

GELITECH

SEASON 2 - EPISODE 5

BELOW

BY SHETIRA ANWAE

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BELOW

“Well, look who the rats finally dragged in,” Dr. Lae harrumphed as the extremely displeased looking snow leopardess and her rather embarrassed looking companion climbed up onto the ancient one track passenger platform. “I do very sincerely trust that you have some plausible explanation for your *extremely* inconvenient delay?”

Figures, Chyka sighed to herself. Of all the physicists to run into here, it had to be this flaming asshole...

This wasn't the little snow leopardess' first encounter with the eminent physicist. One more than one very unpleasant occasion, she'd had the pleasure of dealing with his inquiries about obscure ancient manuscripts. Manuscripts that he

had quite vehemently insisted were held in the Mashiva Mariners' University Library archives. Exactly what use a bunch of old books involving disciplines as varied as anthropology and knot theory could possibly have been to a physicist had been completely beyond her at the time.

Equally beyond the young, inexperienced librarian had been the physicist's absolutely foul demeanor when being told that he was clearly mistaken as to the contents of the MMU archives. It had been a real eye opener as to just how impossibly stupid that even the smartest people could be at times. Why wouldn't someone with so much brain power have double checked a reference suggesting that a new university, with a new library, and who's archive focused on practical spacefaring matters, might have an obscure collection of ancient manuscripts?

So smart in some things, so dumb in everything else, Chyka thought to herself. It seemed to be true of many scientists. Even those more open minded

ones employed by Gelitech weren't immune to the tendency. She had to stifle a chuckle at the thought of Dr. Kidan's futile efforts to separate work from romance. So many potential girlfriends, lost to his inability to keep his mouth shut about all the wonderful experiments he was working on, and how much fun it would be to participate...

"Well?" Dr. Lae snapped. "What's your bloody excuse?"

"What's yours?" Chyka snapped back as she looked around. "You know, these ambushes are *really* getting old. I would have thought someone in your position would have made sure the path was clear. You know, instead of letting us get sent down a tunnel full of subway slime."

The nearly derelict subway platform looked almost as ancient as the texts the physicist had been seeking. Dingy didn't even begin to describe it. The platform itself was built up from roughly cut stones laid against the side of the short stub-

siding tunnel. This gave access to a recess in the tunnel wall which, she presumed, had been intended as an escape access or utility room. Whatever features has been present in the recess wall had been removed in more recent times, in favor of a large, metal garage door. The only sign of what might be behind that door was a large radiation hazard symbol painted in the center.

“Subway slime?” Dr. Lae growled. “Listen here, young lady! If you’d been sent down a tunnel full of subway slime you most certainly wouldn’t be standing here right now!”

“Yeah, I know,” Chyka replied with a scowl. “I imagine that was the point. Which raises the question of who set us up. Not a lot of people knew we were coming here, after all. Even fewer that we were commandeering a work locomotive.”

“It definitely wasn’t the train driver,” Dr. Kidan remarked. “I’ve never seen such hysterics in my

life, the way he ran off screaming for help like that.”

“Mmm,” Chyka agreed. “It was a good thing that postal train stopped for him, though I don’t imagine it’s going to be much comfort when the cleanup screw shows up to de-slime the place and we’re nowhere to be found.”

“You know, one would have thought a switch leading to a slime filled tunnel would have been locked,” Dr. Kidan noted. “Or, you know, that whoever cut the lock would have been noticed by Rad Lab security, considering how ridiculously close that was to this siding here.”

“Indeed,” Chyka responded with a nod. Calling it close was an understatement. The brick barrier with its barely hidden access tunnel had only been about sixty meters past the slime filled tunnel. “Which leads my back to my question. What’s your excuse?”

“Do I look like the sort of person who deals with matters of security?” Dr. Lae growled.

Chyka crossed her arms. “No. And that’s a problem for someone who’s apparently waiting here for us alone,” she scolded with perhaps a bit more enthusiasm than was appropriate. She just couldn’t help herself. Thanks to Omega, she’d had enough of a taste of real power that now any chance she had exert dominance in a situation was proving to be much too enticing to pass up. “After all, I don’t imagine whoever sent us down that tunnel is going to forget to check on the status of their handiwork.”

Dr. Lae responded with an extremely irritated huff.

“Whatever,” Chyka responded with a firm glare. “Now, if you’re all done wasting time, I think we have an experiment that needs to get conducted. And the sooner, the better, don’t you think?”

