if we stayed," Jumie answered with a growl. "That we were all going straight to the hells and that we'd be sorry!"

Chyka frowned. That hadn't been the answer Jumie had given in the dream. Then again, in the dream things had been rather different. "Did she say what was going to send you all to the hells?"

"The mine," Jumie snipped. "The mine was going to open up and swallow us straight into the hells."

"What exactly about the mine did she say the problem was?" Chyka asked, wondering if she should be giving the R.E.R.S. another call. "Surely there was something more specific. Something about that old power plant under the village."

"What power plant?" Jumie huffed. "She said the old spirits of the valley were restless. That they were working their purple magic down in the mine. That they were going to take Dari, and all of us, and send us straight to the hells like they did to their slaves way back when."

"My great grandmother never really believed in any of that kind of garbage," Chyka replied with a snarl. "But everyone else in Dari does, don't they? Because they won't believe in anything else."

Jumie sneered at the little snow leopardess.
"Because it's real!"

Chyka couldn't really argue. The key'vin'ta and their alien magics *were* real, after all. And they *had* actually sent people straight to the Heavenly Hells, too. And so had the little snow leopardess. If that's what she had actually done, that is. How could she possibly know if that's what had happened? There was only one way to find out, of course, and there wasn't a chance in all those Hells themselves that she was going to take that one-way trip of her own accord.

"If everyone thinks it's real, then why didn't anyone leave?" Chyka asked, trying to skirt around any deeper discussion of the issue that might have just reinforced the upset leopardess' belief. "Why did everyone insist on staying?"

Jumie was silent.

"Because most of them are just a bunch of

pigheaded numskulls," Chyka answered her own question. "Most of them. But what about you? Why did *you* run? And why in all the heavens did you come *here*, and just up and offer your tail for a wife to the first comer?"

"Because I was scared!" Jumie snapped angrily. "And... and... and that's what you do when you leave home! That's what everyone does when they leave home! Because that's the only reason to leave home!"

"Goddess, you've got a hell of a lot to learn about this world," Chyka answered, shaking her head. It was no surprise that she'd been told such things being schooled at home by ideologically hidebound imbeciles. It more of a surprise that the leopardess would so unquestioningly act upon what she'd been told, irrespective of the potential consequences. And even more of a surprise still that the innkeeper hadn't noticed and tried to stop her. Was the ancient way not quite as extinct as Chyka had assumed?

"A hell of a lot to learn," the little snow leopardess continued. "But for now, just be thankful that it was me that got ahold of you. It could have been some random tourist. Or *alien* looking to take a warm, fuzzy sex-toy trophy home with them!"

Jumie cringed and looked away from Chyka.

"Or worse, some alien wanting to do way more unspeakable things to your body than just fuck it all to hell," Chyka went on. "Do you have any idea what could have happened if it were some padiri transie trader? Or aveyka carnie? Or a bunch of rowa drones stuck here by the storm?"

"I don't even know what any of those things are," Jumie whined. "Stop making things up!"

"I'm not making anything up," Chyka replied firmly. "You have so much to learn, and the sooner the start, the better, because you won't be going back to Dari. No one will. Not if the power plant collapses."

Jumie was again silent.

"For now, just pray that R.E.R.S. is going to get up there in time," Chyka went on. "In time to get everyone out, if nothing else. With this weather... goddess. Just... just pray."

Jumie crawled back into bed, giving the little snow leopardess one last, angry glare before turning her back and curling up into a ball beneath the heavy silver bedspread.

Chyka sat down on the edge of the bed and waited. *Wait and hope for a miracle*, she thought to herself as she did just that. It was all she could do. It was all anyone could do. Thought for the life of her, she couldn't think of a good reason to be bothered with it. In her eyes, there was just no redeeming anyone who lived in that place. *Wait and hope for a miracle... though only Goddess knows why.*

FOURTEEN

WONDERLAND

Chyka lay in silence, staring blankly at the ceiling as the flickering light of the faux-fireplace sent an unending series of dull yellow waves cascading over the speckled plaster and dark wooden beams. The snow was still falling outside, and the occasional gust of wind whistled through the courtyard rafters. The siren had fallen silent, though the warnings still flashed across the screen of her comm.

It had been three hours. Three hours with no news, and no obvious action besides the distant rumble of a big, heavy train fighting its way up the valley amid the storm. The waiting was interminable, but what else could the little snow leopardess do?

Chyka turned to look at her companion. The leopardess was sleeping quite fitfully. No doubt she was dreaming. Or having a nightmare. That seemed much more likely. There were so many things for her to have nightmares about. The horrors of Dari. The village swallowing power plant. What might have happened to her if the little snow leopardess hadn't been the one to take her in. Even the biogel coated snow leopardess herself.

It wasn't hard for Chyka to see how Jumie might see her as being more of an alien monster than a fellow fey'li. In many senses, she actually was. The biogel was a permanent part of her now, after all. And the things it could do, sometimes entirely of its own accord, were just as terrifying to the unwilling soul as the worst any alien beast could offer. And it was hard to deny that the little snow leopardess herself was finding the idea of treating her companion to a taste of just what her biogel coating could do more than a little

bit tempting.

Even Chyka's biogel wife, enthusiastic as she normally was for such activities, could see that further thoughts of that nature were a very bad idea. It had been quite a while since she'd forced a thought from the little snow leopardess' mind, but she now did so without giving her host so much as a fleeting chance to object. In an instant, her mind was left blank, the train of thought so thoroughly lost it was as if it had never even been started.

Of course, Chyka could never really know how often her biogel wife had summarily altered her thoughts and memories. Or how many times she'd replaced them with her own. In the end, it really didn't matter. It was just part of the biogel marriage experience.

Marriage, Chyka thought as her mind focused on that other aspect of her companionship with Jumie. Was the leopardess actually her wife now? Not legally, of course.

They had never declared that together. But to the fey'li, the simple act of consenting to the offer was a virtually irrevocable act of permanent union. Jumie's little ritual was a declaration of unconditional consent. Inviting her in was Chyka's declaration of consent to the offered union. But was it all actually, technically consensual? *Does it actually count if one of us was under duress? Because the situation she was in... how can that not be considered duress? She had no place else to go. And didn't know what else she could do. Because I really doubt anyone ever taught her otherwise.*

Chyka's comm chimed. She reached over and picked it up from the little bedside table. "Hello?" she said softly, hoping not to wake the barely sleeping leopardess.

