

JULIE

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO

Summary: With the Usurper's hordes at the gates, Rowenna finds herself at the center of a conflict that will change the face of the world. Determined to save her kingdom, Rowenna prepares for war, and it is Fire, who has taken mortal form, who comes to her aid.

On the far western edge of a straw-colored plain is a mountain that people call Fire. The mountain is greatly feared, for the people who farm the plain below have suffered from Fire, having lost crops, livestock, dwellings, and whole families to its tantrums. Yet, they do not move elsewhere, for in good times the plain is productive. So, when the mountain trembles, the plains people bar their doors and console themselves with religion.

Much like children cowed by the unpredictable temper of a violent father, the plains people believe that the power to cause such death and destruction must be Divine, and that at the heart of the great mountain lives a deity who hears all, sees all, judges all, and needs constant appeasement to cool his burning wrath.

In every one of those convictions the plains people are wrong. Fire could care less about them. In fact, Fire would much rather argue points of philosophy with a snake than have terrified virgins and whatnot flung at him by a bunch of misguided, paranoid villagers. Today was no exception. The subject was Time.

Use a specific noun.

verb choice uttered proclaimed?

START HERE →

"Time is like a river," pronounced the snake.

The snake – called Avazi by those who know the true names of all things – lay curled in casual red loops, his head resting comfortably upon the warm sand. He was trying to explain the nature of Time to Fire. It was a futile endeavor, about as productive as trying to teach a turnip

good simile!

to play the violin. Nonetheless, the discussion served, as it had many times before, to keep Avazi entertained, boredom being one of the drawbacks of immortality.

Then Time, according to you, is composed of water. That is irritating. I don't get along with Water.

"Not precisely," replied Avazi. "I was merely pointing out its similarity to something which is in constant movement and flows smoothly from one point to the next."

As Fire transformed himself into a stream of molten lava, Avazi lifted his blunt snout away from the sticky mess and slid onto higher ground.

"You take everything so literally," he complained. Normally Avazi enjoyed talking to Fire. Of all the Elements, Fire was the most responsive. Air, though easily accessible, rarely engaged in conversation. She found it difficult to focus and, in those odd moments when she spoke, was given to sighing, which was annoying. Water's ideas flowed well, but she was a little too self-absorbed for a good debate. That left Earth and Fire. But while Earth welcomed a chat, she was not keen on debate. She avoided all types of conflict, even those of a friendly Socratic nature, which made it impossible to conduct an argument with her. Also, she disliked philosophy of any type, which meant that when a snake of intellect felt a craving for stimulation, he usually found himself at the bottom of a volcano. Today, however, Fire was proving to be stubborn.



She seemed more grounded.

"Time," explained Avazi, warming to his topic, "causes change. Those caught in its flow cannot stay the same. They begin small, then grow, expand, and eventually cease to be. Change is something which mortals do throughout their stay on ^Eearth. Change is what defines them as mortals, and it is something which you, as an Element, cannot do.

Fire rose into a roaring wall of flame, and just as quickly died down to a single glowing spark.

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“Are you trying to make a point?” Avazi poked his snout at the ember. “Or are you just being difficult?”

My point is obvious. Can I not grow, alter myself, shrink to nothing?

“True,” observed the snake. “In many respects you fill the requirements of a living thing. You breathe, you eat, you grow – but you cannot die, because you are not alive.” The snake licked his fangs thoughtfully. “You are a form of energy. As long as the Universe exists you will be an essential part of it, unlike individual living things, ^{which} ~~who~~ are expendable. Anything that is alive can travel the river of Time for only a short distance.”

Are you alive?

Avazi pondered for a moment. In all of their conversations Fire had never posed that simple question. Avazi was not sure how to answer it. Even more troubling, he was not sure he could prove that he was alive.

“As an immortal,” he said, “I cannot die. Therefore, technically speaking, I am not alive. However ...” Avazi narrowed his eyes, attempting to look as if he were wrestling with some profound revelation. In reality he was just stalling. The discussion had become uncomfortably personal, which left him feeling less superior than usual. “I began, therefore I am!” he exclaimed.

And what is that supposed to mean?

“Unlike you,” said Avazi, “I had a beginning. There was once a time in which Avazi, as you know and love him, did not exist.” Avazi paused. “Horrible thought.”

Horrible, indeed. I don’t know what the Universe did without you.