“Yes. Yes. Fine,” Dr. Lae sputtered, gesturing toward the garage door. “This way. Follow me.”

If Chyka had imagined that the vital experiment was to take place in the dramatic setting of a fission reactor room, even if it was a small research reactor like the one in the Rad Lab, then she was left quite sorely disappointed. There was no catwalk around a huge lead lined, concrete tank. There was no pale blue glow surrounding a critical core assembly. There was no exotic machinery to lower the item under test into the deadly abyss. Instead there was just a plain old concrete room with some tables, equipment lockers, and a pneumatic tube that began on one tabletop, and left the room through one wall.

“The experiment is simple,” Dr. Lae explained as he directed a rather skeptical looking reactor technician to open the clear plastic pneumatic carrier vessel. “We take your sample of purple slime gobzite and place it into the carrier. The suction system will then draw the carrier into the very center of the core, exposing it to the very highest levels of neutron flux. We then observe the effects of active exposure for no longer than fifteen minutes. The carrier is then drawn out of the reactor, and into a containment cell for longer term observation.”

“Sounds simple enough,” Dr. Kidan observed as the tall leopardess placed the open carrier onto the table beside the pneumatic tube.

“Indeed it is,” Dr. Lae responded with a rather unpleasant sideways glance at the tiger. “Now... where is your sample of the gobzite? Don’t tell me you have it hidden under that biogel somewhere... well...”

“As if,” Chyka replied with a smirk. “No. I don’t have any gobzite with me. I need to summon it. Give me a moment to get my staff and...”

“Summon it? Wait... you? You’re the one who...” Dr. Lae sputtered with a wide-eyed glare at the little snow leopardess.

“The one who... what?” Chyka asked as she reached out with her right hand to retrieve her staff through the transdimensional mist. The physicist had been giving off an unsettling vibe right from the very start, but she’d chalked that down to her prior experience with his bad attitude. Now, however, it seemed like there might be more to it than just that. “You know something about me?”

“Uh... well... no,” Dr. Lae responded with a very distinctly disingenuous tone that would have raised the fur on the back of Chyka’s neck if it weren’t covered in biogel. “I mean, I’ve heard some things. About someone who could actually

use key'vin'ta artifacts. You know how word gets around in these kinds of circles. And..."

"Really," Chyka responded with a very skeptical glance at the physicist. He clearly wasn't being honest, but who had told him about her? Might it have been her grandmother? Lady Anwae? Or... "I'd love to know who you heard it from, because there's not many people outside of Gelitech and the Navy who know about that. Well... not many who aren't currently hiding from Admiral Sarva."

The little snow leopardess was filled with a sudden urge to make a display of her power. A loud hiss filled the air as she took hold of her staff. It appeared from nothing as she closed her fingers around it. Along with the staff came her ritual skirt and necklace. The purple slime gobzite 'gem' atop her staff, as well as those adorning her skirt's belt and necklace glowed with fierce purple light. Purple light that usually indicated that someone was about to have a very... interesting day.

“AAAAH!” Dr. Lae yelped, jumping back a few steps. “What... what... how is that even...”

“Possible?” Chyka chuckled in a rather deliberately menacing fashion. “Why shouldn’t it be possible? The key’vin’ta priestesses had no trouble energizing the slime all by themselves. Why shouldn’t I?”

Dr. Lae’s expression shifted from one of surprise to one that might be described as one part horror and one part anger. “Only... only specially ordained key’vin’ta can manipulate the slime by will!” he snarled. “You can’t possibly tell me... how... and... and who? They’re dead! They’re all long dead!”

Keep pushing, a voice came unbidden into Chyka’s mind. It sounded an awful lot like Dr. Alluwa to her. Dr. Alluwa mixed with Omega. Or... was it? Maybe it was just an excuse her own mind came up with to justify what she felt almost

obligated to do. *Don't let up. Show him. Show him and he won't have a choice but to tell you.*

“Dead?” Chyka laughed as she gave in to the voice in her head. Dr. Alluwa. Omega. Her. It was all the same thing now, wasn't it? If she wanted to do it, then surely they did too. And if they didn't, then surely they'd stop her. “Really? Well... allow me to enlighten you.”

“Oh dear,” Dr. Kidan muttered as he too took a few steps back.

“What?” the reactor technician whispered into the tiger's ear. “What's she doing?”

“I have no idea,” Dr. Kidan whispered back. “But I'm sure it'll be quite, well, let's call it ‘interesting’.”