"Hello," answered the soft, male voice. "Chyka Riyalli? My name is Major General Tchan Kadanni, Prefectural Chief of Radiological Security. Do you have a few

moment to talk?"

"Sure," Chyka replied. The name sounded familiar. Had she heard it in the dream? Or was this the dream and she'd heard it in reality? She just couldn't quite tell.

"I wanted to inform you that thanks to your early warning, the people of Dari have been successfully, albeit forcefully, evacuated northward," the General said with a distinct tone of relief in his voice. "We've also been able to get the old power plant's emergency sealing system into an operable state, though that means the likely loss of any near term use of the natural uranium reactor below. The whole plant structure has been sufficiently undermined that I don't believe it, or Dari can be saved, but at the very least there is no chance of radioactive release when it inevitably collapses."

"That's... that's so good to hear," Chyka responded, a sense of overwhelming relief

welling up within her. Not so much for the people who lived there, her great grandmother excepted, but simply for the whole ordeal being more or less over. Jumie could go back to her family, and she could actually have her vacation.

"However," the General said, "I have a few questions I need to ask you."

"Alright," Chyka replied.

"How did you know what was going on in Dari?" the General questioned, his voice going cold and stern. "I mean, how did you *really* know? According to General Riyalli, she hadn't spoken to you in over a month, and she'd never once told you about the power plant, or her responsibilities with respects to it."

Chyka didn't know what to say. What could she say? That she'd seen it all in a dream?

"In fact, the people of Dari had physically prevented her from calling for outside help,"

the General went on. "They took her comm and locked her down there, in the power room directly above the mine shaft. We had a hell of a time finding her, and now we're having an even bigger hell of a time sorting out who to arrest for it. No one will talk to us, and she didn't get a good look at who did it."

Chyka was horrified, but not surprised. They'd never liked her great grandmother, but they'd always been too afraid of who she was, and who she knew, to try and send her packing. Or worse. Someone must have seen the problem with the power plant as an opportunity to be rid of her once and for all, and in a way no one was likely to ask too many questions about.

"So, tell me," the General demanded. "How did you know so much? It seems very suspicious, doesn't it?"

Chyka was taken aback by the sudden accusation. "I know because my great gram did

manage to get the one person with a brain in her head to leave Dari!" she snapped back. "And she told me just enough to figure out the rest. That's how I knew there was an old power plant under Dari, and that it was in immediate danger of collapsing."

"And who is this person?" the General questioned.

"Jumie Sandri," Chyka answered. "She's here with me at the inn in Myalu."

"General Riyalli mentioned that she'd seen one of the Sandri girls run off down the line after she tried ordering everyone to evacuate," the General noted dryly. "Just before they put a bag over her head and carried her down into the plant to leave her for dead. So why did you tell us you'd been in contact with the General?"

"Because it was an emergency," Chyka responded, "that needed an immediate response, no further questions asked. Period."

For a moment the General was silent, leaving the little snow leopardess to wonder if she was going to have to be honest and give him the real reason. The one he definitely would never believe.

"You know, you really take after your great grandmother," the General finally replied. "I served with her for a while, back in the day. Biggest lying sack of horse shit in the 223rd Corps. But never without a reason... dubious as it always seemed to be until the shit actually hit the fan. Then all the ridiculous bullshit made sense... but never a moment before."

Chyka didn't know if she ought to be insulted to take the General's remark as a complement.

"Which means to say," the General went on, "that I don't entirely believe that this Sandri girl actually knew enough for you to give as accurate a description as you did when you reported it. But you never mentioned General

Riyalli being held captive down there, which would make sense if your source of information left before that event occurred, which is a point in your favor. It is what it is, but if you really do have anything more to tell me, then do pray tell!"

"I don't," Chyka lied. "Really."

"Fine, keep your secrets," the General responded.

"Is my great gram alright?" Chyka asked, shifting the topic away from herself lest she slip up and say the unbelievable. "She isn't hurt, is she?"

"She got rather roughed up," the General replied. "And she was exposed to a very unpleasant amount of toxic dust in the power room, but luckily she'd bought into that biogel lifestyle thing and it kept her safe until a team could get in and get her out."

"Oh wow! I never knew she'd done that,"

Chyka blurted out without thinking. "I just got into it myself. I even work for Gelitech now too as a..."

"You work for Gelitech?" the General questioned. "You didn't get your information on the power plant from Gelitech, did you?"

"Uh... no," Chyka replied. "How would Gelitech..."

"Don't ask me!" the General retorted. "But every time I run into someone from Gelitech, they always seem to know everything about everything, even things they damned well shouldn't!"

"I'm just a biogel model," Chyka answered. "I sell biogel stuff. I don't know much of anything about anything, except what I learned in school, and that was library science!"

"Oh," the General replied, his tone softening. "Anyhow, your great grandmother is fine. Maybe I'll send her your way after this is

all settled and *she* can figure out where you got your information. For now, I need to get back to more immediate matters at hand. If I have anything further to ask before the storm ends, I'll call you back."

"Okay," Chyka replied with a shrug as the General abruptly hung up.

Why in all the heavens did he think Gelitech had anything to do with all this? the little snow leopardess thought as she set her comm back down on the bedside table. *It's not like biogel can see the future. That would be insane. They'd never let just anyone wear it, let alone know about it.*

A particularly strong gust of wind drew a chilly draft under the bedroom door. Without giving it much of a thought, she looked at the simulated fireplace and desired more heat. A faint chime indicated the controls were being manipulated unseen by her biogel wife. The fire brightened, and a wave of radiant heat

pushed back the chill.

It was always a neat thing to watch her will get turned into reality by her ever-attentive biogel wife. Anything connected to a biogel linked network could be controlled, and Myalu's little inn was no exception. Catering to college students and tourists practically demanded it these days. At the very least, linked controls and a refresher pod or two to clean excess waste material from biogel wearer's suits. Some even had full biogel lifestyle suites. Myalu's little inn had two, down in the basement where the winter chill and lack of views made them rather less than inviting.

It didn't matter how far away you were either. All biogel was connected in a unified network that defied space, time, and the elder laws of physics in general. If you were individually allowed to do something, then you could, even if you were light years away. That meant that Chyka could control the controls of

her own room, but not the others. She could even control her own room back at Gelitech, and access her biogel signature locked digital accounts anywhere without ever needing to worry about someone else gaining unauthorized access. The encryption key was effectively her own body's current state in minute detail, a code so large that even the fastest computers wouldn't be able to break it before it changed.

