

TALES OF THE PURRFECT EXPLORERS

# THE FUNGUS PRIEST

SHETIRA ANWAE

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**The Fungus Priest**

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This story contains situations and concepts which are appropriate for mature audiences only. These include: **Strong Language, Non-Consensual Sex, Sexual Situations, Bondage and Physical Transformation**

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Cavern

Shetari Anwae and Emwi Amara had entered the caverns only an hour before and they were absolutely exhausted. Their bright green, dull gray-blue and lavender bodysuits were covered with the sticky greenish goo which seemed to coat every surface in the deep, tunnel-like cavern. Such was the amount of muck that many of the bright yellow and black warning stripe accents on their suits were completely invisible under the grime. That they had managed to keep their faces clear of the goo up to this point was pure luck.

Here, on the world of Vegura, the owner and captain of the Furry Explorer and her chief pilot had been following a suspicious trail of fresh, humanoid footprints. As the crew of the Furry Explorer had been learning first-hand, the world of Vegura was home to some of the most bizarre, interesting and dangerous plant life in all of known space. It had evolved around what had once been the largest barbarian Ambwassi civilization ever known and many plants had special uses for humanoid creatures.

Though the civilization was long gone, used up by the worlds plant life, the plants themselves still remained. These plants continued to exist, unlike the Ambwassi nation, due to the numerous back-up methods provided them by nature. This made the world a very dangerous place to explore for anyone without the proper technological protection. While most would resort to powered and shielded armor or well armed vehicles, the crew of the Furry Explorer had the benefit of the one piece of strange, alien technology that could make their pleasure and experience seeking mission possible: the lifegate.

The lifegate was a truly amazing device. Through its power up to four individuals at a time could be protected from any sort of permanent change, even death. At the end of a predetermined time or upon the fulfillment of specified conditions, the protected individual would be instantly returned to the ship in exactly the same state that they were in when they had obtained the protection of the device. It was this device that allowed Shetari and Emwi to follow the trail into the caverns with little fear of what might happen to them. Indeed, they were eager to find some new experience there in its slimy depths.

"Well, I can't see much of anything here," Shetari remarked as she shined her goo covered hand held spotlight around in the darkness. The chi'tess' sweet, melodic voice seemed muted in the slime covered environment, the sound absorbed by the goo. Indeed, there was nothing to see but slime covered rocks and shallow pools of stagnant water.

"Neither can I," Emwi responded as she looked about. The odor of dampness was beginning to irritate the her sensitive nose. "We lost the trail back when this goo started... are you sure this is worth investigating any further?"

"Yes," Shetari replied, looking at the slime covered lep'rdess. The slime may have been nothing more than algae, water and dirt, but it looked damned sexy coating Emwi, dripping and shimmering. She began to

wonder if she should have the crew bodysuits redesigned for a glossy surface.

"Why? It was probably just some barbarian recluse who got frightened when the ship landed," Emwi commented as she gingerly stepped over yet another a slime coated rock. She was beginning to contemplate turning on the grav-grippers in the soles of her bodysuit's integral boots to keep from slipping as the process of walking was becoming ever more difficult in the slippery environment.

"Maybe," Shetari responded, looking down the winding and descending passage, "but those tracks were male. The only barbarians that would come to a world like this would be nature shamanesses."

"I guess we should have brought Shawi along," Emwi remarked as she watched Shetari wade into a two foot deep pool of scummy water.

"I would have," Shetari responded as she dropped to her knees in the pool in an effort to wash some of the slime off of her exposed tail, "but she just got back from her nasty encounter with those carnivorous root plant things and she'll need some time to recover. She was pretty shaken up, being eaten alive like that."

"Yeah, getting eaten sucks ass," Emwi commented, her slightly off-tune accent becoming very pronounced as she thought of her own less than pleasant experiences with carnivorous creatures. She always seemed to have the tail end of luck when it came to getting randomly selected for mission missions.

"Still upset about the slime aren't you?" Shetari asked, a somewhat goofy grin on her face.

"Well, yeah," Emwi replied as she watched Shetari's futile attempt to rid herself of the slime which was clinging to her tail, "I mean come on, you had me dive off the landing ramp into a literal ocean of that stuff. I might as well have tried out jumping into a vat of acid!"

