

# - TALES OF THE PURRFECT EXPLORERS -

SHORT STORY SERIES 2011, #7

HALLOWEEN SPECIAL



♀ ♀ **SPIRITS' EVE** ♀ ♀

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## ⚠ ♀ Into the Mist ♀ ⚠

Mashi shivered as she walked alone down the dark, mist shrouded dirt road. The heavy, midnight fog was unusually dense, making it difficult for the young pan'tyress to see more than a few dozen feet in any direction. Her ears twitched as strange, muffled animal noises rose and fell, ever-present and yet unidentifiable. Her nose wrinkled at the strange, rubbery odor which hung in the cool air. It was all making her very nervous.

The road into the village was long and winding. Small cottages lined the road, set well back in spacious, well kept yards. All were now heavily decorated with orange, purple

and black streamers and banners, the signs of this very special holiday. Here and there, a holo-candle flickered, casting an eerie, almost supernatural light through the gray mist.

Somewhere ahead in the darkness, Mashi knew, was the small farming village of Ky'nie. She hoped to get to the small ancestor shrine before anyone else. The Spirit's Eve festivities would start well before dawn. Getting there early, really early, was the only way to get a front row seat for the opening rituals and a chance to personally participate in one of the holiest ceremonies in the Ambwassi faith.

"This sucks," Mashi muttered, frowning as she pressed onward. The closer she got to the village, the thicker the fog seemed to get. The rubbery odor was getting stronger as well. "I wonder what that smell is. It's... funky."

The pan'tyress began to wonder what could possibly be causing the odd smell. "I hope it's not a fire," she thought to herself, frowning more deeply. "That would really ruin everything. I don't here any alarms though. Odd."

Mashi continued forward until she reached the first intersection on the outskirts of the village. The unsettling animal noises of the rural road faded into an eerie silence.

All of the nearby houses were completely dark. There was no sign of light on the road into the village center either. “What’s going on?” she whispered to herself as she cautiously moved on into the village. “It’s so dark. Isn’t anyone up? This... this is weird.”

As she moved down the gravel paved main street of the village, Mashi looked around at the dark buildings which loomed up out of the fog to either side. There was no sound, no flicker of light, no sign of life at all. Her tail began to twitch. She started to think that it would have been better if she had been willing to content herself with a back row seat at the shrine.

“Oh, what am I nervous about?” the pan’tyress tried to soothe herself as she made her way toward the far end of the village center, where the shrine was located. “Everyone’s just asleep because of the festival. They’ll all be getting up in an hour or two.”

Suddenly, a strange, sonorous noise caught Mashi’s ear. At first it sounded somewhat animal, almost alien. For a moment it stopped. Then a distinctly feminine moan, much louder and sharper, replaced it. It seemed to be coming from the opposite side of the street, near a small storefront.

“Hello?” Mashi called out, looking around in confusion as she moved toward the source of the sound. Another moan, almost despairing in tone, was her only reply.

The pan'tyress stopped and looked for some sign of the moaning's source. In the fog, she could just barely make out a dark shape huddled against the shop's front door. “Hello?” she called, slowly advancing toward the indistinct form. “Is anyone there?”

For just a second, Mashi could make out a humanoid shape, reaching out toward her. Then it seemed to melt away into a thick, black puddle on the narrow, stone sidewalk. “What... what the fuck?” she stammered, taking a step back. She wondered if she was dreaming. “That... I... I didn't just see that. It... it can't be real.”

## ♀ It Can't Be Real ♀

Mashi stood frozen, unable to process what she was witnessing. The lumpy black pool on the sidewalk seemed to be moving. Something inside was pushing up, trying to break free. All at once, a nearly skeletal humanoid form emerged, at first on all fours but then rising up to a standing position. Strings of dark goo hung loosely from its head and limbs as it swayed from side to side. “This... this can't be real. It just can't be real!” she thought as her heart began to race. “I have to be dreaming. This is just a nightmare. I've got to wake up!”

The horrific creature lurched about and broke free of the black puddle with a squishy sound. The monstrosity seemed to be having trouble keeping its balance and it moved about somewhat randomly for several seconds before turning toward the terrified pan'tyress. It stumbled forward.

The stench of fresh rubber overwhelmed Mashi's nose. Her head spun. Tears flowed from her eyes. “What the fuck!?!” she screeched, taking several steps back from the horrific spectacle. She was shaking from head to toe.

The creature continued to move toward the

pan'tyress. It reached out with one arm. It's dark, skeletal maw opened. A strange, gurgling sound came out. "Glurgle... lurgle... fffff... gurg."

Mashi screamed, turned and ran. She crossed the street and banged on the first door she came to. She looked back over her shoulder to see the terrifying creature shambling slowly toward her. She frantically pounded on the door. To her horror, she could hear more gurgling noises from inside the building. The door began to open. A thick smell of rubber flowed out. The pan'tyress screamed again as a black, bony hand reached for her. She ran back down the street.

In the fog ahead, Mashi could see five humanoid forms standing in the road. "Help! Help!" she screamed, racing toward them. "Please! Help!"

The rubbery monsters turned toward the onrushing pan'tyress. They began to gurgle and lurch toward her.

"Oh fuck!" Mashi whined, coming up short. She slid on the damp gravel and fell. She screamed as she scrambled away from the approaching monstrosities. She looked around desperately for some route of escape. There was nothing but a narrow alley between two shops. She got to her feet and ran for the dark passage, panting heavily from

fear and exertion.