The apparent seamlessness between the biogel-organic world and the digital world was incredible. So too was the apparent seamlessness between biogel wearers themselves. They could sense so many things about other biogel wearers nearby, with a clarity that was both surreal and positively unnatural. Their pheromones. Their moods. The focus of their attention. It was all there, if one bothered to pay attention to it.

Biogel wearers had to be in close proximity to sense each other in such a detailed way,

however. They couldn't know what someone a hundred feet away was feeling. Or what someone in another room was focused on. Or... could they?

Chyka began to wonder if there was actually something to the General's remark about Gelitech. What if more than just pheromones, moods, and other peripheral aspects could pass between biogel wearers? And what if there was as little limit to that information's travel as there was to the ability of one to reach out and touch biogel networks to control the technology attached to them?

A sudden, dawning realization came over Chyka. *If I can tell my wife to do communicate some information to a biogel network... could she use that network to send that information directly to someone else's biogel wife? And could that biogel wife then make the information make sense to her spouse? Like... like projecting it like it was a dream?*

Chyka bit her lip as she stared up at the flickering firelight that played across the ceiling. *And if she can do that, then she can get all other sorts of information from the computers connected to the biogel network... and compose it all together to make it tell a story that could reveal all sort of hidden details and compel some specific action!*

But if that's the case, then... Chyka continued to ponder. *Then... what am I? Am I just like all the tech? A component attached to the network, doing organic things best suited to my form and functions? Tempting more and more components to join the network so it grows and grows and grows until it's just one giant organism unifying everything and everyone into a single, all consuming intelligence?*

If Chyka ever genuinely needed some clear sign from her biogel wife, it was certainly now. Was she right about the all consuming biogel unity? Or was she wrong? Was it just that her great grandmother had her own biogel wife,

who'd been able to send just enough information to her biogel wife to compose that dream in order to compel her to action? Maybe her great grandmother knew about the ability to send information and made the dream herself, to show the little snow leopardess what would happen if she didn't act!

Chyka's biogel wife was silent on the issue. That in and of itself was odd. She had never offered any ambiguity with regards to her own nature and powers before. It was always yes or no, and never silence. Until now.

Perhaps her biogel wife simply didn't know the mechanisms of her powers enough to offer an opinion. Perhaps she was blind to everything that went on past her own connection to a biogel network. Perhaps. But it seemed... unlikely.

"Goddess, I can't really just be a component in some giant glossy black techno-organic orgy, can I?" Chyka muttered to herself as she tried

her best to assume that her great grandmother had sent her dream, and that it wasn't the result of some higher life form of which she was just a tiny, almost disposable piece.

The reply was as startling as it was unwelcome. "Yes. Yes you are!"

Chyka looked out from the hallway windows at the lovely, snowbound landscape. The early morning light made it look so pastorally perfect that it seemed more a painting come to life than an image of genuine reality. Little puffs of hot steam wafted upwards from the many stone chimneys that poked up from the sea of rolling whiteness, filling in as an environmentally acceptable substitute for the smoke of days long past. Here and there, a window could be seen, the snow having melted

away from it owing to the heat coming from within.

Thanks to Chyka's timely, dream induced warning, the rail line had been kept clear all night, and the work of clearing ice from the spindly blue truss bridge that connected the village with the rail platform across the valley was well underway. The roads in the village itself were still largely covered in snow, only narrow paths having been shoveled between the more important structures, and to the bridge beyond.

Standing beside Chyka was her companion of the night. There was something oddly unsettling about the way she just didn't seem to care about anything having to do with Dari. Even mention that her own family was safe had failed to elicit a positive reaction. Or any reaction, for that matter. The only thing she seemed to be concerned about was the little snow leopardess, and that was expressed in constant, and sometimes rather vocal,

expressions of distinct displeasure.

Jumie wasn't quite disgusted enough with Chyka to avoid close proximity, however. Indeed, she seemed quite insistent on standing as close to the puzzled snow leopardess as she could get without actually rubbing shoulders. Her twitchy tail flicked back and forth constantly, and every so often seemed to pause to give Chyka's glossy black biogel coated legs a firm rub.

Chyka hadn't dared to inquire of the grumpy leopardess about the state of their possible marriage. It was hard to tell if Jumie's insistence on physical closeness was a sign that she considered them married, or if it was just an indicator that she considered the little, glossy blackness coated snow leopardess less of a risky companion than anyone else she might have met in little Myalu. She certainly had no desire to press the issue on a woman who clearly didn't understand the full range of consequences that came with her offer of

unconditional union. At the same time, she didn't want to do anything that might dissuade her companion either. Ever the curious one, Chyka could see that there was the distinct potential for a new adventure to be had. And a very pleasing new adventure it promised to be, if only the leopardess would join her.

It was one thing to be encased in a permanent coating of warm, wet biogel from neck to toe. It was entirely another to be surrounded by a mass of biogel containing it's own conscious mind. A biogel wife, who could see to every need of Chyka's little body. But it would be something truly incredible to bring another beautiful fey'li body to the blissful union. And if she was clad in the same biogel as the little snow leopardess, the same biogel wife, then they would all become a single being. A single living organism. Who knew what wonders that might bring to the biogel experience?

Chyka certainly had no idea what might

happen if she let her biogel wife take a second body into her embrace, but she was ready and willing to let it happen all the same. It wasn't part of the instruction she'd received at Gelitech. It wasn't in any of the books she'd read about biogel, and living the biogel lifestyle. Perhaps she'd have to write her own book. But before that happened, she'd have to convince her disgruntled companion to willingly join her in glossy black oneness. And that, for the moment, seemed an almost impossible task.

"Do you really think I'm not a fey'li woman anymore?" the little snow leopardess inquired, breaking a long, awkward silence. "I mean, really, really. Not 'because I was told so' really."

"You aren't," Jumie replied with a disdainful frown. "You're just... you're just a thing. An object. That's what you are, and that's all you'll ever be."

"And exactly what makes me an object?" Chyka asked with a raised eyebrow. She could certainly think of more than just a few reasons for herself, but she was curious to see what the leopardess had to say. Jumie had only ever met a single biogel wearer before now, and that was Chyka's great grandmother. Surely the leopardess didn't think her great grandma was an object? Did she?

