

"Are you sure about this, Professor Kumo?" Seymour Hamish asked.

He looked around with mounting unease. The goblin-like creatures were short, barely taller than toddlers. But they were numerous. They surrounded Professor Kumo and Hamish. They jumped up on nearby boulders and tree branches and gibbered away in their strange, alien tongue.

"There is no need to be concerned," Professor Kumo said. "They're just curious."

They did not look curious to Hamish. They looked malevolent.

The thing is, Hamish was a fantasy game geek. He played *World of Warcraft*. He played *Magic: the Gathering*. He had a playgroup that met up every Friday evening to play *Dungeons & Dragons*. He knew goblins. They were low-level fodder that were mostly treated as comic relief—stupid creatures frequently more dangerous to themselves than anyone else.

These creatures looked very similar to the goblins of those fantasy games. They were short, had green skin, long hooked noses and big pointed ears. Despite this, they weren't anything like the goblins of those fantasy games. They weren't comic relief. Hamish didn't smile at their antics. Instead he felt threatened by them. He didn't like the way they stared at him with their beady black eyes. They looked like they wanted to do him harm... or worse.

You're stereotyping them, Hamish thought. You're letting that nasty vestigial ape tribalism rise to the surface. It was just stupid primal instinct to fear The Other. He needed to be better than that. He needed to be like Professor Kumo.

Professor Kannatuki Kumo was a legend. At the relatively youthful age of 44, what he'd already achieved in the field of anthropology would take most of his peers a full academic career—*several even!*—to emulate. He'd led first contact expeditions into both the Amazon and New Guinea. On behalf of the Indian government he'd led a diplomatic mission to the reclusive and hostile Sentinelese people of the Andaman Islands. While that had not been a full success—the Sentinelese were still highly mistrustful of outsiders—Professor Kumo had at least got them to communicate rather than simply shoot their visitors with bows, and he firmly believed that within a generation the Sentinelese would overcome their isolationism and be more receptive to future contact attempts.

Professor Kumo's reputation was incredible. Hamish had been overjoyed when he'd received the email confirming his acceptance to be one of Professor Kumo's postgraduate students. Even then, he hadn't been prepared for just how much boundless energy the man had. He was a living human battery. Hamish suspected the university approved his many foreign trips because they feared the consequences of keeping him cooped up in one building for too long.

And some of those trips were more far-flung than even the furthest corners of the globe...

Hamish hadn't suspected this when Professor Kumo had first approached him with his proposal for an expedition. To be honest, Hamish hadn't thought about much at all. He'd been too busy bouncing off the walls with excitement—him, on an expedition with the legendary Professor Kannatuki Kumo.

The penny had dropped when, instead of heading out to South America or New Guinea, Professor Kumo had taken Hamish to an unmarked army base in the middle of 'darkest' Montana.

Hamish liked his sci-fi almost as much as he liked his fantasy. Suspicions of what this might be about—really about—were already swirling around inside Hamish's skull as Professor Kumo had parked the rental car in a layby about a mile before the main gate of the military compound.

"Okay, I have been deliberately vague about this for good reason," Professor Kumo told Hamish. "As you might be already suspecting, this is not a regular expedition. Where we're about to go is highly sensitive and extremely classified. On entering that compound we will be subject to stringent binding agreements with extreme penalties for their breaking. I cannot understate the consequences of telling anyone else of what you see in there. The men in charge are ruthlessly pragmatic and scarily efficient. They have the means to disappear you and anyone else you might communicate with, and will not hesitate to do so in order to protect the secret hidden within that base. This is why I'm giving you a last opportunity to change your mind. If you feel uncomfortable at all about this, it would be best for you to go no further. So, what say you?"

Hamish didn't have to think long for the answer.

"It would be a serious failing of me as an academic to turn down an opportunity like this."

"That's exactly what I wanted to hear," Professor Kumo said, giving Hamish a hearty clap on the back.

Hamish was enough of a sci-fi geek to not be surprised by what was within the compound, although it was his second guess rather than his first. That was even more of a pleasant surprise. Hamish had been expecting attempts to communicate with an extraterrestrial visitor, not travel to another world as if *Stargate* had suddenly become reality.

It was a much more prosaic reality. Hamish had walked down an otherwise plain corridor and found himself standing on an alien planet before he'd had a chance to let the hype build. And then there hadn't even been a chance to take in that enormity before Professor Kumo was rushing him over to the corresponding military compound built on the other side of the portal. From there they'd commissioned a pair of bicycles—the local conditions played havoc with machinery, apparently—and then they were off again.

During the long ride, Hamish had again marveled at Professor Kumo's seemingly boundless energy. Hamish considered himself to be reasonably fit—he ran every morning, weather permitting—and here he was, struggling to keep up with a man twice his age.

They rode under a roiling purple, pink and red alien sky. Rolling hills of long red grass gave way to a barren scrubland punctuated with twisted, almost *fleshy*, trees. Hamish was on an alien planet. He was surprised the enormity of that hadn't affected him more. Maybe it was because Professor Kumo, the human dynamo he was, kept everything moving too fast for Hamish to properly dwell on it. Instead he wondered how many other people were aware of this H-space, as Professor Kumo called it. A discovery as massive as this would require the greatest minds—the top geologists, biologists, anthropologists—to explore it. Then you had all the various personnel, military or otherwise, in the bases on either side of the portal. So many people, and yet not a whisper had crept out to the general public.

