

## Transferral

By Douglas McLean

I entered the black pyramid with uncertainty, as the doors slammed on the Martian landscape behind me. The normally bustling entry chamber had only one other occupant, a small cloaked sorceress who wore a pentagram on her robe and stood in front of the door to the main chamber. The door depicted a great shadow that eclipsed the sun. Thirteen tendrils flowed off the door onto the walls, and each ended in one of the immortal priestess's sigils.

The last time I was here was to perform the final trial. I had to siphon a portion of the sun into myself with the materials provided. I couldn't. By adding my own blood, I had enough power to succeed in the task, but in doing so I broke the trials' oath of conduct. I had to force myself to keep moving as the disciple opened the massive door; she bowed as I passed her.

Inside the chamber stood the thirteen priestesses. They wore pitch-black robes that concealed their faces and forms, only differentiated by the red sigils on the front of each robe. Behind them was a large mural that showed them as they gathered power from a solar eclipse thousands of years ago. They used that power for the ritual that freed our small community from the tyranny of Earth's gods and delivered us to the untouched mountains of Mars. On the floor before them lay a pentagram of blood-powder, with several objects at the points: Jupiter gas, a lizard's eye, a mummified rat, a human tooth, and a chunk of rock from Saturn's rings. A power transferral spell? Did they know I cheated on the last trial?

"Your abilities have brought you before the coven on this fateful day to perform a crucial and honorable role," spoke Priestess Ennea, "to serve us as so few do."

A wave of relief washed over me. They must have chosen me to

be a disciple! I'd worked toward this all my life. Years of studying and training had finally paid off.

"While it is rather sudden, you will be replacing Priestess Penta," Ennea finished.

"R-replacing?" I blurted out. But that's impossible, they're immortal. No, only their power is immortal, transferred from body to body across the eons. Their flesh must age like the rest of us. They pick someone they deem has the talent and capacity to learn, like myself, to be taught by the remaining twelve.

"Yes," replied Priestess Penta, "this body is no longer fit to be a priestess. We have convened and decided you are the best candidate for replacement. You will become a part of us."

"That's . . . thank you so much," I managed.

"We should be thanking you. Now please, step into the pentagram so the transferal can begin," said Priestess Triskaideca.

I did so gleefully, stepping in to begin the ritual with Priestess Penta, while the other priestesses formed a circle. I waited for a long moment, before the blood-powder started to liquefy, accepting the Jupiter gas into its writhing form. Then, the mummified rat, human tooth, lizard's eye, and Saturn's rock quickly followed. Priestess Penta's power began to flow into me, there was so much of it. The pressure was immense, like something trying to force itself into my head. Then I blacked out.

I was still upright when I came to. The pressure was still there, worse than before. It felt like I couldn't do anything. Like I was going to be trapped, standing there, for the rest of my life.

"Help," I tried to say. I tried again and again, but nothing happened.

"She's a sticky one," I heard my voice say, as my body bent down to pick up the former Priestess Penta. My hands stripped the priestess; her dried corpse fell to the ground.

“It’s been too long since we’ve had a mind that survived the ritual. Are you going to send her to The Sun-Eater or keep her for yourself?” asked Ennea.

“Feels like it wants her,” said Triskaideca.

She was right, there was something there. I could feel it, just outside of my mind.

“I’d better give it what it wants then,” replied my voice.

I felt a pull on my soul. Penta must have cast me out. Whatever that thing was, it took hold. I tried to fight it, but without my body, without my magic, I was powerless.

When it finally pulled me from my body completely, I understood everything. I could feel the minds of the others who had suffered this fate before me, each distinct voice coming together as one. A mindless, never-ending scream.