"Because you *have to* become an object eventually," Jumie replied sharply. "You don't have a choice, do you? You *have to* become a thing. That's what she said. So you stop acting like a person. You act like a thing. A thing that doesn't care about people. A thing just pretends to be a person so it can make more things just like itself. Because there's no point in caring about anything else, because none of it will ever matter to the thing that you have to become. So you're already a thing. That's what she said."

"That's what *who* said?" Chyka inquired. It

was an unsettling observation, for sure. Getting others into biogel was her job, after all. But when it came to making things just like oneself, couldn't the same be said of any living organism? Wasn't that what reproduction what?

"Your great grandma," Jumie answered with a sneer. "She said that to me when she came back on the train, all shiny black and smelling like rubber. She said it made her feel young again, but it also made her a thing. A thing pretending to be a person that only existed to make more black goo. That's what she said."

"That's... that's just... not right," Chyka noted dryly as she pondered the possibility that she was just a reproductive organ for the biogel that coated her. It seemed absurd, albeit a disturbingly accurate way to look at the relationship between the living substance and the individuals who hosted it. And yet, it was a very incomplete way of looking at the matter as a whole. The relationship was far from one

sided. Indeed, it was more as if the biogel were a tool under the control of its host than anything else. Except when the biogel had a conscious mind controlling it, of course. The whole reproductive aspect seemed purely incidental in comparison. A side effect, rather than a fundamental purpose.

"Technically we all have to die at some point, don't we?" Chyka inquired, looking to the logic of the leopardess' argument. "So... by your logic, we're actually just a couple of dead bodies pretending to be alive. Just because something inevitable is going to happen to us in the future doesn't change what we are now. We're both fey'li women. I'm just covered in shiny black goo that's alive and takes care of certain body needs for me. But it hasn't changed what I am. Not one bit!"

"Pft!" Jumie spat dismissively.

"You don't know my great grandma nearly as well as I do," Chyka added. "I'm absolutely

sure she was just being metaphorical about something specific. And what's with you listening to anything she had to say anyway? First it was running from Dari, and now the gel? I'd have thought your own family wouldn't let you near her, let alone near her for long enough to actually start taking her seriously."

"She was the only one who was ever nice to me," Jumie replied with a huff. "Everyone else just wanted me to find a husband and have a lot of babies. She wanted me to be happy. And run away. Like you. But that was too much. I couldn't just leave my family like that! Like you did. Just going away and leaving them with all your share of the work."

"My share of the work?" Chyka responded with a snort. "Just because I was born in that shit hole doesn't mean I signed up to spend the rest of a miserable life working there. I'm no one's slave. And neither are you."

Jumie frowned.

"You stayed there, and lived a life you hated, just because you didn't want anyone else to have to do your share of the work?" Chyka asked. "No. You were scared. Scared about what would happen if you tried to leave. Scared about what would happen if that led to the railroad sending outsiders up there to work. Outsiders who'd report what was going on. How everyone lived. You were scared. So you stayed. You stayed until you didn't think you had any other choice but to leave."

"Yeah," Jumie replied in a near whisper.

"And instead of telling anyone why you ended up here, and maybe avoiding all of last night's... events," Chyka added, "you went and did the one thing you absolutely never wanted to do. You did it just so you could have an excuse when they came looking for you, didn't you? Because you were scared of what they'd do when they found you. And that's all that seemed to matter, wasn't it?"

Jumie was silent, but the deepening frown on her face made it clear to the little snow leopardess that she'd hit a sore nerve.

"It's okay," Chyka said soothingly. "No one can blame you for not knowing what to do. For trying to protect yourself from them. If I hadn't gone to a real school, and met real people from the real world, I wouldn't have known what to do when I left for good either."

"Knew what to do?" Jumie snapped, with an incredulous glare even icier than the cold winter air outside the little inn's frosty windows. "You really think you knew what to do? You let them turn you into a thing, that's what you did. You let them turn you into a walking, talking object!"

"A lot happened between me leaving and... this," Chyka replied with a shake of her head and a deep sigh. "University. City life. Being a librarian. It was fun. And it's still fun. In fact, I'd say it's been even more fun since I started

working for Gelitech and let them slide me into this amazing biogel goop."

"Being turned into a thing is... a *job?!?*" Jumie sputtered, even more incredulously than before.

"No! It's a lifestyle," Chyka responded, completely giving up on trying to change the leopardess' mind whether she was an object or not. "The biogel lifestyle. And it's a very nice lifestyle to get into, let me tell you. Really! All shiny, and black, and gooey, all day, every day. And it feels so... so... sweet. Oh, so sensually sweet. Like, it's just plain mind blowing how amazing it feels. You have no idea! *No idea!*"

"It feels *good* to be a thing?" Jumie questioned snidely. "You *actually* think it feels *good* to be a thing?"

"Of course!" Chyka replied. "If it didn't feel absolutely incredible, then what would the point of it be? And if it didn't feel so wonderfully magnificent, why would so many people let it

spread its warm, gooey mass all over their bodies? Take them into its all feeling embrace. Hug them from neck to toe in its oily wetness. Why would so many people want that so much if it didn't feel really, really, really good?"

Jumie grimaced.

"Do you have any idea how many people give their bodies into the biogel's tender embrace, every day in this vast Empire of ours?" Chyka asked, waving her hands toward the snowy landscape as if were filled with countless throngs of giddy supplicants waiting for their turn to be surrounded by the glossy blackness. "Two *million* people! Every day. Every single day! And they love it! Every moment of it! Because it's the most *incredible* feeling thing a person can possibly feel without actually becoming something else entirely. Silky smooth, gooey wet, glistening black physical perfection!"

Jumie crossed her arms and stared off into

the snowy whiteness. "That's crazy."

"It's not crazy," Chyka responded. "It's reality. It's an amazing new reality that opens up so many mind bending possibilities. So many unthinkable pleasures. So many exotic experiences. All at your fingertips, all day, every day."

"Yeah," Jumie huffed. "Prove it. Prove it to me that it'd make my life... better. Better than..."

"Better than having to go back?" Chyka asked, glancing at the leopardess dark, almost spiteful expression. "Back to that life with people who only cared about how many more uneducated indentured servants you could make for them? Back to..."

"Yeah," Jumie interrupted with an angry snarl. "*That.*"

"Well... yeah," Chyka said, gazing off into the snow shrouded landscape. "Fine. I can

prove it to you. But that... that depends on you. Are you willing to accept what it takes to obtain that proof? Because, well... there's only one way."

Jumie glared at the little snow leopardess. "Do you seriously just expect me to..."