Ruthlessly pragmatic and scarily efficient indeed.

Maybe it was time for Hamish to quit the beer and weed, like he'd been saying he was going to do for a while.

It was not like he needed any mind-altering stimulants out here. Everything around them was like a bad acid trip. Were those trees, or tormented souls eternally rooted to the stony soil? The sky, with its churning purple, pink, and red clouds, reminded Hamish of bruised flesh. Assaulted. Molested.

Hamish wondered if the alien physics were having an effect on his perception. Professor Kumo had warned him some people were susceptible. It triggered feelings of unease, sometimes even hallucinations in extreme cases.

The terrain became rocky and elevated. Professor Kumo pulled to a halt at the foot of low-lying and boulder-strewn hills. Then the goblins came out.

That was when Hamish had asked Professor Kumo if he was sure about this. Like most liberal academic types, Hamish felt nervous around your typical bull-necked, crew-cut military types. At this point in time, with a throng of goblins surrounding them, Hamish wondered if they should have brought a military escort along with them.

He voiced that thought to Professor Kumo. "Shouldn't we have some kind of military escort for protection?"

The goblins—Professor Kumo had told him their official name, but Hamish kept defaulting to what they most reminded him of—made Hamish feel very uncomfortable. They weren't wearing any clothes and their genitalia were fully exposed. They were human-like in that regard, although their penises were longer in proportion to their short stature, and tapered to a wicked looking point. One standing up on a tree branch leered at Hamish while stroking a hand up and down its pointed member.

Fuck respecting different cultural sensibilities, Hamish thought. It was a nasty little gross thing. Hamish hoped this shameless uncouthness wasn't common amongst the rest of the goblins.

"Armed escorts inevitably provoke more trouble than they prevent," Professor Kumo explained. "The first step in any successful contact is to build trust in the other party. This cannot be done while both parties are fearful of the other. This area has already been scouted anyway, and this is my seventh time of visiting the Pauxillum Constupros. They are accustomed to my presence. In time they will become accustomed to yours."

Hamish glanced back at the goblin masturbating itself in the tree. Its beady eyes met Hamish's and didn't flinch. No shame at all, Hamish thought.

Hamish still wasn't entirely sure why he was here. That was the other thing about Professor Kumo. Like most intensely focused people, he frequently forgot to explain his plans to the mere mortals swimming along in his wake. Hamish felt he should correct that before they went any further.

"I plan to embed myself with the Pauxillum Constupros for an extended period of time in order to better study them," Professor Kumo answered. "I'll need a research assistant to help me out during this period. The Pauxillum Constupros have already accepted me. I need them to also accept you if you're going to be my research assistant."

He flashed Hamish a breezy grin.

"And for you to accept them. This is not your regular research assignment as you might imagine. It won't be for everyone. But what an opportunity, eh."

Hamish couldn't deny that. This was way beyond the dreams of a fresh-faced anthropology student. This was science at its most primal. This was like being back at the days of Darwin and *The Beagle*. No-one with any interest in science and progress could possibly turn down an opportunity like this. He just wished the goblins—the Pauxillum Constupros—were less... well... gross.

The tribe led them up into the hills along winding, rocky paths. Hamish saw no other fauna, and what little vegetation he saw didn't look right. Yes, this was an alien planet and he'd expect alien vegetation to look alien, but this looked... wrong... corrupted.

Hamish rubbed his temples. He must be sensitive to those weird magnetic fields Professor Kumo had told him about. He'd talk more with him later. He didn't want it affecting his role as the Professor's assistant.

The goblins led them up to a secluded cave entrance high in the hills. The cave entrance had been carved into a stone archway. It was 'decorated', if you could use such a word, with crude fetishes depicting obscene acts. Similar depictions were daubed directly onto the stone arch. Hamish didn't know what 'paint' had been used for this. He had a nasty suspicion it was feces.

Up until now the goblins had—mercifully—not touched him. This changed the moment he was about to step into the cave entrance. Chuntering angrily, a pair surged forwards and dug sharp claws into the fabric of his pants. They held him on the spot and tried to tug him back. No, it felt more like they were trying to tug his pants down.

Hamish looked over to Professor Kumo for guidance. The professor was already in the process of taking his clothes off.

"This is a sacred place to the Pauxillum Constupros," he explained. "Clothes are not allowed. We should respect their culture."

Reluctantly, Hamish started to strip until both he and Professor Kumo were as naked as their goblin hosts. With disgust, Hamish noticed that same goblin was leering at him with beady black eyes while jerking away on its weird, pointed genitalia. He felt a strong urge to kick the loathsome little thing in the head.

Hamish felt something brush against his back leg, followed by a *whoosh*, a *crack* and a pained yelp. He turned in time to see one of the goblin creatures backing away with its hands on its head. Professor Kumo twirled his oak walking stick in his hands and smiled at Hamish.

"Respect, but also establish our own boundaries," he said.