Chyka opened her left hand and a drop of liquid biogel appeared on her palm. It was a spontaneous idea rather than something that she'd actually

thought out. A magical flourish that would seem to defy everything that most people understood about biogel. A display of power that had just the right sort of vibe to make it clear to the highly suspect physicist that he was in far over his head. Assuming it was actually going to work the way she intended, that is.

The biogel sorceress grinned as she turned her hand over. The liquid biogel drop fell towards the floor.

As it descended, the biogel droplet rapidly expanded and morphed into the shape of a certain key'vin'ta high priestess turned mi'ah. Its color shifted to a pale light gray as the form's finer details solidified. Its feet touched the floor. It opened its eyes.

“Ti'ah'ta!” a very confused and very naked Ki'su exclaimed as she found herself suddenly yanked from one shape to another without even the courtesy of a moment's warning. “Oh! Oh...

what can possibly be the matter? I was... enjoying that strange shape. It was very... curious to the senses!”

“No,” Dr. Lae stammered. “No. It can’t. It’s just the biogel playing a trick. One of those body modifications. Or one of the shapeshifting... whatever they’re called. That has to be it! You can’t fool me!”

“You’re half-right,” Chyka purred, locking her gaze with that of the sputtering physicist. “But... you’re also half-wrong. Biogel doesn’t discriminate, after all. It’s willing to accept anyone. Anywhere. In the present. In the future. Even in the past.”

“That portal at Key’von... it... are you suggesting... it actually worked?!? And you... you brought that beast back with you?!?” Dr. Lae screeched.

“Ah! Well now!” Chyka laughed as she took a menacing step forward. “You know... you were just about the last person I’d have expected to be involved with that... organization. Cult. Whatever you want to call it. Such a shame, really. You were such a great physicist. What made you turn traitor?”

“Nice catch,” Dr. Kidan noted. “But... how did he know it was a portal through time?”

“A portal through time?” the leopardess asked. “What are you all talking about?”

“You... you... little bitch!” Dr. Lae shrieked. “You... you and that whore Anwae! And now... now... no! I refuse to believe it! You can play your tricks all you want! It’s far too late! The Goddess has been reborn! There’s nothing you can do to stop her!”

“Crazy bastard,” Dr. Kidan dryly noted.

“Uh... do I need to call security?” the leopardess asked.

“Not necessary,” Commander Nax declared as he strode through the open doorway, assault rifle leveled at the stunned scientist. “What’s the matter Lae? You weren’t expecting company? Who am I kidding. Of course you weren’t.”

Dr. Lae’s jaw hung open as he took a few steps backwards toward the controls for the pneumatic system. “Where did you come from? How did you... you were...”

“Otherwise detained?” Nax replied. “You know, I’ve got to hand it to you Shi worshiping wankers. Getting General Riyalli into a suit of what she thought was Gelitech biogel took an awful lot of work, didn’t it? Tricking the General into accepting a suit of Shi’s biogel instead was quite the coup. But I think you missed a step somewhere, didn’t you?”

“What... what are you talking about?” Dr. Lae hissed.

“You thought she’d stay in Dari until all was said and done, didn’t you?” Nax answered with a grin. “So you didn’t do anything to keep her from coming into contact with Gelitech gear. You know, Gelitech gear that automatically applies the Omega upgrade to any non-Omega biogel it comes into contact with. Yeah. You thought she was in your pocket this whole time, didn’t you? Especially with all that information she was feeding you. In reality it was Omega feeding you all that garbage. Every last bit of it.”

“No! Impossible!” Dr. Lae shouted as he flipped a selector switch and reached for a shielded red button with a very large radiation hazard placard next to it.

“No! Cell 3! There’s a cobalt 60 slug in that cell!” the technician yelled as the physicist reached out and flipped open the shield covering a

very large red button. “No! Don’t do it! Stop! Stop!!! STOP!!!”

Dr. Lae laughed and motioned to mash his fist into the control button. Time seemed to come to a near standstill.

Chyka reached out with her power. She drew forth glowing purple slime from nothing. She cast it toward the physicist.

A klaxon wailed. Red lights flashed.

“Emergency condition in pneumatic insertion room 2 verbally indicated,” a computerized voice announced over the loudspeaker. “Automatic lockdown and scram initiated!”

The purple slime raced across space as Dr. Lae smashed his hand onto the big button, even as the leopardess grabbed hold of his arm and tried to yank him away from the controls. He pushed her away, and directly into the path of the slime.