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"I," he said pointedly, "have a ²corporal form. All beings which are alive have been endowed with bodies, though not necessarily as elegant as mine." He surveyed himself with satisfaction. "Therefore, although I cannot die – or at least have not yet done so – I am alive. Because I am alive, I exist in Time. And, because I exist in Time, I have an intuitive knowledge of the nature of Time. Time, therefore, is like a river, because I say it is. Subjective experience, my dear Fire, is what gives me the authority to make that claim."

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Is having a ²corporal form necessary for life?

"It is," mumbled Avazi. "It's a requirement."

Well, then. I will have to acquire one.

Avazi came awake with a jerk. "One what?"

A body. How can I verify that your knowledge of time is correct unless I experience it directly?

"Perhaps," said Avazi. "But requiring objective proof is really more appropriate for a scientific argument, not a philosophical debate."

Fire blazed. You're the one who claimed "authority."

“True. But omnipotent beings don’t need to go through the process of subjective discovery.” Even as Avazi spoke he realized he had slipped into a trap.

Whose authority are you claiming now? Mine or yours?

Avazi coiled himself into a knot of frustration. He had to admit that Fire had effectively undermined his argument. Unless, that is, Fire could indeed acquire subjective experience. As he considered the idea, Avazi realized he rather liked Fire’s proposal. Something interesting might result from it, something different. Avazi began to uncoil.

Fire adopted a friendly, conspiratorial glow. Where do I find a body?

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Elements, on the other hand, could be trusted to be discreet. After all, they were already everywhere.

“Earth might lend you a body,” said Avazi finally. “I have heard she grows them. Might I suggest ...” Avazi gazed down humbly.

If I looked like you, you’d just end up talking to yourself.

“There is absolutely nothing wrong with that!” said Avazi. “But you are probably right.” He stretched out to his full length. “This volcano wouldn’t be big enough for the both of me.”

All nine inches of you.

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"Nine and a half," spat the snake. "Now do you want a body or not?"

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Water ... Fire nearly flickered out. I'll take human.

"I'll be back before you know it!" Avazi slithered away. In this case the expression was apt, for Fire had no awareness of the passage of Time.

But soon, thought the Serpent, that will be remedied.

THIS EVOKES MEMORIES OF WILY SNAKES AND SPIDERS (ANANSI) IN ASIAN, AFRICAN, AND EUROPEAN FOLKTALES.

I THINK THAT THIS WOULD BE A FAR STRONGER STORY IF YOU STARTED "IN MEDIAS RES" WITH THE SNAKE AVAZI SAYING, "TIME IS LIKE A RIVER."
EXPLAIN THEIR RELATIONSHIP.

WHY DOES FIRE DESIRE A BODY ALL OF A SODDEN?

WHO/WHERE IS ROWENNA?

WHY NO QUOTATION MARKS FOR FIRE?

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Much like children cowed by the unpredictable temper of a violent father, the plains people believe that the power to cause such death and destruction must be Divine, and that at the heart of the great mountain lives a deity who hears all, sees all, judges all, and needs constant appeasement to cool his burning wrath.

In every one of those convictions the plains people are wrong. Fire could care less about them. In fact, Fire would much rather argue points of philosophy with a snake than have terrified virgins and whatnot flung at him by a bunch of misguided, paranoid villagers. Today was no exception. The subject was Time.

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Fire actually lives on the mountain maybe point this out.

- if you don't want to use quotation marks for Fire, use a different font or all caps or something. Like Terry Pratchett does with Death.

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Then Time, according to you, is composed of water. That is irritating. I don't get along with Water. !!

“Not precisely,” replied Avazi. “I was merely pointing out its similarity to something ^{that} which is in constant movement and flows smoothly from one point to the next.”

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Horrible, indeed. I don't know what the Universe did without you.

Avazi flicked his tongue in Fire's direction. Fire had a sardonic wit that sometimes rubbed Avazi's ego the wrong way. But, in the end, making a winning philosophical point was much more satisfying than sinking his fangs into somebody. *Eggs is it? ~*

"I," he said pointedly, "have a corporal ^eform. All beings ^{short} which are alive have been endowed with bodies, though not necessarily as elegant as mine." He surveyed himself with satisfaction. "Therefore, although I cannot die – or at least have not yet done so – I am alive. Because I am alive, I exist in Time. And, because I exist in Time, I have an intuitive knowledge of the nature of Time. Time, therefore, is like a river, because I say it is. Subjective experience, my dear Fire, is what gives me the authority to make that claim."