“They’re... they’re everywhere,” Mashi moaned as she stumbled down the alleyway. “I’ve... I’ve got to get out. I’ve got to get away.”

The narrow passage led into a large, walled garden. Mashi closed the wooden alley gate and locked it but she wondered how long it could possibly hold the monsters back if they were really intent at getting to her. She leaned against the wall next to the gate and closed her eyes. “This has to be a dream... a really, really bad dream. I’ve got to wake up. I’ve got to wake up.”

A wet, shuffling sound brought the pan’tyress back to reality. To her abject horror, another one of the creatures was only a dozen feet away and coming right for her. She screamed, pressing her back to the wall. She was genuinely paralyzed with fear, unable to move or resist.

The creature reached out toward Mashi’s face. It gurgled almost gleefully as its victim remained motionless. One more lurch and it would have her.

At the last moment, Mashi came to her senses. She ducked away from the monster’s outstretched hand and dashed for the far wall. She jumped with all her strength. She practically vaulted over the high barrier and landed in a



soft bush. From there, she tumbled to the cold, hard ground.

Mashi lay still, staring up into the foggy sky. She was nearly spent, both physically and mentally. Tears streamed from her eyes. She started to sob. There was now nothing she wanted more than for the sun to rise, the fog to lift and the horrific nightmare to end.

## ♀ Revelation ♀

Mashi slowly picked herself up off the ground and looked around. She was in another walled garden. It was much larger than the one she had just come from and did not connect to a house. Instead, a large metal gate closed it off from the rest of the world.

The young pan'tyress blinked and realized that it was easier to see here than it had been everywhere else. She looked around and was surprised to see an odd, green glow coming from just beyond a line of low, dense shrubs. She took a timid step toward the eerie light but then hesitated. Was this a clue to her salvation or some new horror just waiting to be discovered?

"Fuck it," Mashi huffed, shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head. "It can't be worse than those monsters."

The pan'tyress slowly and carefully made her way around the bushes. There, laying on the ground amid a clutter of torn metal scraps was a strange, hexagonal tube-like device. At each end were glowing green panels. A number of labels were attached to its sides, all printed with an incomprehensible alien script.

"This is.. strange," Mashi muttered, looking down at the

alien device. She took a step back and looked around the garden nervously. “I... I wonder if it has anything to do with those... things.”

The alien tube began to emit a low, throbbing hum. It’s green glow brightened.

Mashi looked back down at the glowing object, a look of mixed curiosity and fear on her face. She couldn’t decide whether to run or stay and find out what the device was doing. Her hesitation ensured that she the fine, black mist which sprayed out from one of the device’s end caps hit her square between the legs. She gagged on the overwhelming stench of rubber that accompanied the thin, rubbery substance which soon covered her clothes from the thighs up to the waist. She staggered back.

“What the fuck is this?” the horrified pan’tyress screeched, looking down at the black coating which seemed to be eating through her clothing at an alarming rate. She shuddered as a sudden realization came over her. “It’s not... no... no... it can’t be!”

Mashi reached down and tore at the stretchy black substance. Tears welled up in her eyes as she discovered that the stuff was solidly stuck to her body. It was now spreading as well, eating away at more and more of her

clothing as it flowed over her slender, youthful body. “No! Please! No!” she shrieked, clawing at the rubbery goo. She writhed and shuddered as she futilely struggled to tear it from her body. “Fuck! Fuck! Let me go! Let me go!”

The pan’tyress eyes grew wide as the goo spread down over her arms and up her neck. “No! Please! Please!” she whined, falling to her knees while desperately trying to pull the edge of the advancing substance away from her face. She panted for air as it simply flowed around her fingers and up over her wide open mouth. “No! No! Mmm! Nnn! Mmmph!”

Mashi pulled at the solid covering of rubbery goo that now closed her nose and mouth while the rest of her head was quickly covered by the stuff. “No! I can’t breathe!” she tried to scream as the last of her hair vanished into the alien substance. She desperately tried to force an opening in the goo. It wouldn’t give. She fell to the ground and slowly began to asphyxiate.

“I don’t want to die,” the pan’tyress whined inside her rubbery prison. Her whole body now tingled. Her head swam. She began to feel as if her body was shrinking over her bones. The ground around her felt wet, as if she were laying in a puddle.

“Oh... oh goddess!” Mashi tried to scream as her head began to feel shrunken and bony. A vision of the first monster, rising up out of its pool of black goo, flashed through her mind. She suddenly understood the awful truth. “I’m not dying. I... I’m becoming... one of them!”

## ♀ Rubber Zombie ♀

Mashi struggled to keep focused but she couldn't stop the rapid degeneration of her mind. Memories faded. She didn't know who she was. Then she didn't know what she was. Then she didn't know that she didn't know. Mashi was gone. What was left had become something completely new. She had become a creature of living rubber: a rubber zombie.

The newly transformed creature rose up, a skeletal humanoid form of slender construction. Black, rubbery goo dripped from its thickly coated bones. It lurched forward, pulling away from the pool of rogue nanorubber that had once been its flesh. It sniffed the air with its bony, rubber nose. Without sound, it began to shamble toward some enticing scent.

The rubber zombie had only one desire. It wanted to lay its bony hands on the warm, living flesh of a humanoid. It wanted to deposit its rubbery essence upon its victim. It wanted to make her one of its own kind. It wanted to reproduce.

THE END