Professor Kumo's famed walking stick. It was legendary amongst undergraduates. Even in these supposedly more civilized times, Professor Kumo still cleaved to some old-fashioned ideas when it came to education. He had no qualms about giving particularly inattentive undergrads a short sharp rap on the knuckles to, as he put it, 'improve their focus'. He certainly didn't need the stick for walking.

Then, with the ground rules laid down, Professor Kumo and Hamish followed the goblins into the cave. The tunnel was wide, well-travelled and illuminated by burning torches fixed to the stone walls at regular intervals. The stonework was daubed with various crude and obscene murals.

"Is this their... warrens?" Hamish asked as they followed the goblins deeper into the hill.

He hadn't noticed a single goblin that could be described as female amongst their guide party. They all appeared to be male. Presumably, there had to be some female goblins—and children—somewhere.

"No," Professor Kumo replied. "It would be more accurately described as their temple, or ceremonial ground. Their village is located in the mire on the other side of this hill. They don't allow outsiders to visit, at least not until they've grown accustomed to them. Which is why we're here."

"Ah, so we need to be participants in one of their ritual ceremonies in order to be accepted by the tribe."

"Correct," Professor Kumo said. "Once you've been accepted—dare I say inducted—by the tribe, we will be able to take up residence in their village and study them in their own settlement for an extended period of time."

"Have you taken part in one of these... induction ceremonies?" Hamish asked.

"Yes," Professor Kumo replied.

"What should I expect?" Hamish asked.

He looked again at the crude murals daubed on the tunnel walls. There were many things Hamish was prepared to do in the name of science. The acts depicted in those crudely daubed murals... nope.

"We do not have to take an active role," Professor Kumo said. "Just being there is enough."

That came as some relief to Hamish.

As they walked deeper into the hill, Hamish noticed strange growths on the wall, like roots or ivy. It was clearly plant-like, but it also reminded Hamish—uncomfortably—of veins. The end of one knotted branch terminated in a big pink flower. That also seemed queerly fleshy. The pink deepened to red near the center, where there was a vertical—and also fleshy—slit. A sweet smell, strangely like women's perfume, drifted from the opening.

What a curious plant. If it was a plant. He knew there were certain invertebrates that were easy to confuse for plants. It was a while since his undergraduate classes studying the lower plant and animal orders, so he couldn't really tell in this case. He was leaning in to take a closer look when Professor Kumo grabbed his arm and pulled him away.

"We're not on Earth, Hamish," he admonished.

"Yes, sorry," Hamish said.

He gave the strange flower a backwards glance as they carried on. The scent it emitted had been strangely alluring.

The tunnel opened up into a vast underground cavern. And it was vast. Most of the inside of the hill must be hollow. Light shone down through cracks in the ceiling. Water ran down the side of natural stone columns in little rivulets. The air was filled with the same sweet scent Hamish had smelled earlier and he saw more of the strange growth and pink flowers. It was most concentrated at the far side of the cavern, where it overgrew a statue of a naked woman carved from green stone.

"Time to put that brain to use," Professor Kumo said. "What can you tell me about this chamber and its relationship to the Pauxillum Constupros?"

Hamish looked around. The most distinctive feature of the room was the overgrown statue. It was not of a goblin. It might even be the statue of a human woman, although Hamish had no idea how it had ended up here. The sculptor must have been a master artisan. Though carved from green stone—*jade?*—the woman still looked soft, fleshy and enticing. Only her upper body was visible. Her lower half was festooned in the same plant growth running rampant through the rest of the cavern. This growth expanded out beneath her until it looked as though she was standing on—or just behind—a giant woody gourd or pumpkin.

The goblins clearly worshipped the statue. They danced wildly on the bare earth in front of it while other members of the tribe banged away on crude drums.

"Cargo cult?" Hamish said. "The statue isn't theirs. At a guess I'd say it was a relic of a previous, now collapsed, civilization. The gob..." Hamish paused to correct himself. "Pauxillum Constupros found it and adopted her as their goddess."

Professor Kumo smiled mischievously. "And now the surprise."

The 'statue' opened her eyes.

"Their goddess is alive," Professor Kumo said.

Hamish watched, stunned, as what he'd initially taken to be a statue came to life. The green woman opened her eyes, sighed and stretched. She smiled beatifically at the goblins dancing before her.

"I suppose it would be more accurate to call her their queen," Professor Kumo said.

"Is she their progenitor?" Hamish asked. "Like a queen bee?" That would explain why he'd seen no females.

Hamish saw the plant growths shudder and squirm as the 'queen' woke up. With a shiver he realized they were part of the same organism.

"Sexual dimorphism?" Hamish asked. "Maybe with some form of symbiosis with a plant-like organism."

"No, I believe she is an entirely separate species," Professor Kumo said. "One with a mutualistic relationship with the Pauxillum Constupros."

Hamish was mesmerized by the goblin queen. Her movements were hypnotic. Not just her, but the slow writhing of the vines and flowers growing out of her as well. Hamish thought back to his various fantasy games. There were plant girl monsters in those settings as well—dryads, alraunes. Could this goblin queen be something like that?

"Professor Christof Taaks would be fascinated by her," Hamish said.