"After two years I thought you'd have gotten over it," Shetari said as she stood in frustration, her tail still coated with a thick later of wet goo. Much to her dismay it was now getting into her bodysuit around the tail opening and slowly oozing down between her butt cheeks. She shifted about uncomfortably, clenching her ass in an attempt to stop the slime from advancing any further. Her attempts to stop the flow only succeeded in making things worse by pressing the goo down in between her legs where it gripped on the fluffy lips of her pussy in a very disconcerting fashion.

"The goo got in my suit twenty minutes ago," Emwi remarked as she watched Shetari's performance. "I guess we'll just have to live with it, though it does feel all funny when I walk. I'll admit though, it does give a nice clit massage."

"Yuck," Shetari muttered as she stepped out of the pool. For all of the strange and disgusting things she had been through on missions she still found things like plain old algae slime to be a major put-off. Her first few steps did incline her to agree with Emwi's assessment of the stuff's ability to stimulate. "Well, let's keep going."

The two women moved forward slowly, picking their way several hundred more feet down the dark, ooze coated passage. There, the

passage opened up into a truly massive cavern, its high ceiling supported by rough, eroded pillars of stone. Stalactites and stalagmites were abundant as was dripping water which formed a pond, barely visible in the darkness beyond the reach of the two women's spotlights. Near the edge of the pond lurked strange shapes, like huge mushrooms.

"Well now, this is interesting," Emwi commented as the two women slowly approached the pool of water. Surrounding the pond were indeed giant mushrooms, with light lavender stalks and pink caps. They stood a head taller than the two women and their shadows, which danced about in the light of the women's spotlights, gave the cavern a very disturbing feel.

"Interesting, but not to be unexpected in a damp, dark, slimy place like this," Shetari responded as she moved around the pond, making sure to keep ten feet between her and the mushrooms. "Just don't get too close. If they let of spores it could do strange things to us and I'd rather not find out too much about that right now."

"Gotcha," Emwi answered as she moved to stick by Shetari.

Suddenly another voice, distant and muted by static joined the two women in the cavern. They were both so startled that they grabbed at each other. Thanks to their sudden movements, both slipped and fell into the thick layer of slime on the ground, fully coating whatever parts of their bodies had thus far escaped its gooey caress.

"We're loosing track of you," the feminine voice seemed to hiss through the static, "beyond your current position you're on your own."

For a moment, the two sat in the slime. Shetari fumbling around her belt for her scan-comm. The poor device was so coated in slime that it was proving quite difficult to get enough of a grip on it to pull it from its holder.

"Are you still there?" the voice asked with a slightly concerned tone.

"Yes, we're still here," Shetari answered as she finally pulled the scan-comm from belt. She shook her head in an effort to get the foul tasting goo away from her mouth. It tasted very unpleasant, like salty dirt. "What was all that?"

"This is ops. You're at the edge of our surface penetrating sensor range," the voice continued. "We're beginning to loose track of you. Beyond this point you'll be on your own."

"That's alright," Shetari responded, "we're only going to go a little further. We've lost the trail and at this point we're totally covered in slime that seems to coat everything in this place."

"Sound like fun. Must be quite a sight too," the voice answered, clearly amused. "Well, if anything gets you, we'll see you back in... four days according to the lifegate log."

"Right," Shetari responded, "four days. Just make sure to continue with the remote controlled probes. Try to find out if there's anyone else in the area."

"Affirmative," the voice answered. "Anything else?"

"Negative," Shetari replied, spitting away a glob of goo that had dipped onto her lips. "Team one out."

Shetari tuned to Emwi who was clearly having significant difficulties in keeping the goo away from her nose and mouth. "We'll just go to the far

end of this big cavern and then head back out. Anything more really isn't worth the effort."

"Yeah," Emwi muttered as she spat a glob of slime away from her mouth. "This stuff tastes awful!"

"Tell me about it," Shetari responded as she again shook her head in an effort to rid her face of the goo.

The two women struggled to their feet and began to move toward the rear of the cavern were, in the darkness, they could now see another passage leading out, and further downward. A tiny stream of water from the pool ran out through it.

"I guess that's that," Emwi muttered as the two women shined their lights down the new passage. It was just as slime coated as the rest of the cavern.

"Yeah," Shetari responded wryly. "What a waste."

"Well, at least we know what this goo feels like," Emwi commented thoughtfully. "If we could recreate it without the foul taste it might just make a fun alternative to a mud bath."

