

Journey to the Core, Part I: Body



The moment they crossed the threshold, gravity changed.

Not heavier.
More *honest*.

The emerald light washed over them in slow waves, not blinding, not warm, but unmistakably present. It slid across skin, through muscle, into bone. Alissa felt it immediately. Not pain. Not comfort. Something stranger.

Calibration.

Her breath slowed without instruction. Her pulse fell into a rhythm that wasn't hers, yet felt more natural than any she'd known. Every scar, every ache, every tension she carried from years of motion and resistance surfaced all at once... then softened.

Beside her, Harkin Zor said nothing.

That's when she noticed it.

His posture had changed. No commanding stance. No cosmic authority. No pirate legend wrapped in confidence. Inside the mine, he stood as he *was*. Balanced. Present. Unarmored.

An equal.

The floor beneath them was crystal-veined stone, translucent enough to glow from within. With each step, the mine responded. Not reacting, not resisting. *Listening*.

Alissa felt her body questioned without words.

How much weight do you carry that isn't yours?

How much strength is habit rather than truth?

How much pain has become identity?

Her legs trembled, not from weakness but release. The mine did not demand endurance. It demanded *honesty of flesh*. When she tried to push forward out of instinct, the ground subtly resisted. When she relaxed into movement, it yielded.

The lesson was immediate and unforgiving.

Force fails here.

Alignment continues.

She caught herself smiling, breath steady, muscles loose but ready. This wasn't about domination. It was about *being allowed further in*.

Harkin finally spoke, quietly, almost reverently.

"This is where most turn back."

"Because it hurts?" she asked.

"No," he said. "Because it stops letting you pretend."

The emerald glow intensified as they moved deeper, and Alissa realized the mine wasn't stripping her body of power. It was removing everything that *imitated* it.

When they reached the first chamber, both stood lighter. Not physically. Existentially.

Behind them, the entrance dimmed.

Ahead, the path narrowed.

And the mine prepared them for the next descent.

Revision #5

Created 2026-01-02 16:50:43 UTC by the Hand - Harkin Zor

Updated 2026-01-02 18:28:22 UTC by the Hand - Harkin Zor