Professor Taaks was a botany lecturer from Hamish's undergraduate days. He was one of the world's foremost authorities on lichens and symbiotic relationships.

"Yes, I imagine he would," Professor Kumo said with a wry smirk. "I did put his name forward. Botany is not my field. Unfortunately, I was told Professor Taaks had already been vetted and rejected for ideological concerns. While the organization behind this exploratory mission want the best and brightest, they have even stricter requirements on secrecy."

Hamish felt a little flash of pride at that. As he was out here, someone above must have already vetted him and found him worthy.

They continued down the slope and found a quiet spot at the back of the cave. The goblins continued to cavort wildly in the center of the cavern, spurred on by the banging of drums and the green girl's hypnotic swaying.

"How mutualistic is the symbiotic relationship?" Hamish asked. "Do the *Pauxillum Constupros* receive anything for their worship?"

Professor Kumo didn't answer. Hamish looked over and saw the other man had put a hand over his mouth and nose like a mask.

The ceremony reached some sort of crescendo. The green girl tipped her head back and held aloft her arms. The drumming stopped. The goblins paused their dance and held their hands aloft. A throb emanated out from the plant girl's body and travelled down the vines growing out across the cavern walls. The pink flowers opened up and emitted something—*nectar? pollen?*—in a fine spray. It filled the cavern with an amber mist. The effect on the goblins was immediate. It whipped them up into a greater frenzy. Their dancing became wild... chaotic. Some couldn't even keep up and collapsed to the floor with foam flecking their lips.

It also had an effect on Hamish. He hadn't had a chance to take a deep breath and hold it, and as a result had inhaled some of the amber mist. Fortunately, it didn't seem to have a toxic effect on human physiology. Hamish felt a slight pleasant buzz and a nice warm feeling, but that was about it. The secondary effect was a little more embarrassing. Outside of his control, Hamish's penis swelled and ballooned out into a rather noticeable and awkward erection.

Hamish tried to discreetly hide it. The last thing he wanted was for Professor Kumo to think he'd got it from ogling the plant girl's naked breasts. Although, to be fair, through some strange quirk of parallel evolution the girl appeared to have been gifted a spectacular example of the human female form.

Hamish tried to take his mind off it by continuing with his observations. The sweet-smelling mist was not the plant girl's only contribution to the ceremony. Other vines dangled down from the walls and ceiling. These terminated in strange, almost phallic structures that oozed amber-colored nectar

from the tip. Every so often a goblin would pause in its dancing to suck on one of the structures. Then it would either return to dance with greater ferocity or just collapse in a drugged stupor.

Hamish thought again of bees. Not in terms of queens and hierarchical social structures, but on their role as pollinators and how plants would effectively bribe them with nectar to facilitate that role. Hamish watched one goblin suck on the oozing tip of a vine—it did unfortunately look as vulgar as if the goblin was sucking on a penis—and wondered if the goblins might, in some way, be the plant girl's bees. This wasn't Hamish's field, but he knew it would fascinate some of his biologist colleagues.

Except he couldn't tell them. Not at all, not if the people at the top of this research endeavor were as secretive and ruthless as Professor Kumo had intimated.

"Ah, now it would appear our roles are about to change from observers to participants," Professor Kumo said.

Hamish turned and saw they'd attracted the attention of the plant girl.

Or rather, he'd caught the attention of the plant girl.

She was staring right at him. There was no mistaking that. The corners of her mouth turned up in a smile when their eyes met.

Languidly, she pointed a finger at Hamish and beckoned him to come to her. Her gesture was flirtatious, like an invitation to dance.

Hamish smiled back at the girl while whispering out of the side of his mouth at Professor Kumo. "What do I do?"

"It's all right," Professor Kumo said. "This has happened before. Just follow her instructions."

The plant girl was beckoning with both hands now. Her body swayed like an exotic dancer. On the cavern floor the goblins stopped their wild dancing and parted to open up a clear corridor between Hamish and the green-skinned girl.

The plant girl beckoned again. Hamish didn't move. He didn't know what to do. He was paralyzed by indecision.

"Go on, lad," Professor Kumo said. "She is their queen. Displeasing her will displease them."

That jolted Hamish into action. He didn't want to turn the Pauxillum Constupros hostile and ruin months of Professor Kumo's work. He stepped out onto the cavern floor and walked over to the green-skinned naked girl. He felt terribly self-conscious and uncomfortable. The goblins' attention was on him and they made strange, almost reverential *cooing* sounds as he passed. It also *really* didn't help Hamish's sense of dignity that he currently had a very large and very noticeable erection flapping around between his legs.

For science, Hamish thought. For progress and the betterment of the human race.

It didn't help his current out-of-control state of arousal that—green-skin aside—the goblin queen had an extremely alluring figure. Her eyes seemed to smolder with sexual want as she beckoned Hamish to her.

No, that was Hamish doing the toxic male thing of projecting his own sexual desires. Her body was gorgeous, to be fair, with a pair of naked breasts that were definitely appealing to look at. Well, what body he could see. Her lower half was hidden beneath a lot of vines and some kind of large woody growth.

Calm it, Hamish thought. You're here for science.