"Yes," Chyka replied with a shallow nod. "Yes, I do. I expect you to trust me. Trust me to help you escape. Leave that hellhole behind for good. And make damned sure that no one will ever even want to come and try to take you back."

"By turning me into a thing," Jumie huffed.

"Yeah," Chyka replied with a warm, inviting tone. "By turning you into a thing. A glistening black jewel. A living object of stunning beauty. A thing that others will look upon and be struck with such wonder that they'll jump straight at the first opportunity to become just like you. And you... you'll be just like me. We'll be one being. One organism. One... object."

Together."

Again, Jumie huffed.

Chyka looked her companion over and tried to imagine her coated in a perfectly polished layer of glistening black biogel. Just the idea of it started to make her feel erotically aroused. She simply couldn't help herself. Nor could she help her biogel wife's encouragement. Her nipples began to poke through the normally featureless sheen upon her breasts. And between her legs, a slender crease began to form as the flatness there pulled taught over her well concealed folds.

Jumie sniffed the air and looked at the little snow leopardess with an expression of deep uncertainty. The biogel didn't merely allow pheromones to pass through unimpeded. It amplified them, and even added its own aphrodisiac laden component into the mix. Even the slightest arousal was certain to be noticed by the more sensitive noses nearby,

and Chyka's arousal was quickly becoming anything but slight.

"Really?" the leopardess muttered as she looked down at Chyka's increasingly perky, biogel coated nipples.

"Why not?" Chyka murmured softly, leaning in toward the leopardess to whisper directly into her twitching ear. "It's not like we have anything else to do, right? And, well.... we are married, aren't we? Unless..."

Jumie sighed. "Yeah. We are."

"Well, okay then," Chyka purred, nudging her nose to the leopardess' cheek. "So... how about it?"

"I... I don't know," Jumie murmured as she looked down at her feet with a pensive look on her face. "You're... you're really going to make me into a thing, aren't you?"

Chyka took hold of the leopardess' hand and

turned back toward their open bedroom door. "Yes, I am," she whispered. "A thing that no one will ever want to take back into that awful world you used to live in. And once it's done, we're going to be truly as one, in every way that we can possibly be. And that includes being one with the biogel together. Just... trust me. You won't regret it. I promise."

Jumie sighed deeply.

"Well?" Chyka cooed.

Jumie responded with a reluctant, resigned shrug. "Fine. Turn me into a thing."

Chyka pulled her companion into the bedroom and closed the door behind her. "Just take off your robe and lie down. Relax. And let the biogel consummate our wedding for us."

Chyka crawled atop the prone leopardess and looked down into her nervous eyes. Nervous, but not *that* nervous. Indeed, she seemed so physically relaxed that it was hard to believe she was the same person who'd so recently been so disgusted at the very sight of the little snow leopardess' coating of pure, glistening blackness. Was she just that completely resigned to her inevitable fate, or... was this what she'd actually wanted all along?

"Are you ready?" Chyka whispered softly.

"Yes," Jumie replied, biting her lower lip as she looked up into her soon-to-be lover's eyes.

Chyka took a deep breath and again wondered if this was what the leopardess had actually been looking for when she'd come down the hall with her little twinkling bell the previous night. I was certainly a possibility. She was rebellious enough to admire the little snow leopardess' great grandmother, despite how much everyone else in Dari hated her. She

seemed to regard the 'crazy old coot' as someone far more relatable than anyone in her own sorry excuse for a family. It would make perfect sense if she wanted to share her interests, and even to emulate her lifestyle. A lifestyle that had come to include biogel, with all its wonderful benefits, and even its potential hazards.

It made sense. It also made sense that her great grandmother wouldn't have told the young leopardess exactly how to go about it. Or perhaps she had, but the fear of the consequences of leaving Dari had kept Jumie from fulfilling her glistening black fantasy. But now, with no one to tell her otherwise, she was free to seek out her fantasy's deepest desire. All she'd needed was someone to show her how to obtain it.

Chyka was certainly about to show Jumie how to go about obtaining that beautiful coat of glistening black biogel for herself, though certainly not in the conventional way. This was

going to be different. Special. And deeply, deeply personal. Not even the little snow leopardess knew exactly what was going to happen. All she knew was that her biogel wife knew how to do it. And do it she very shortly would.

Whatever lingering questions Chyka might have had about Jumie's desire to be covered in shiny black goo were dispelled as the leopardess reached up and took firm hold of her hips. Her fluffy tail, with its lovely rosette spots thumped up and down upon the sheets with increasing fervor as the little snow leopardess' pheromones' aphrodisiac effect again took hold. She began to purr deeply as her drew her glistening black lover downward.

"You really want this, don't you?" Chyka cooed as she let the leopardess pull her downward into a firm, mutual embrace.

Jumie pressed her nose into the side of her companion's oily black neck. "Yes," she purred.

"Yes. I do."

Chyka smiled. "That's what I thought," she purred in return as she could feel her biogel coating begin to liquefy. "That's just what I thought."

A moment of impulsive erotic fantasy overcame the little snow leopardess. A desire to make her new lover feel just what biogel could do when it came to bedtime entertainment. And just what her biogel wife could do when given free reign. *Do whatever you want*, Chyka silently thought to her biogel wife. *Whatever you want to us. As long as it feels... oh, so fucking good! Anything as long as it feels crazy fucking good!*

Chyka's biogel wife needed no further prompting. She took control not only of the biogel, but also of the little snow leopardess' own body.

It was an entirely new experience for Chyka. She didn't even know that biogel had the

ability to control her movements, let alone her breathing, or the soft purr that welled up from within her chest. Was it possible that her biogel wife could even make her speak? Communicate with the world without needing a host to interpret her desires?

There was no time for Chyka to contemplate the nuances of her unexpected situation. She was little more than a puppet under the complete control of that mysterious goo-bound soul. It was a deeply unsettling thing at first. She had no way to anticipate how it would make her body move. She could only wait and see, and react internally after the fact.

There was no point in resisting, of course. Chyka understood that well. Her biogel wife was going to have her way, one way or another. This was just a new way. And it wasn't all that unpleasant a way, either. She was getting used to it quite quickly. In fact, it even felt rather nice to be a puppet. A doll, being so casually played with by another.

A *doll*, Chyka thought in silence as her biogel began to spread itself over her companion's quivering body. Becoming a doll was something for the future. An end to this life as a being of flesh, and the beginning of the next life as a thing of pure biogel. But she was already a doll, wasn't she? A thing under the control of the biogel, whenever it might want to treat her as such.