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"It is," mumbled Avazi. "It's a requirement."

v Well, then. I will have to acquire one. *||*

Avazi came awake with a jerk. "One what?"

v A body. How can I verify that your knowledge of time is correct unless I experience it directly? *v*

"Perhaps," said Avazi. "But requiring objective proof is really more appropriate for a scientific argument, not a philosophical debate."

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Elements, on the other hand, could be trusted to be discreet. After all, they were already everywhere.

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“If I looked like you, you’d just end up talking to yourself.”

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“All nine inches of you.”

“Nine and a half,” spat the snake. “Now do you want a body or not?”

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“I’ll be back before you know it!” [Avazi slithered away.] In this case the expression was apt, for Fire had no awareness of the passage of Time.

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Fun!
interesting!

Jenni's Feedback

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO -

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On the far western edge of a straw-colored plain is a mountain ~~named that people call~~ Fire. ~~The mountain is greatly feared,~~ for the ~~farmers~~ people who farm the plain below have suffered from Fire, having lost crops, livestock, dwellings, and whole families to Fire's tantrums. Yet, they do not move elsewhere, for in good times the plain is productive. So, when the mountain trembles, the plains people bar their doors and console themselves with religion.

Commented [RJL1]: Passive voice. Try "The people fear the mountain." To make it more active voice.

Much like children cowed by the unpredictable temper of a violent father, the plains people believe that the power to cause such death and destruction must be Divine, and that at the heart of the great mountain lives a deity who hears all, sees all, judges all, and needs constant appeasement to cool his burning wrath.

then why does he erupt? Is it just his nature?

In every one of those convictions, the plains people are wrong. Fire could care less about them. In fact, Fire would much rather argue points of philosophy with a snake than have terrified virgins and ~~what~~ not flung at him by a bunch of misguided, paranoid villagers. Today was no exception. The subject was Time.

Commented [RJL2]: They're not wrong on all counts, the mountain is sentient.

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Commented [RJL4]: Don't tell us he complained. Make it clear in the dialogue that he is complaining.

- Is this relevant to the larger story?

- (sn.) death what defines them as mortal?

Commented [RJL5]: Since the snake is immortal then can he not change?

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO

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“And what is that supposed to mean?”

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“Horrible, indeed. I don’t know what the Universe did without you.”

Commented [RJL6]: Is Fire not speaking audibly? Is that why you aren’t using quotes. If their conversation is more telepathic then put Fire’s dialogue in italics.

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BYERICA VERILLO

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Commented [RJL7]: But he can't sink his fangs into a mountain, and even if he did it would have no effect.

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Commented [RJL8]: Use an em dash

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"Is having a corporal form necessary for life?"

"It is," mumbled Avazi. "It's a requirement."

"Well, then. I will have to acquire one."

Avazi came awake with a jerk. "One what?"

Commented [RJL9]: Avazi happened to still be there when Fire decided to respond? Or is Fire present everywhere?

"A body. How can I verify that your knowledge of ~~time~~ ^T is correct unless I experience it directly?"

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YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BYERICA VERILLO

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“If I looked like you, you’d just end up talking to yourself.”

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“All nine inches of you.”

Commented [RJL10]: What does that look like?

Commented [RJL11]: Is Fire immortal, or a diety? Or just an element?

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERTCA VERRTLLO

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But soon, thought the Serpent, that will be remedied.

Is this more of a prologue? Because if Rowenna is the main character then she should show up on the first pages. Make sure you start your story in the right place which is right before the trouble (the main focus of the story) is about to begin. –Don’t start with backstory. You can fill this detail in later in the story. Right now there is no conflict, nothing is at stake. You need to draw the reader in and make them want to keep turning the pages. Right now I don’t know what the story is about. Your writing style is good, and I like the premise of your story. I’m just suggesting you rearrange the order in which the story unfolds. Start with Rowenna.

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YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO
SUBMISSION FROM MASSACHUSETTS

SUE ZALL CRITIQUE

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Commented [SD1]: I would delete the first two paragraphs. I was a bit confused after reading them and had to reorient myself when I read beyond that.

Commented [SD2]: I don't know that I'd consider a sentence like this in a YA novel.