A series of loud bass thumps filled the room as Nax unleashed a barrage of force-ram pulses from his rifle's under-barrel projector. "Dammit Chyka!" Nax snapped as time seemed to snap back to normal. "He's too valuable for that!"

Chyka barely noticed the admonishment. The glowing purple slime streaming from the air around the tip of her staff had found the leopardess' back.

"Chyka!" Dr. Kidan yelled. It was too late.

The leopardess screeched as the slime instantly covered her back from tail to shoulder blades. In an instant it had wrapped itself all around her torso, dissolving her clothing as it spread. She began to float up off the floor as it slithered over her abdomen, down her arms and legs, and up her neck.

“Can’t you... can’t you stop it?” Dr. Kidan stammered.

“Oh! OH! OHHHH!” the technician panted in confused desperation as the slime pulled her arms to her sides and her legs together. As it flowed up over her chin, before cutting her sonorous utterances short by filling her mouth. Her eyes quivered and her ears twitched as it spread upward.

“NonononononoNO!” Chyka groaned as she struggled to pull the slime back. The slime had completely surrounded the leopardess’ head. It was too late to stop it. Her one-way trip to the Heavenly Hells had begun. Or... had it?

Something strange was happening to the leopardess as Chyka tugged and pulled in a vain effort to keep her from dissolving into the slime. Yes, she was beginning to dissolve away. Yes, her soul was beginning to spiral down into the pleasurable abyss. But... something else was

happening. For every bit of her that was making its way into the Hells, a bit of something else was making its way out, and into the mass of slime that was consuming her.

“Ti’ma’pu’ma!” Ki’su exclaimed. “Oh! Yes! Yes! Do it!”

Chyka had no idea what ‘it’ was. She took it meaning that Ki’su wanted her to continue struggling against the leopardess’ total dissolution. That *was* what she was fighting *against*, wasn’t it? Or was she actually fighting *for* something? Was she fighting to hold that connection open so that something could take the leopardess’ place? Something summoned from the bowels of the Nine Heavenly Hells? Something...

“Mi’ku’mi’pa!” Ki’su giggled. “Yes! Oh yes! The power! The power! It is... amazing!”

Chyka didn’t have a clue what she was doing. The going and the coming stopped feeling like

separate things. Now it felt more like a loop. A loop that was slowly changing as time passed. The bitterness of the fight to save the leopardess was turning sweet. Attractive. Enticing.

“Ga’ti’wa!” Ki’su sputtered as she began to bounce up and down on her feet. “Feel it! When it feels right... let go!”

The loop went round and round and round and round. Chyka wasn’t fighting to maintain it anymore. Instead, she was fighting the urge to step forward. To cast herself into the undulating blob and join in its glorious, throbbing, totally alien power. It felt like such a perfectly natural thing to do. Natural... and right.

Chyka let go, as much for her own self-preservation as in following Ki’su’s instruction. The light of her staff faded. The blob of purple slime which floated before her began to take shape. Humanoid shape. With viciously clawed hands and feet, and bony wings which might have

been bat-like if there had been anything between their ‘fingers’.

The slime that covered the shape suddenly vanished into a delicate purple mist. The leopardess reappeared, though she was only half the leopardess she had been before her terrifying transformation. The other half of her...

“T’no’pi!” Ki’su bubbled. “You... you did it! You have made her into a slime demon! It is... magnificent!”

Chyka was as fascinated as she was horrified by the monster that she had created, though she couldn’t quite get over the fact that it had been a complete accident. “Oh... uh... oops?”

The slime demon pranced about on her legs of dark lavender, adorned with numerous glowing purple slime patches and nodules. This carapace opened up mid-thigh, running up the outside only, where it met the lumpy, spiny mass which had

grown over her back, from her slime-gem tipped tail, all the way up over her shoulders and arms. This too was covered with patches, lumps, and spikes of purple slime.

Chyka gawked as the demon flexed her huge wings. Each of their three bony fingers ended in a glowing purple slime gem, just like her tail. The creature caressed her pair of purple slime horns and stroked the flat patches of purple slime that had taken the place of her nipples. Another patch covered the middle of her belly, while beneath, the barely exposed inner folds of her luscious womanhood seemed to have been remade into purple slime as well.

“Uh... what did I do?” Chyka asked as the little key’vin’ta priestess bounced and giggled beside her.