"There's an idea," Shetari remarked as she turned to head back up the long, tortuous path to the surface. "Well, let's go."

Emwi did not have time to respond. Neither of the women saw it coming. One moment they were starting to leave. The next moment they were falling. Then there was nothing.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Prisoners

Shetari awoke slowly. She was dizzy and nauseous. She could hear what seemed to be a strange humming sound. She could feel what seemed to be hands running over her body, rubbing and massaging her fur. She could tell that she was naked, save for a thick coating of slime.

"Ah, yes, that is my pretty," a deep, raspy voice assailed Shetari's ears. "Your nipples really do like this cave goo, don't they?"

"Unh," Shetari grunted as her senses began to return. She was standing, tied up to some sort of upright, inverted V shaped frame. Her arms were bound away from her sides and her legs were spread wide. Her whole body dripped with cavern slime and strange fingers were caressing her now erect nipples.

"Yes, it is such a nice thing isn't it," the voice continued as the hands moved down Shetari's belly. "So rare for such pretty things to come here looking for me... they usually require much more effort to obtain."

"Who... who... are you?" Shetari moaned as her mind cleared. She twisted about, but her bonds held fast.

"Questions? I do not answer questions from my fine eggs," the voice answered as its source stepped in front of Shetari. "You are an animal, nothing more."

Shetari gasped. Before her, though barely visible in the almost complete darkness, was a tall, muscular ly'n Ambwassi male. He was totally naked, covered with the same goo that covered her body. His long, thick penis was erect and the cavern slime coating is was mixed with wisps of what looked like semen.

"Such a firm, attractive body my lovely creature has there," the ly'n said after a short period of silence, a slightly triumphant tone in his voice. "very tight too. Quite pleasing."

Shetari stared at the male. Despite all of her often disgusting experiences with alien creatures, she had never once had any sort of sexual encounter with a "normal" humanoid male. Now, apparently, she had and, being unconscious, she had missed the whole thing. She might have been disappointed at what she had missed were it not for the fact that she was bound and quite angry.

"A yes," the male continued, "I do not often have the opportunity to try such nice places on for size these days. It has become just so arduous to go and track down such fine creatures. Finding places where their disappearance will not go noticed until I have made my escape had become very, very difficult."

Shetari began to struggle again. She didn't mind the idea of having been raped in her sleep so much as the idea of what such types of predatory males tended to do with their victims once they had satisfied their urges.

"Don't struggle my tight little hole," the male said as Shetari's futile effort to free herself began to wane, "you'll only hurt yourself and that would certainly make your last duty as a piece of animal flesh very unpleasant."

The male ran his hand over Shetari's chin in the darkness. All that she could think to do was try to bite the intrusive fingers but the male was too fast for her, jerking away at the last moment and leaving her to spit out the slime that had dripped into her mouth as she lunged.

"No nibbles for you," the male laughed as he backed away, disappearing into the darkness. "Just wait right there, my lovely, I must prepare to give you your gift."

Shetari fell limp, letting herself hang there in her bonds. Clearly this male was a real monster, kidnapping women for some horrid purpose. She wished she could contact the Furry Explorer and call in her squad of mercenary marines to put an end to his activities. Yet, even if she freed herself she did not know where her scan-comm was in the darkness. She also doubted that it would be able to reach the ship from wherever she was, which was, no doubt, well beyond the ship's sensor range.

"She... shet... Shetari?" a voice called out in the darkness, its source sounding woozy and disoriented.

"Emwi?" Shetari asked in response. The voice had come from her left and slightly behind but she could see nothing in the darkness.

"Shetari... something's happening to me," Emwi answered, her voice conveying a sense of fear. "There's something shoved up my pussy. Well... I'm not even sure if I have a pussy anymore it just feels like there's something in there."

"What do you mean?" Shetari asked, confused.

"My... my legs are stuck together and my feet are... huge and they don't feel like feet," Emwi replied, her voice shaking. "I don't have hands anymore either. My body feels all funny and... dull and there's something growing on my head. It's really big... and heavy."

"I don't think I understand," Shetari responded as she twisted about, again trying to free herself from her bonds. "I can't see anything... or even move."

"I can't move either, my legs... I don't have legs to move with," Emwi answered. "Oh shit Shetari! The change... it's starting to move over my face... I can feel it tingling."