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"Time," explained Avazi, warming to his topic, "causes change. Those caught in its flow cannot stay the same. They begin small, then grow, expand, and eventually cease to be. Change is something which mortals do throughout their stay on earth. Change is what defines them as mortals, and it is something which you, as an Element, cannot do."

Commented [SD3]: Why is the snake immortal?

Commented [SD4]: Choice not to have quotes for when Fire speaks?

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO
SUBMISSION FROM MASSACHUSETTS

SUE ZALL CRITIQUE

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“Are you trying to make a point?” Avazi poked his snout at the ember. “Or are you just being difficult?”

My point is obvious. Can I not grow, alter myself, shrink to nothing?

“True,” observed the snake. “In many respects, you fill the requirements of a living thing. You breathe, you eat, you grow – but you cannot die, because you are not alive.” The snake licked his fangs thoughtfully. “You are a form of energy. As long as the Universe exists, you will be an essential part of it, unlike individual living things, who are expendable. Anything that is alive can travel the river of Time for only a short distance.”

Are you alive?

Avazi pondered for a moment. In all of their conversations, Fire had never posed that simple question. Avazi was not sure how to answer it. Even more troubling, he was not sure he could prove that he was alive.

“As an immortal,” he said, “I cannot die. Therefore, technically speaking, I am not alive. However ...” Avazi narrowed his eyes, attempting to look as if he were wrestling with some profound revelation. In reality, he was just stalling. The discussion had become uncomfortably personal, which left him feeling less superior than usual. “I began, therefore I am!” he exclaimed.

And what is that supposed to mean?

“Unlike you,” said Avazi, “I had a beginning. There was once a time in which Avazi, as you know and love him, did not exist.” Avazi paused. “Horrible thought.”

Horrible, indeed. I don’t know what the Universe did without you.

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SUE ZALL CRITIQUE

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"I," he said pointedly, "have a corporeal form. All beings which are alive have been endowed with bodies, though not necessarily as elegant as mine." He surveyed himself with satisfaction. "Therefore, although I cannot die – or at least have not yet done so – I am alive. Because I am alive, I exist in Time. And, because I exist in Time, I have an intuitive knowledge of the nature of Time. Time, therefore, is like a river, because I say it is. Subjective experience, my dear Fire, is what gives me the authority to make that claim."

Fire was silent for a long interval. Several days, or weeks, passed. Avazi did not keep track. Silences lasting days, weeks, months, even years were not at all uncommon during these discussions. Avazi felt his head droop. He loved the heat that Fire produced. It made him sleepy and relaxed, and after winning an argument there is nothing quite like a nap.

Is having a corporeal form necessary for life?

"It is," mumbled Avazi. "It's a requirement."

Well, then. I will have to acquire one.

Avazi came awake with a jerk. "One what?"

A body. How can I verify that your knowledge of time is correct unless I experience it directly?

"Perhaps," said Avazi. "But requiring objective proof is really more appropriate for a scientific argument, not a philosophical debate."

Fire blazed. You're the one who claimed "authority."

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SUE ZALL CRITIQUE

“True. But omnipotent beings don’t need to go through the process of subjective discovery.” Even as Avazi spoke, he realized he had slipped into a trap.

Whose authority are you claiming now? Mine or yours?

Avazi coiled himself into a knot of frustration. He had to admit that Fire had effectively undermined his argument. Unless, that is, Fire could indeed acquire subjective experience. As he considered the idea, Avazi realized he rather liked Fire’s proposal. Something interesting might result from it, something different. Avazi began to uncoil.

Fire adopted a friendly, conspiratorial glow. Where do I find a body?

It was not unusual in the realm of supernatural beings – immortals, gods, minor deities, and so forth – for some of them to take animal or even human form from time to time. Gods were particularly inclined to adopt human form, though Avazi could never understand the allure. All that meddling in human affairs, begetting of infants (who always developed strange psychological complexes), and instigating of wars seemed childish. Avazi suspected that the so-called gods liked to muddle things solely in order to boost their self-esteem. The gods were an insecure lot.

Elements, on the other hand, could be trusted to be discreet. After all, they were already everywhere.

“Earth might lend you a body,” said Avazi finally. “I have heard she grows them. Might I suggest ...” Avazi gazed down humbly.

If I looked like you, you’d just end up talking to yourself.

“There is absolutely nothing wrong with that!” said Avazi. “But you are probably right.” He stretched out to his full length. “This volcano wouldn’t be big enough for the both of me.”

All nine inches of you.