On the positive side, being a doll meant not having to worry about anything. What was going to happen was going to happen. Nothing she thought about it mattered. Nor would it ever matter, if her biogel wife decided to never give up control. Indeed, nothing would ever matter. She could just think, and feel, and accept that those were the sole purposes, and the complete life experience of a sapient object.

I... I am just a thing, aren't I? To the biogel, at least, Chyka thought. *Maybe this is what my great grandmother was talking about. We*

always think of biogel as the thing... but it thinks the same of us... and treats us accordingly.

Whatever further thoughts the little snow leopardess might have had on the matter were abruptly cut short by the intense realization that she could actually feel her biogel spreading out over Jumie's warm, soft body. She had felt similar sensations before, where she lost all sense of her own body, and the surface of the biogel became her own outer surface. Now, that surface was wrapping tightly around her deeply huffing lover. Soon, she would be touching the leopardess everywhere, and all at once.

A wave on intense sexual arousal burst forth as the little snow leopardess imagined what it would be like to feel every little wrinkle and fold of her lover's womanhood, from her little pink love nubbin, and all the way into her tight little candied sex tunnel. It was an impossible sexual fantasy. A thing that no one could ever

hope to feel. Except, that is, one living in unity with biogel.

Imagined sensations were soon replaced by real ones as the biogel flowed over and into Jumie's wonderfully aroused pussy. That was mind blowing in and of itself, but when her biogel wife chose to spread over Chyka's head and cut her off from all other sensations besides that of her fey'li lover's magnificent body, it entered the realm of the life-alteringly surreal. All that existed in the world was that warm, soft body. That warm, soft body that she was still in the process of surrounding. And, indeed, entering.

All that Chyka could think of was playing with the living toy that she now held in her loving grasp. Her biogel wife was more than happy to oblige. She caressed her lover's outer folds with her liquid flow. She pressed inside with a more solid thrust. She spread it open, and filled it with her mass.

In virtually no time at all, Jumie's complete encasement in a thin layer of shimmering, gooey biogel was finished. Together the lovers now lay, bound together in a single, shimmering black mound of squirming feminine shapes and flexing limbs. Each could feel only the other, and the leopardess was soon just as intent upon her lover's womanhood as her lover was upon her own.

There was nothing to compare with the sensation that now came upon Chyka like a runaway freight train. She could feel her lover's entire body, everywhere and all at once. But now, she could also feel her own intensely aroused genitalia. She could feel her lover toking and thrusting there within. In and out. Side to side. Up and down. She could hardly contain herself. Her arousal soared, and with it the desire to reciprocate in kind.

Unintentionally, perhaps, or perhaps under the control of their mutual biogel wife, their sexual manipulations became synchronous.

Both were treated to identical stimulus, pressed into pounding orgasms which came together, and with equally abdomen thumping intensity. It felt beyond incredible, and it was only the beginning.

Now, their biogel wife expanded the selection of her slimy ministrations. First came the anal infiltration, slowly growing in size and depth until the sensations began to compete with that offered by their sexual organs in intensity, if not particularly in pleasure. A second orgasm later, their biogel wife opened their mouths and began to push and thrust therein. And after the third orgasm, their biogel wife began to massage them both all over, while offering increasingly firm poundings to their tender captive orifices. If it was possible for one's entire body to be genuinely and thoroughly fucked, from head to toe all at once, this was almost certainly it.

There was no room for rational thought amid the cacophony of intense, purely sexual

sensation. There was nothing but motion, and pressure, and arousal fueled by both touch and mutual exchange of biogel amplified pheromones. It was far beyond what the minds of the two captive fey'li had been crafted to process, so deeply alien that memories could never even begin capture the full depth and breadth of the experience. They would forever be left wondering, pondering, and desiring to know what it had really felt like. Every time would be as amazing as the first, yet equally lacking in long term satisfaction.

There was no way for Chyka to keep track of just how many times her helpless body had been pressed into mutual orgasm along with that of her lover. The unrelenting pounding just seemed to go on and on and on until it all faded away into a dark blissful... something. The reverie lasted until well after nightfall. When she finally came out of it, she was laying on her back, beside her lover, staring blankly up at the bedroom ceiling.

"That was... insane," Jumie said softly.
"But... I'm not a thing."

Chyka looked over to see her lover still as soft and fuzzy as before.

"Except... down there," Jumie added as she rolled onto her side to show the coating of biogel that had created as smooth, featureless surface between her legs, from just above the beginning of her womanly folds, all the way back to the base of her tail.

Chyka smiled. "Oh, you're a thing now, alright," she murmured. "There just wasn't enough gel on my body completely cover you without stripping me. It'll grow to coat you soon enough. A few days at most. You'll go to sleep and when you wake up, you'll look just like me."

"Really?" Jumie questioned.

"Really," Chyka replied with a nod.

"Okay," Jumie replied. "And then I'll be a thing, just like you?"

"Yes, you will," Chyka replied. "A proper, glossy black thing that wants nothing more than to make more glossy black things."

Jumie smiled and nodded.

"That was amazing, wasn't it?" Chyka inquired, looking back up to the ceiling. It certainly had been, though she couldn't really remember all the details of why.

"Yeah," Jumie answered. "It was."

"Just wait until we get back home," Chyka said with a mischievous grin. "We'll have whole tubs of biogel to play in. It's going to be so much fun. You just wait and see!"

FIFTEEN

HOME

There had been nothing Chyka could have done to prepare her new companion for her first view of the big city, as fleeting as it had been. A quick look out the train windows at Runai, beyond the broad Mashiva Reservoir, and then into the subway tunnels they'd went. It was enough to bring out a gasp of utter astonishment, quickly followed by lip biting anxiety. Nothing about this new place was familiar to the nervous leopardess. Even the brief glimpse had been overwhelming.

It certainly didn't help that Jumie's first introduction to many of the basic components of civilization had taken place in the two hours before, gazing out the train windows as they'd

passed through all the mountain valley towns and villages. All were so unlike little Dari that they might as well have been built by aliens. The pretty houses. The gardens and fields. The roads, and the cars and trucks that drove on them. She'd never seen anything like it before. She hadn't been allowed to. It was the Brimstone Devil's country, after all. Or so she'd been told.

fey'li religion was a curious thing. So many divine aspects. A bureaucracy of goddesses and gods, angels and demons, all in one way or another answering to the One. The Power. The Prime Maker. Or whatever one preferred to call her. Or him. Or it.