Hamish reached the wooden pumpkin structure and wondered what he was supposed to do next. Clamber up the side and join her on 'stage'? Or maybe just do a little dance where he was?

He glanced back to Professor Kumo for guidance. This meant he did not spot the vines snaking down from the ceiling until they had already coiled around his arms and waist. Hamish was hoisted up into the air before he even realized what was happening.

Whoa, he thought. Now he was dangling right over the pumpkin structure, almost face-to-face with the green-skinned woman. Up close her raw attractiveness was even more evident, but also her alienness. The lines of her face weren't quite right, but perversely that only made her seem more exotic... and sexy.

The vines—well, they couldn't be vines; plants weren't capable of movement like this—twisted Hamish from side to side like a puppet. It gave the queen full view of Hamish's naked body. Including, to his profound embarrassment, his flapping cock. The plant girl queen seemed more interested in that than Hamish was entirely comfortable with.

"A traveler," the queen said, "and an excellent specimen at that."

Hamish's brow furrowed. Was that English she was speaking. How?

"Hi," Hamish said. "I'm Seymour."

"And I am Comedentia exivia de Cobali," the plant girl said. "Do you wish to partake of the sacred ceremony with me?"

Okay, that was definitely English. How could she speak and understand it? Had someone—Professor Kumo or someone else—taught her?

That was a question for Professor Kumo later. Currently he had to get through this without angering either the queen or her huge throng of goblins.

"What is this ceremony?" Hamish asked.

"An offering," Comedentia said. "A meeting of the mind, body, and soul."

She rubbed hands over her luscious curves.

"Mostly of the body," she added, staring right at Hamish.

He gulped. Was she intimating what he thought she was intimating?

Not cool, Professor Kumo, Hamish thought. Consent matters. You have to think about consent before springing surprises like this on people.

His cock belied his current thoughts by giving an enthusiastic little twitch.

At least Hamish was currently single, so he wouldn't be cheating on anyone. And it was every nerd's secret dream to get it on with the green-skinned alien babe.

If he could get it on with the green-skinned alien babe. He was thinking compatibility here. She seemed willing enough, but he couldn't see much of her below the waist. That was all hidden by vegetative growth. Did she even have the right bits under all that?

He was looking down at her crotch when the big wooden pumpkin growth she was standing behind suddenly proved to be not very wooden at all, and opened up to reveal a liquid-filled hollow. The interior walls looked very fleshy and were lit up by some kind of strange pink bioluminescence. The fleshy pot was big—maybe as big as a whirlpool bath—and contained about the same amount of water.

Big enough to fit a human, Hamish realized with a chill.

He started to struggle and try to free himself from the vines, because what had opened up below him looked very much like the pot of a carnivorous plant.

"Why the struggling?" Comedentia asked. "Don't you want to partake of the sacred ceremony with me?"

"What happens in this sacred ceremony?" Hamish asked.

"Nice things." Comedentia said. "Pleasurable things."

She reached over to caress Hamish's hips. Her touch was smooth and warm.

"My pauxies are very envious of you. Any of them would trade everything to be where you are now. Look."

Hamish saw a lot of beady black eyes staring back at them. As to what was in them, he couldn't tell. An expectant hush had settled over the entire cavern.

"I do so adore my little constupros," Comedentia said. "But after so many of them it is pleasant to have a change."

She leaned closer to run her smooth hands all over Hamish's naked body.

This further confused the hell out of him. Did she want to eat him or fuck him? Hamish was getting very mixed signals here and the outcomes couldn't possibly be further apart in terms of desirability.

As he twisted in the vines, he turned enough to see Professor Kumo watching him from the back of the cave. At least Professor Kumo didn't appear to be stressing out. As spry as the middle-aged man was, Hamish didn't expect him to try to fight his way through a horde of goblins just to rescue him.

He would have expected him to look concerned, though, and Professor Kumo looked slightly amused more than anything.

In fact, he was very much watching this like a man who had seen all this before.

Had maybe even taken part in it himself.

Hamish let out a sigh of relief. He'd jumped to the wrong conclusion. Too many D&D sessions in fantasy worlds filled with deadly dangers. He'd have to watch that, especially now he was on an alien world.

He stopped struggling. By the time he turned back to face Comedentia he had an apologetic smile on his face.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I saw that," he glanced down to the liquid-filled pot beneath him, "and panicked. I thought you were some kind of carnivorous plant."

Comedentia smiled back at him.

"Oh, but I am a carnivorous plant."

She dropped him into the pot with a splash.

Hamish thrashed about wildly in burning acidic panic before realizing the burning acidic panic was purely in his head. The fluids were warm, like a bath at optimal temperature, and maybe a little thicker than water, but otherwise didn't seem to be having an adverse effect on him. He lifted up a hand. The flesh wasn't sloughing off or anything gross like that.

That didn't mean anything anyway. Digestive fluids only worked that way in shlocky horror movies. In the real world they worked a lot slower and normally required the thing being digested to be dead first.

He stopped panicking long enough to realize all the goblins were laughing at him.

Goddamn. You're a biologist, Hamish thought. You need to stop thinking like a D&D goober.