Commented [SD5]: What are the ramifications/dangers/rules for Fire to be able to inhabit a human body? What are the limitations? There has to be some danger involved-maybe a time limit, etc, before Fire is no longer immortal. So, what are the stakes here? And What does the snake get out of this?

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO
SUBMISSION FROM MASSACHUSETTS

SUE ZALL CRITIQUE

“Nine and a half,” spat the snake. “Now do you want a body or not?”

Fire dimmed, contrite.

Avazi flicked his tongue as he worked on the problem. “Let’s see now, you’ll need a species that is social, intelligent, philosophical – and one that can speak, of course, to allow you to gain access to its views of this question. That leaves you with two options, whale or human.”

Water ... Fire nearly flickered out. I’ll take human.

“I’ll be back before you know it!” Avazi slithered away. In this case the expression was apt, for Fire had no awareness of the passage of Time.

But soon, thought the Serpent, that will be remedied.

Interesting start and good humor. My main points are 1) what I mentioned earlier, about the stakes/ramifications etc. when Fire takes the form of a human body. The rules should be laid down. Maybe the ramifications are unknown because an element has never taken the form of a human? But having the reader aware of the risks raises the stakes for Fire. 2) Also, what does the snake get out of this? And 3) The beginning of the story does not at all hint that Rowenna is involved. I think you should think of a way of weaving that in, somehow tying this beginning into what’s to come. Maybe in becoming human, Fire is able to do such-and-such, and then later, the ability to do that will help Rowenna. Something like that. Good luck!

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO

CONNIE MAYO CRITIQUE

Summary: With the Usurper's hordes at the gates, Rowenna finds herself at the center of a conflict that will change the face of the world. Determined to save her kingdom, Rowenna prepares for war, and ~~it is~~ Fire, who has taken mortal form, ~~who~~ comes to her aid.

On the far western edge of a straw-colored plain is a mountain that people call Fire. The mountain is greatly feared, for the people who farm the plain below have suffered from Fire, having lost crops, livestock, dwellings, and whole families to its **tantrums**. Yet, they do not move elsewhere, for in good times the plain is productive. So, when the mountain trembles, the plains people bar their doors and console themselves with religion.

Commented [CM1]: This sounds a little frivolous – perhaps “rages”?

Much like children cowed by the unpredictable temper of a violent father, the plains people believe that the power to cause such death and destruction must be **Divine**, and that at the heart of the great mountain lives a deity who hears all, sees all, judges all, and needs constant appeasement to **cool his burning wrath**.

Commented [CM2]: Not sure this would be capitalized

Commented [CM3]: Great phrase!

In every one of those convictions the plains people are wrong. Fire could care less about them. In fact, Fire would much rather argue points of philosophy with a snake than have terrified virgins and whatnot flung at him by a bunch of misguided, paranoid villagers. Today was no exception. The subject **of conversation** was Time.

“Time is like a river,” pronounced the snake.

The snake – called Avazi by **those who know the true names of all things** – lay curled in casual red loops, his head resting comfortably upon the warm sand. He was trying to explain the nature of Time to Fire. It was a futile endeavor, about as productive as trying to teach a turnip

Commented [CM4]: Are these actual people?

YA FANTASY: ROWENNA BY ERICA VERRILLO

CONNIE MAYO CRITIQUE

to play the violin. Nonetheless, the discussion served, as it had many times before, to keep Avazi entertained, boredom being one of the drawbacks of immortality.

Then Time, according to you, is composed of water. That is irritating. I don't get along with Water.

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Commented [CM5]: Is there a reason this is not in quotes?

Commented [CM6]: If we are in the point of view of the snake, he would not have access to this info – you could say "It appeared that she had difficulty focusing"

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CONNIE MAYO CRITIQUE

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Commented [CM7]: But Fire isn't a "somebody"

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Commented [CM8]: Since he is reversing his former position that he is not alive, it would be clearer if you stated explicitly that he decided that he changed his mind.

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“There is absolutely nothing wrong with that!” said Avazi. “But you are probably right.”

He stretched out to his full length. “This volcano wouldn’t be big enough for the both of me.”

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Commented [CM9]: This joke was a little confusing – didn’t quite “land”.

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Commented [CM10]: I love the “voice” of the Serpent, and the concept here is clever and intriguing. I hope we get to see more of the other Elements. There is good balance between dialogue vs describing what is happening in physical space.