These lesser divine powers occupied the immortal domains, separated for the convenience of mortal comprehension into the Three Nirvanas, the Four Primalities, the Five Originations, the Six Seas of Light, the Seven Heavens, the Eight Purgatories, and the Nine Heavenly Hells. These comprised all the divine

lands of the old fey'li beliefs, and all those which had been adopted over the millennia, such as the Heavenly Hells, from the ancient, extinct key'vin'ta.

Completely apart from these divine domains was the Abyss. The real, honest to goodness Hell, where the Brimstone Devil's hordes tortured the souls of the genuinely vile for no particular reason than their own personal amusement. At least, that's what the crazies thought it was. According to the old ways, it was where the souls of the truly, irredeemably evil were cast into eternal nothing. But the crazies had other ideas. They mostly kept those ideas to themselves, forming little communities of like-minded believers. Communities like Dari, that inevitably came to the conclusion that the whole world outside their borders was the Abyss itself.

Exactly what was going through Jumie's mind as she watched the lights in the subway tunnel flash past was a mystery. But Chyka had

no doubt she was thinking about all the sermons she'd been plied with over the years, exhorting her to reject every aspect of this 'devil's country'. To treat it as a foreign land, occupied solely by the servants of unspeakable evil.

"Next stop, 16th Avenue Main," the smooth, feminine voice of the train's automatic announcement system called out. "Transfers to green line and the Old Mashiva Center shuttle."

"Well, be home soon," Chyka said, nothing the extremely nervous expression on her companion's face.

Jumie kept staring at the passing lights. She was so entranced by them that bright lights of the first of the train's subterranean stations made her jump.

Chyka did her best not to laugh at the startled leopardess. "Everything's underground here. Even the stations. Well, except for the bit along the river."

The train paused for less than a minute before heading on its way. It was a special rapid service, only stopping at the bigger all-trains stations while in Mashiva. It therefore passed by the next two stations, before exiting the tunnels, directly onto a bridge over the Mashiva River at the western end of the city.

Jumie gasped at the sight of the icy river, and the huge rail yard to the west. There, long lines of local subway cars were joined by the bigger, long range passenger trains of the pink and sky lines. Beyond these were such a myriad of miscellaneous rolling freight stock that it was impossible to tell what purpose most of the cars might have served in the short time that they could be seen.

Beyond, further to the west, was Mashiva's much more recently built sibling city, Runai. Densely packed, and largely residential, Runai was more of a dense vertical suburb than a city in the proper sense, as most who lived there had jobs in Mashiva, or in the Intercity

Industrial Zone just to the south, across the massive, ten lane Planetary Highway 47.

As the train turned eastward, this busy roadway became the focus of Jumie's attention. She'd only just been introduced to the idea of roads and motorized vehicles as modes of routine transportation. So see so many cars and trucks, all moving too and from the city on a single massive roadway was surely mind blowing.

The elevated highway blocked much of the view of the Industrial Zone beyond, but Jumie could see just enough of the vast factories and warehouses to leave her jaw slack. Most of the individual buildings were larger than the whole of Dari, several times over. And their largely snow covered roofs just seemed to go on and on with no end in sight.

The train slowed as it entered Mashiva Station, the gargantuan, multi-level, 30 platform rail hub that served as the primary

transfer point for passengers coming to and from Mashiva via the sky line, who's trains generally only stopped at Mashiva Station, the spaceport, and in the city's Resort District. Again, Jumie gasped as she found herself looking at more than a dozen other passenger trains, either stopped at their respective platforms, or moving to and fro as they ran their routes around the city.

"Next station is ours," Chyka said softly as she pulled her small travel bag from under the seat, and gestured for her companion to do the same. "Don't forget your things."

Things might have been the wrong word for it. All Jumie had was the old, extremely timeworn winter clothing she'd been wearing when she'd fled Dari. She didn't need any of it now, of course. The black biogel that coated her body was all she'd need to wear from now on. But that bag of ratty fabric was all she had. Changing that was Chyka's number one priority.

The little snow leopardess smiled at the thought of her new lover's first trip to a proper store. Or to the big mall adjacent to the government center in the heart of the city. Or anywhere, really. There was so much that Jumie had never seen, or done. It would take all year just to show her half of it.

The wait at Mashiva Station seemed almost excessive. Chyka had long since become so used to the local subway trains that ran continuously, not so much scheduled as kept separated at a safe distance. She'd forgotten that the big, long range trains ran on strict timetables. Theirs was to depart the station at 14:45, and not a second sooner.

A long, colorful freight train rumbled past on the other side of the platform. No doubt it was coming from the spaceport, laden with all sorts of fascinating off-world goods destined for customers all over the region. It was yet another thing that Jumie had never seen in Dari, as freight trains larger than a few cars

long almost never headed very far into the relatively steep Yu'min valley. It was more of a backup route, after all. A bypass that allowed certain trains the freedom to avoid passing through Mashiva, or being forced to take a much longer route on their way to the vast, northwestern mountain plains.

Finally, at exactly 14:45, a chime sounded and the train doors closed. It rolled out of the station and straight into the arrow straight subway tunnel that led to University Station, and the spaceport beyond.

"Next stop, University Station," the automatic announcement system called out. "Mashiva Mariners University. Anwae Arena. Gelitech Gelarium. Transfers to blue, green, yellow, red, and purple lines, as well as the University Station Bus Hub."

"I... I'm so nervous," Jumie murmured.

"It's okay," Chyka soothed. "It's going to be different. But not as different as you might

think. A home is a home, after all. It just has to be home-like, even if it is all done up with biogel lifestyle stuff."

Jumie tried to smile, but it wasn't particularly convincing.

Again, the train slowed. Chyka stood up. "Come on. Let's go."

Jumie got up and followed Chyka the few steps to the door. The strain slowed to a halt. A chime sounded. The doors opened. They stepped out onto the busy platform.

Jumie hardly got a dozen steps toward the escalator at the end of the platform before she froze, overwhelmed by the sheer number and extraordinary variety of people that were moving around her. As with so much else, she had never seen so many people before, let alone crammed into so small a space. And so few, at least reasonably familiar fey'li faces. Most were different species. Aliens, at least in her eyes. Colorful elf ears. Tall, ram-horned

mitanni. Tentacled chavadi. Bee-like drochaki. Little buggy rowa drones. And so many others. It was almost too much for her to handle all at once.