"Do you have any idea at all what you're changing into?" Shetari asked, her voice straining as she twisted and pulled in the darkness. The bonds felt like metal cable and there was no way she could free herself from such strong cords. If she tried, however, there was a chance that she might be able to do something about loosening the frame.

"I don't know," Emwi replied, a frantic tone entering her voice, "it feels so weird... I... my mou... mmph... mrm..."

"Emwi?" Shetira called out. She stopped moving, hoping to hear some response. "Emwi? Are you alright?"

From Emwi came no reply. There was only silence.

"Fuck!" Shetira yelled yanking at her bonds until the pain in her arms and legs was so great that she could do no more. She fell limp, deciding to give up the struggle. She could only hope that the monstrous male would not be able to escape the guns of her ship, once the lifegate returned her there.



There was a long period of silence in the darkness with nothing but the sound of dripping water to keep Shetari company. Then she could hear the sound of sloshing cave slime and soon, she could again hear that evil voice.

"Are you ready for your gift?" the male asked, an amused tone in his voice. He was behind her and very close.

"Just get it over with you fucking bastard," Shetari hissed in reply.

"As you wish," the male responded.

For a moment nothing happened. Then Shetari could feel something brushing up against the soft lips of her pussy. A rounded tip began to press between them, searching for the opening which led into her body. She could feel it press into her, opening her wide around its huge, bulbous shape. Then it was inside her, trailing some sort of stalk or handle out between her legs.

"And now, it shall begin," the male said, caressing Shetira's shoulder. "Soon you shall be part of my beloved garden."

Shetari could feel his breath on the back of her neck as she stood bound. The object in her vagina was static, unmoving. She did not know what it was, but she knew it was probably the same sort of thing that triggered whatever had happened to Emwi. Then the tingling started, not on the surface of her body, but within.

She could feel a strange sensation that seemed to indicate that the thing within her vagina had somehow fused with her flesh. Shetari wiggled in an effort to try to feel what was going on. The tingling spread up her crotch and between the cheeks of her rear. The dull sensation that followed the tingly wave brought with it the sudden realization that she didn't have a pussy anymore... or even a tailhole.

As the tingling sensation proceeded down her legs and up her belly, Shetari's crotch and her inner thighs began to feel strained, as if they were trying to pull together. She could feel the male's hand running up and down her legs and the smooth sensations made her realize that those areas which the tingling had passed no longer had any fur.

"You are proceeding quite nicely," the male said as he released the bonds on Shetari's legs.

All at once, her legs pulled themselves together and there was nothing she could do to resist. The tingling spread downward rapidly, quickly running over her feet and then vanishing. Shetari could feel her legs fusing together and her feet fusing and expanding into some sort of round base. Her tail then vanished into the back of her now tubular, though still femininely formed lower body. She could no longer move her legs or hips at all.

"Very, very good," the male commented, releasing the bond on Shetari's arms. He then pulled the frame away and Shetari stood free, but immobile on her growing base. "No need to hold you up anymore, you won't be going anywhere now."

As the tingling moved up over her breasts, Shetari could feel a new tingling on the top of her head and around her neck. Something was now growing there. The stiff, though spongy feeling mass grew rapidly and, were it not adding support to her neck there would have been no way for Shetari to hold it up.

"Yes, yes," the male laughed as he stood behind her watching the transformation, clearly very pleased with its progress.

The tingling now washed over Shetari's upper body, rapidly running over her shoulders and down her arms. To her shock, her arms became tentacles of a sort and they were soon attached to the sides of her body with leathery feeling wings. The thing on her head was growing still, and she could feel the tingling sensation begin to creep over her face.

"There now," the male purred into Shetari's right ear as it slowly vanished into new form, "you are almost complete, my lovely fungus maiden. Your high priest of the fungus maidens is very pleased with you."

Shetari could feel her muzzle and nose being pulled closed and then it seemed to fade away into a solid mass. For a moment she began to panic, thinking she would suffocate. The panic passed rapidly as her eyes vanished into the form and her mind began to lose touch with her former body.