Comedentia held her arms aloft to grab the attention of the crowd.

"Our offering does not seem to realize the great honor bestowed upon him," she called out to the assembled goblins. "Or the pleasures he is about to receive."

The opening to the fleshy sac closed up until it formed a snug-fitting cuff around Hamish's neck. His head was the only part of him not submerged. The fleshy walls of the 'pot' pulsed and warm fluids were churned around Hamish's naked body. He was stuck now. The fleshy walls were thick and extremely muscular.

"Professor Kumo," he called out in alarm.

"It's okay," Professor Kumo called back. "Just go along with the ceremony."

Comedentia bent over him.

"You should listen to your master, boy," she said. "And your senses. Do my fluids not feel pleasurable?"

The walls of her sac throbbed and pulsed. The warm fluids swirled around Hamish. It did feel quite pleasant, like sitting in a warm jacuzzi.

"Relax," Comedentia whispered. "Let pleasure soak into you."

The fleshpot continued to churn and pulse. Lots of squishy liquid sounds emanated from within. Despite Professor Kumo's assurances, Hamish couldn't shake the fear he'd been plopped into a giant stomach.

Comedentia bent down over him.

"I'm going to consume you, erotically," she whispered huskily.

Hamish didn't even get a chance to properly panic. Pores opened up in the muscular cuff around his neck and sprayed a fine mist that surrounded Hamish's head in a sweet-smelling cloud. He inhaled and his thoughts became fuzzy, as if smothered in cotton candy. *Stomach. Erotically consumed.* He felt those words should concern him, but he felt it hard to summon any form of urgency. It was like taking a warm bath on a cold winter day. He wanted to delay getting out for as long as possible.

"You came here to study me, did you not?" Comedentia asked.

Fuzzily, Hamish nodded. As much as was permitted by the cushioned fleshy lips around his neck.

"Mmm, then I shall satisfy your curiosity and tell you exactly what is happening to you as you melt away inside me."

Melt away? Shouldn't that concern him more, Hamish thought.

"But you don't need to worry," Comedentia continued. "Our world is different to yours. We melt our prey with pleasure, not acids. See. Feel."

The walls of her fleshpot pulsed and throbbed. Thick liquids swirled around Hamish's naked body.

"Mmm, yes. Feel my juices soak into you. Do they cause you pain? Of course not. Their role is to relax you and increase your sensitivity."

Hamish did feel warm and relaxed. And pleasantly tingly all over.

The sac churned and throbbed. The inner walls were covered in large fleshy bumps. They felt like soft tits rubbing all over Hamish.

"Mmm, yes. Relax," Comedentia said.

The fleshy bag briefly scrunched up tight around Hamish. It felt like many naked women were hugging him and pressing their tits up against him. Then the bag relaxed and went back to slow throbs and pulses.

Hamish relaxed. He felt more like he was in a hot tub than dissolving away in a digestive organ. As Comedentia had said, they did things differently out here. There must have been a mix-up in communication. This must be some kind of weird mating ritual.

Then the internal nipples started squirting jets of warm liquid at Hamish and he stopped fretting.

"Now you're fully relaxed you'll be in the right state of mind for these juices to take effect," Comedentia said.

The water jets made it feel even more like Hamish was in a jacuzzi. Except this jacuzzi had fleshy walls lined with tits that squeezed Hamish and rubbed against him. It made Hamish feel like he wasn't alone, that he was sharing the hot tub with a bevy of buxom beauties, and that was a great fantasy. Hamish lay back and luxuriated in it.

"These juices have a strong aphrodisiac effect. Now that you're relaxed, they'll soak in and you'll start to feel horny."

Comedentia fixed her sultry gaze on Hamish. She reached up and fondled her massive breasts.

"Mmm. Really horny."

She seemed to be getting into it as well. Her eyelids fluttered and she parted her sensual lips. Around him and unbeknownst to Hamish, great veins throbbed in the side of the fleshy sac as they pumped more of Comedentia's aphrodisiac juices into the fleshpot.

Hamish groaned. This was too much. His cock had unfurled into an erection, but had gone further... harder. The flesh and skin of his penis struggled to contain the blood rushing down to fill it. So taut to be over-sensitized, almost painful. The same with his balls. They felt bloated. Gravid.

Comedentia pouted down at him and continued to play with her magnificent breasts.

Her fleshy sac clenched and squeezed Hamish again. The hot juices were churned around his naked body.

Not enough. Hamish needed more—rougher—stimulation. He couldn't take it anymore. He didn't care where he was or who might be watching. He needed to jerk himself off just to get rid of the unbearable pressure in his balls. He reached for his cock...

...but before he could wrap a hand around it, his cock was sucked into a fleshy tube with thick, muscular walls. Comedentia gave a low erotic moan, as if Hamish had just penetrated her. And it did feel like Hamish had just stuck his dick deep into a warm and willing orifice. One where ripples travelled through the muscular walls and tugged at his erection.

His hand found the outside of the tube. It was warm, smooth and so thick his hand couldn't wrap the whole way around it. It stretched back to the wall of the pot like some kind of perverse umbilical cord.