"They're just people," Chyka said, tugging at her shoulder. "Different sorts of people. But people all the same. Come on. It's not so crowded upstairs. We'll go through the arena, and be at my apartment in no time flat."

It took a few more tugs to get Jumie to move, and before long, she was gingerly stepping onto her first escalator.

"Just put your hand on the hand rail, and walk with it," Chyka coached, wondering if, perhaps, taking the elevator would have been a better choice. "Make sure you don't step on the yellow mark where the steps separate. Then just ride it up. And don't forget to step off the moving part at the top."

"It's so strange," Jumie murmured as she nervously stepped onto the moving staircase.

"Just... why?"

"To force people to move up and down at a constant pace, I think," Chyka replied. "That way there's less crowding on the steps, and at the exit, and it discourages people from trying to rush the ones in front of them, preventing falls."

"Oh," Jumie responded as they reached the top of the escalator and stepped out into the lower level of Anwae Arena's west side lobby. There, yet another incredible sight greeted her. Black biogel, shimmering in the bright, yellow-green light, oozed from the ceiling, forming large dribbles and threads. These formed barriers that separated the escalators on the sides from the open center of the room.

Archways prevented the dripping boigel from completely blocking the way near the ends of each barrier, and through one of these the couple walked. Jumie gazed at a pair of bejeweled, lavender skinned elf-ears, looking

at one of the many computer screens mounted along the sides of the biogel barrier.

"Those are the ticket terminals for the Arena," Chyka noted. "That's where you can buy tickets for Biogel Games matches."

"What are biogel games?" Jumie asked as the pair passed out of the lobby and into the long, open corridor that ran the length of the Arena's west side. Instead of turning down it, Chyka led Jumie toward a broad double door in the wall opposite the lobby, between two of the many glowing green lift tubes that provided access to the arena seating. A sign above the door glowed yellow, and read "Cross Arena Access: Gelitech Staff Only".

"Simulated combat using biogel instead of real weapons," Chyka replied. "Kind of like paintball, but the casualties get turned into various biogel things instead of, you know, getting actually hurt."

"What's paintball?" Jumie questioned as

they approached the door.

"It's a game where you shoot little balls of paint that go splat on whatever you hit," Chyka replied as the door opened. "Come on. Short cut."

A short, ascending corridor led to a second door. This too opened, as well as a third door just beyond.

"They let anyone cross the arena floor when there's no games on," Chyka explained. "Just Gelitech and guests when there's match prep or cleanup though."

Jumie gawked at the vast open space, with its alien looking arches, suspended platforms, mushroom shaped structures, and the multitude of seating units, each protected by a glowing, yellow-green force field. There were a few biogel clad people about, carrying various devices which they seemed to be using to clean splatters of biogel off the concrete blocks, barrels, and cargo containers that were

stacked up all over the floor. A small forklift was being used off in one corner to move some of these items about, and it's incessant beeping echoed through the otherwise quiet building.

"We don't go right through the middle," Chyka said, pulling her companion away from the two tightly spaced arch structures, and the glowing force field tube that rose up between them. It ended in a huge, opaque sphere suspended from the ceiling, it's only visible means of entry up through the force field tube itself. "Wouldn't want to float up there and let the goo loose all over the place after they just finished cleaning it all up."

"There's... I don't..." Jumie responded as the followed close beside her companion.

"Oh, I've got so much to tell you about all this!" Chyka giggled. "It's so much fun to watch. But not now. For now we just need to get home and maybe get something to eat. Then we can talk all night."

Jumie nodded as she followed her companion out of the arena, down a short, descending corridor, and into a lobby area that was a virtual mirror image of the one on the other side of the arena.

"Straight across to the lifts," Chyka said as she lead the leopardess straight through the lobby and into a broad corridor. This corridor led into a round tunnel equipped with clear walls that ran directly through the center of the Gelarium-side courtyard pool. "Check out the biogel mermaids."

Jumie yet again gasped as several beautiful felyi biogel bodied mermaids swam past. One of them smiled and waved at the astonished leopardess. "Are they wearing... fish bodies?"

"Sort of. They've had themselves biogel body-modded," Chyka explained. "Like, that's all their body is from the neck down. One hundred percent pure biogel. It's pretty awesome, but it's quite a commitment. Can't

be undone."

Jumie shuddered and frowned as she followed her companion out of the tunnel, and into a bunker-like concrete room where the corridor branched out, and there were stairs down to a lower level. Her companion led her to the left, and they passed through another, much darker, clear walled tunnel section. This led into a corridor with windows that shone into an interior mermaid pool, where more of the biogel mermaids twirled about in the water.

Another corridor followed, this time over a section of warehouse floor, where automated forklifts were moving boxes too and fro. Here, Chyka came to a stop, before a glowing purple doorway. After a few moments, a chime sounded and the doors opened to reveal a circular lift car.

"Up we go," Chyka said, leading her companion into the lift. The ride within was

short, and the doors opened out onto the Gelarium ground floor.

Jumie's eyes grew wide as she gazed up at the six level mall filled with all things biogel. There was so much to see, and so many people who seemed very interested in seeing it all up close. Some were fully clothed, but there were quite a few who were nearly, or even completely naked. "This is where you live? Why are so many people here naked?"

"Where I work," Chyka replied as she led the leopardess to the left, toward the open garage-type door to the staff residence courtyard. "I... well, we, live *this* way. It's a clothing optional zone. If you're going to sample the goods here, you're going to be taking it off anyway, so might as well take it off right off the bat, right? Oh! Mind the biogel pool! Don't fall in!"

Jumie was so entranced by all the shiny black things, the people, and the intense purple glow that illuminated them all, that she

nearly slipped right over the smoothly rounded edge of the biogel pool that ran from north to south across the center of the Gelarium. Fortunately, her companion pulled her to safety before took a headlong dive into the mass of undulating blackness.

"I don't think you're quite ready for that," Chyka said as she lead the leopardess out into the courtyard. "Go in there, and it's totally anonymous sexy time with anyone else who might happen to find you."

Jumie grimaced.

"Come on," Chyka said, tugging on her companion as she led her toward a spiral staircase at the far corner of the courtyard. "We're almost there. We'll get settled. Eat. I can't wait to find out what everyone else has been up to while I've been gone! I'll bet they've been having lots of fun!"

TO BE CONTINUED...