“Ma’tu’ma!” Ki’su laughed with unfettered delight. “You have made the one into a slime

demon! Do you... do you not know what that means?!?”

“Uh... no,” Chyka responded with a raised eyebrow and a sense that she probably wasn’t going to like the answer.

“Ki’ah’ma!” Ki’su exclaimed. “Only the most holy of supreme royalty have the power to do such a glorious thing!”

“Oh dear,” Dr. Kidan remarked, bowing his head with a deep sigh.

“Na’ma! Mo’mi!” Ki’su sputtered. “You... you are new ruler of my people! The new Empress of Ma’ri’ah!”

“Oh, for heck’s sake!” Nax grunted as he struggled to restrain Dr. Lae. “What next? Is she going to build a temple and get declared a goddess or something?”

“Mi’ka’ru,” Ki’su giggled. “The Empres of Ma’ri’ah is a Goddess!”

“Greeeeeat,” Nax huffed as he turned to the door. “Are you guys going to get in here or do I have to do this all myself?”

“Sir, yes sir!” came the reply as a pair of Admiral Sarva’s marines charged in and piled on top of the struggling physicist.

“I’m not your Empress,” Chyka replied, shaking her head as the marines finally managed to get a pair of handcuffs on the physicist.

“Mo’mi!” Ki’su chuckled. “You are. The Goddess of the Hells has ordained you!”

“Shi is the Goddess of the Hells and Shi had not...” Dr. Lae hissed as the marines dragged him onto his feet.

“Ta’ka’ka!” Ki’su shouted. “Heretic!”

“You’re the heretic, bitch!” Dr. Lae shouted back. “Both of you!”

“Ki’ka’na!” Ki’su yelled. “How dare you speak to the Empress of Ma’ri’ah and High Mother Of Xin’ta in that way!”

“Keep talking!” Dr. Lae growled. “When the true Goddess of the Hells gets hold of you...”

Commander Nax shoved Dr. Lae forward. “Get his asshole to the train. Now!”

“Yes, sir!” the marines replied as they dragged the physicist from the room.

“Phew,” Nax muttered. “Now that that’s done and over with... I think it’s best we get moving before Shi figures out that her downfall is underway.”

“I don’t understand,” Chyka said, turning to the Vixanti intelligence officer with a very skeptical expression. At this point, she really wasn’t sure who she could trust. “Did you really suggest that everything that’s happened to me... that was... Omega’s doing?”

“Yeah,” Nax replied. “But this isn’t the place to talk about it. We should head back to Gelitech. Lady Anwae’s special train is on the tracks outside waiting.”

“Alright,” Chyka replied before turning to the slime demon. “Uh... demon lady... I’m uh... I’m sorry I did that to you.”

The slime demon turned to face her creator. “What are you sorry for, my Empress?” it purred with a low, demonic rumble that seemed to tug at the ears in a deeply unsettling way. “This wonderful shape... it is pure pleasure. I savor it. And I will savor every moment at your side!”

“Yeah, about that,” Chyka observed, not quite sure how to deal with the creature. Was she actually still the leopardess? Was it the leopardess’ half-transformed body possessed by some angel or demon? Or was it a creature from the Hells that just happened to look like the leopardess? In any event, the last thing she wanted was to have the creature following her around anywhere she could be seen. While she might have been able to pass her shape off as a biogel body-mod, one that was suspiciously similar in coloration to the Gelarium’s interior décor, she just stood out too much for it to be safe at the moment. “You’re a bit... shall we say... conspicuous, and I don’t think it would be a good idea to... uh...”

The slime demon laughed. “Worry not, my Mistress,” it replied. “I shall retire and await a more appropriate time.”

The slime demon dissolved into a small blob of purple slime. This flew around Chyka a few times before solidifying into a little purple gobzite gem.

The little snow leopardess took hold of it, but didn't have any idea where to put it. Could she send it off to the secure location where her staff and regalia were kept?

Sending anything back to storage seemed just a bit too risky for the moment. She took the little slime-demon gem and placed it on her wrist, just below the back of her right hand. There, she willed the biogel to take hold of it within its glistening blackness. On a whim, largely because it looked kind of pretty, she left it half-exposed.

“Mi'ma,” Ki'su purred. “What will my new Empress first edict be? How many Mi'ah will she demand? What will she...”

“Stop it with the Empress stuff, will you?” Chyka huffed as she followed Nax out the door. “We have more important things to deal with right now. Come on. Let's go.”

TO BE CONTINUED...