If Hamish hadn't been so massively—maddeningly—aroused, his first instinct would have been to try and peel the worm-like structure away from his vulnerable genitals. Instead he wanted to wrap his hands around it and slide it up and down his cock as if it was a sex toy masturbator.

Not that he needed to. The warm inner flesh was alive and extremely pliable. Hamish was stimulated plenty by the ripples of peristaltic contraction rolling up and down his shaft.

Comedentia tossed her head back and moaned. It was clearly a sexual moan. This was sex. Weird freaky alien sex, but still sex.

Looking up at Comedentia's gorgeous body, Hamish realized he was fulfilling one of nerd's oldest fantasies. Here he was, getting to be Captain Kirk and fucking the green-skinned alien babe on an alien planet. Fuck political correctness. Every nerd had secretly entertained that fantasy at some point in their life. And now Hamish was living it right now.

"Give me your seed," Comedentia moaned. "Your vitality. Your energy."

She moved her body sinuously against the fleshy sac. Like she was humping it. Humping Hamish.

He moved his hands away from the internal fleshy tube. It wasn't as if there was anything he could do to make it feel better than what the tube was already doing to him. In synch with Comedentia's movements, it gulped and rippled... squeezed and sucked.

"Mmm, yes," Comedentia said. She sounded like she was approaching her own climax. "Let me suck it out of you."

Her motions—and those of her fleshy sac—grew more vigorous. The cushioned walls of the internal tube rippled against Hamish's cock as Comedentia sucked harder and longer.

Hamish's hips rose up off the floor. The muscles in his legs started trembling uncontrollably. Oh fuck. She was going to do it. He was going to...

"Yes," Comedentia hissed. "Don't hold back. Come."

The internal tube tugged against him a great long rippling wet suck.

Yes! Hamish thought. He bucked. His cock throbbed and emptied a satisfyingly large load into the strange—but incredibly comfortable—alien suction tube.

Comedentia flopped her body down on her fleshpot and hugged it. She sighed as if savoring an expensive delicacy as her internal tube siphoned Hamish's issue back to the fleshy wall in a series of peristaltic bulges.

"Ah," she sighed blissfully.

That sounded exactly like Hamish felt, and Hamish felt... pretty damn awesome after that. He felt like he was floating in pure bliss.

"The offering has acquiesced. The contract is sealed," Comedentia said.

Her words sounded cryptic even through Hamish's post-orgasmic haze. The fleshpot trembled and Hamish heard strange liquid sounds all around him, as if powerful organic machinery was sparking to life.

Comedentia fixed her glittering emerald eyes on Hamish. "Want to know what happens next, little scientist?"

Veins swelled in the wall of the fleshpot. The nipples on the inner wall extruded more juices into the sac. These juices were thicker and more concentrated. They felt more like cream... thick frothy cream. It felt pleasant enough against Hamish's flesh, but also wrong... perverse.

"We seek greater delicacies than mere meat," Comedentia said. "But there are strict rules on the consumption of this delicacy. It cannot be taken. A portion must be given first. But once given..."

She gave an erotic sigh. Great drifts of soft cream were pumped into the fleshpot. The walls slowly throbbed, massaging the creamy substance into Hamish's naked body.

As the cream soaked into him Hamish felt warm and pleasantly tingly. Horny, too. Even after his massive release. Really horny. But weird also. The cream sank all the way into him and he felt a little strange inside—sloppy, mushy... liquid.

A note of concern tried to penetrate Hamish's blissful fugue. What was she doing to him? He tried to turn his head in search of Professor Kumo.

Comedentia placed hands on his cheeks and turned his head back to face her. She placed her lips against his in a long sensual kiss. Her kiss was sweet and overflowing with juices. They filled Hamish's mouth with a fruity, forbidden flavor.

Too sweet. Sickly. Corrupted.

"I'll have to be fast now, little scientist. The pleasure is already starting to melt your mind to mush. Soon you won't be able to understand. It is your souls we eat. We soak the flesh in earthly pleasures and sin. Steeping and soaking it in sin until the soul comes free. Then we suck it right out of you."

The digestive sac was pumped full of more soft creamy juices. The walls continued to pulse and squeeze and massage Hamish with fleshy bumps that felt so wonderfully like women's breasts. Comedentia moved her body against the fleshpot with the same slow, languorous rhythm. The fleshy tube within kept tugging on Hamish's erection with wet irresistible suction. The peristaltic sucking force travelled up Hamish's shaft and focused on the swollen head of his cock. Coaxing him. Urging him. Gently concentrating more of his being into the tip with each rippling suck.

"Suck and suck until we have everything," Comedentia whispered.

The sac clenched, squeezing up tight around Hamish. The fleshy inner tube did the same and Hamish responded with a great eruption of cum and nerve-jangling pleasure. His thoughts were washed away in a great flood of white bliss.

Comedentia kissed him again and hugged her fleshpot.

Another squeeze. Another eruption of pure, sinful ecstasy.

"And now to free it entirely," Comedentia whispered into his lips.

Gently, she pushed his head down into the fleshpot and the fleshy opening closed up behind him. The walls pulsed and throbbed. The inner nipples kept squirting warm cream into the interior of the pot. Her fleshy suction tube kept working away at Hamish's crotch. Floating in her lovely comfortable fleshpot, Hamish came again and this time the sensation was strong enough to blow his mind away entirely.