All that Shetari could do was exist. There was no sound, not sight, no feelings other than a strange, almost erotic, spongy sense of touch. For a time she could feel the male caressing her but then it ended and she was left alone with only her own thoughts to keep her company.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Justice

The male may have thought he had done a fine job of capturing his prey, but he didn't know that his prey had friends and that their friends were just the sort of people he went through pains to avoid. Not long after his capture of the two women, a remotely operated probe had detected and analyzed his small staryacht. It's stealth modifications and the numerous hidden holding cages for his captives had not gone unnoticed.

The cave slime hissed and vaporized around their feet as the bulky, aggressive forms of the ten power-armored marines made their way deep into the cavern. The goo may have made life difficult for Shetari and Emwi but it was no match for the powerful shield units which protected the squad as they advanced through the caverns in search of their superior officers.

"Almost there," Aeshu Suri's voice hissed over the comm channel. She was the chief of the Furry Explorer's security and ground combat force. Her FE2000C pulse rifle was continually aimed into the darkness ahead, though for her there was no darkness. The visor on her helmet projected a view which made it seem like there was full daylight in the cavern. It also showed the positions of the discarded bodysuits which Shetari and Emwi had been wearing and it was toward these signatures that the troops were moving.

Not long after passing through the cave where Shetari had been last in contact with the Furry Explorer, the ten troops entered a huge cavern full of large mushrooms arrayed on either side of a stream of water. They fanned out in groups of two. The bodysuits they were tracking lay on the right side of the cavern and the two troops who were positioned on that flank soon found them.

"We've got their suits," Lashu Sima, the team's recon specialist declared dryly, "missing rations and equipment but otherwise intact. That and they're totally covered in this goo."

"Leave them for the sciences team follow-up," Aeshu responded as she continued to advance cautiously through the center of cavern, following the path of the stream.

"Is it just me or do all these mushrooms look have very... feminine stalks?" trooper Oshurra Mey'ssa asked as she and trooper Ramie Saia moved down the left side of the cavern.

The question prompted Aeshu to pause and have a good look at the nearest of the giant mushrooms. They did indeed have very feminine forms. She could see hips, the curve of a tummy, what looked like breasts and the tendrils which held out wing-like structures seemed to extend from where a woman's shoulders would be.

"Shit, I think they are... or, well, used to be women," Aeshu answered. Her sensor unit was picking up only plant substance, with no animal flesh whatsoever.

"There are lots of them here... more than two hundred," Lashu remarked. "That would explain why that ship out there is equipped to hold captives."

"Indeed," Aeshu responded, looking down toward the tunnel which led out to the surface where the unidentified ship was located. "I think it's time we found out exactly who the bastard is who's responsible for all this, don't you?"

"Affirmative," came the replies from the squad members.

"Go ahead Aeshu," Sha'nerra said as she sat in the soft, leather command chair on the Furry Explorer's bridge, running her hand through her long, straight, black hair. The Ashiri woman was the ship's new first officer and she was quite nervous at the prospect of having to command the ship in combat so soon after taking the position.

"It would appear the owner of that ship is engaged in kidnapping subjects and turning them into giant mushrooms," the voice of Aeshu crackled over the speakers. "He doesn't appear to be in the caves so I'll bet he's on his ship. You'll need to try and get him to surrender before we can find out exactly what's going in. Us trying to engage the ship as is would be quite suicidal."

"On our way," Sha'nerra replied as she signaled to the ship's lepr'dress pilot with her hand. "Let's get moving Sunawi."

"Emergency launch procedures in effect," Sunawi replied as an alarm sounded. Several moments later, she pulled back on the control stick and rammed the aero-drive throttle full forward. Despite the inertial compensation systems there was a pronounced lurch as the ship seemed to suddenly leap off of the ground. Moments later the huge, odd looking vessel was speeding over the terrain, following a long, shallow curve towards its target.

As he sat munching on the emergency rations he had stoled from the back-belt of Shetari's bodysuit he was thinking about where to obtain his next batch of victims. Watching the transformation of such beautiful creatures into giant mushrooms had become an addiction and he could think of little else.

"Maybe some Ashiri this time," he muttered to himself as he gazed out of the windows of his small control center. "I've never done any Ashiri... I wonder if it's any different."

Then, from the corner of his eye he noticed motion along the treeline. He looked more closely. It was a ship and a strange looking ship at that. It looked for all the world like someone had smashed together all sorts of disparate components from sailing ship bits to submarine pieces. It was elegant, in a way, and a bit aggressive looking too.