Comedentia moaned her own bliss as she sucked up the resultant spiritual slurry.

* * * *

Kannatuki Kumo watched the slow pulsations of the fleshpot with revulsion. Comedentia might reassure him that things were different here, that her prey were taken to such pinnacles of pleasure that most would voluntarily choose this fate, but it still looked like vile predation to Kumo. And even though he knew it was vile predation—by the time Comedentia was done there would be nothing left of Hamish, not even bones—Kumo could not stop himself from becoming aroused. Comedentia's low erotic moans, the way she sensuously writhed against her fleshpot in wanton abandon, the last orgasmic moans of her prey before she pushed them down into the pot—all were clearly sexual and provided a perverse turn-on. And Kumo was turned on. His penis was hard. Precum dribbled from the tip. Even though he knew what the inevitable outcome would be, part of Kumo wished he could be there, in the pot, to experience Comedentia's unworldly and unparalleled pleasures for himself.

He despised and was revolted by such thoughts.

As for Seymour Hamish, Kumo didn't pay much thought to him at all. He had been a most unpromising student. Bland and incurious, just like so many of his blighted generation. They never questioned or challenged anything. They just blindly accepted what they were told and expected to be spoon-fed like babies. Hamish was no different. His would not be a great loss. The academic world would not miss Mr. Hamish.

At least, through his offering, Hamish would be making a small contribution to academic progress. Or rather, Professor Kannatuki Kumo's academic progress.

Long after the raucous ritual had died down and most of the Pauxillum Constupros were crashed out exhausted on the cavern floor, the real reason for Kumo being here was wheeled out of a back cave. It was a train of three trolleys, each covered in rough sackcloth. Kumo lifted a flap and confirmed the contents were as expected—jar after jar filled with Comedentia's amber nectar.

It was addictive, incredibly so. He'd given a sample to a colleague in the Chemistry department and the results had left his colleague astounded at the narcotic properties of this 'naturally occurring' drug.

"Where did you discover this?" his colleague had asked.

Kumo had shown him... by offering him to Comedentia. With the plans Kumo was hatching, he would rather he was the only one who knew of the existence of Comedentia's nectar. And anyway, his colleague had already told him everything he needed to know—the nectar stimulated various pleasure centers in the brain, was highly addictive, and also relatively safe.

i.e. good product.

Academia was getting harder. Universities were much tighter with their purse strings. Kumo's important expeditions were growing more and more expensive. It had long vexed Kumo how the world rewarded insipid vacuity while intellectual titans were left to grub and toil for funding. Now Kumo had his own fix for that. He would supply the pretty little faces that danced, sang and smiled on TV with a new wonder drug to fuel their tawdry little parties. And they would fund Kumo in his endeavors to push back the boundaries of human knowledge. It was a perfect solution.

Kumo heard a rustling sound and felt the whisper of a leafy vine across his naked back.

A near-perfect solution.

Comedentia had roused herself from her digestive slumber and come down from the wall.

"Checking it's all there?" she asked. "Or eager to try a sample for yourself?"

Kumo's stomach knotted. Sudden need flared within him. He tried to stamp it down. No, he wasn't going to do that anymore. He was a supplier, not a user.

"Your offering was most delicious," Comedentia said. "As much as I love my pauxies," she caressed the head of a nearby Pauxillum Constupros, "and they love me, I do like to have a change from time to time."

She looked over the little caravan of trolleys. All were fully laden with jars of her nectar.

"I squeezed out a bumper crop for you," she said. "Why don't you try for yourself to see how good it is?"

"No, it will be fine," Comedentia said. His guts clenched again.

"Or maybe you'd like to get it directly from the source," Comedentia teased.

She beckoned and a vine dropped down from above. The bud at the end unfurled into a lurid pink flower. Nectar oozed from the tip of a phallic pistil. The air was filled with a sickly sweet—and irresistible—scent.

No. Not this time, Kumo thought. He would be strong this time. He would resist. He was the supplier, not a user. He would not—

He grasped the vine and sucked on the phallic tip of the pistil. The flower gave a convulsive shudder and Kumo's mouth was filled with sweet-tasting nectar. He swallowed...

...and floated away on a pink cloud of sensual bliss. His penis rapidly expanded in taut erection. His whole body shuddered as he violently came and sprayed thick ropes of cum onto the cavern floor. Twitching and shuddering uncontrollably in savage ecstasy he collapsed to the floor and passed out.

Kumo came to sometime later. His pubic hair was crusted with dried semen. He'd been weak. Again.

Some of the Pauxillum Constupros had been harnessed to the first trolley like huskies in a dog sled team. They looked down at Kumo as he unsteadily got back to his feet. As ever, their beady black eyes were completely unreadable. Was that pity there? Or contempt?

Kumo shrugged it off. He was not an insipid simpleton. It was just a temporary weakness. He was in control. He could decline her nectar any time. And next time he would.

He led the train of Pauxillum Constupros as they began the journey to take his special shipment back to Earth.

Next time he would turn her nectar down. Next time...