He had seen ships on Vegura before and they always passed by without giving him any notice. This one, however, seemed to be slowly turning toward him. He took out his binoculars to have a better look as the ship began to turn more tightly, banking sharply.

"Fucking shit!" he screamed as the front of the ship came into view. On its upper deck was a huge, nearly battleship sized pulse cannon and in its bow was a nest of four torpedo tubes, outer doors open and clearly ready to fire. He frantically powered up his engines. He had no chance at fighting it out with so heavily armed a ship, his only chance was to make a run for it.

"Target locked, all weapons armed and ready to fire," the Furry Explorer's tactical officer declared as the ship leveled out and slowed as it approached the unidentified vessel below. "It would also appear the the bastard is going to try to make a run for it."

"Open a comm channel," Sha'nerra ordered. She was going to give her target one chance to surrender.

"Target is refusing a comm connection," the feminine voice of computer responded. "Non-targeted transmission begun."

"Unidentified vessel, you are hereby ordered to surrender pending an investigation of your activities," Sha'nerra announced over the comm channel. She doubted she would get a reply, but it was worth an attempt, for fairness sake if nothing else.

The bridge crew on the Furry Explorer watched as the small, unidentified ship lifted off and fired its engines at full power. The small ship was fast, very fast. Unfortunately the male who flew it was no engineer. His ship had only a fraction of the power-to-mass ratio of his pursuer and thus had no real chance of escaping.

"Tactical, bring him down" Sha'nerra ordered after nearly a minute of no response from the fleeing ship. "Main gun, fire!"

There was a brief glow as the meter wide aperture of the ship's huge pulse cannon tuned itself properly for the atmospheric environment. Then, all at once, a huge blob of plasma shot out of the muzzle of the giant gun. It streaked toward its helpless target, striking it less than a second later with devastating effect.

"That's the end of that," Sunawi remarked wryly as she watched the small craft explode in a very spectacular fashion, bits and pieces flying for more than a kilometer in every direction. "Good riddance!"

"Let's head back and pick up our marines," Sha'nerra instructed, wondering if Shetari would approve of her decisions. "We've got work to do."

# Epilogue

Shetari and Emwi fell to the padded floor all tangled up in a ball. Neither of them immediately aware that they were back to their normal Ambwassi selves.

"Welcome back, mushroom girls," a voice said, laughing. "I've got you some new suits here. We still haven't figured out a way to get that foul goo off of your old ones."

"Oh... we're... back," Emwi muttered as she pulled herself away from Shetari. "That was all very... weird."

"Ugh," Shetari moaned as she stared up at the ceiling. "What happened to us?"

"You got turned into mushrooms, apparently," the voice answered.

Shetari sat up and looked toward the woman talking to them just in time to see her new bodysuit land next to her.

"Mushrooms Anshi?" Shetari asked, looking at the Furry Explorer's ty'gress chief science officer as she started to slide into her new uniform.

"Yes, giant, very feminine mushrooms," Anshi Alluwa replied, leaning on the wall to the port side of the lifegate room. "That bastard kidnapped more than two hundred women and did the same thing to them. He won't be doing it again though... ever."

Shetari nodded, immediately understanding what Anshi had meant. This wasn't the first time they'd caught some freak forcing victims to have horrid things done to them. There was really only one thing to do with that sort of monster.

"We've already figured out just what causes the transformation," Anshi began as Shetari and Emwi dressed. She then held up a strange looking object sealed into a clear case. It was a spore of some sort, with a big, purple, bulbous head and a long stalk with three trailing tendrils. "Apparently, these fungi release these large spores. They don't seem to do anything unless you stick them up a twat."

"It was a spore he shoved into me?" Shetari asked as she wiggled her arms into her suit.

"Yep," Anshi continued. "Having a look at the sensor data from your scan-comms, the transformation seems to go very fast. Flesh gradually converts to vegetable in such a way that it doesn't actually do any harm to the individual being transformed. It leaves them totally aware through the whole process and apparently afterwards if our high detail scans are correct."

"I'd say your scans are correct," Emwi commented wryly.

"That's good to hear, that means you can tell us all about what being a giant mushroom feels like," Anshi responded, smiling as she turned to leave. "We'll meet you in the conference room in twenty minutes."

"We'll be right up," Shetari replied.

## THE END