

Shadow's Revenge

by Holo

Bod stepped into his lab with his recently-tested inflation device strapped to his back. A grin was stretched across his face; his portable air compressor backpack had successfully bloated and blown up his look-alike friend Holo. The red and yellow dragon had been reduced to red and yellow confetti in record time and with record ease. Bod snickered at the memory of Holo's swollen red hide and the sight of his yellow scales splitting apart. He could practically still hear that scaly, stretched hide creaking.

He slid the leather straps off his shoulders and placed the machine on a table by the door. The lab entrance slid shut behind him, and he moved further in to check on his other inventions and products. The Pumpz labs were quiet today, a detail which did not go unnoticed.

"Anyone here?" Bod called out. His echo was the only response. "Lexal? Icon? Man, I swore I told them to all come into work today," he huffed at the laziness of his employees and took a seat at his mainframe computer to make note of their absence. The power switch clicked under his finger, but the screen remained black. He frowned at his reflection in the glossy, dead screen, and pressed the button again. And again. It clicked with each depress, but the computer refused to power on. "What the crap..." He got up and looked around, scowling and frustrated.

"I think your power got unplugged," a voice sounded out into the silence. Bod spun in place, swiveling his head toward the voice.

"Hello? Are you the new intern?" Bod replied as anxiety welled up in his throat.

There was a snort, and a deep chuckle that seemed to come from all around. "Not quite." A figure emerged from behind a large machine and stepped into view. His red scales glimmered in the light, and his face was turned up into a sneer that flashed his fangs at Bod. "Good to see you again, Bod."

Bod stepped back, eyes wide. "Holo?" he gasped.

"Were you expecting someone else?" Holo stepped toward Bod. His huge talons clicked against the tile floor.

"I was expecting someone I hadn't just blown up!" Bod stammered in response. His eyes darted around, looking for something to defend himself with as he backed up. Holo was closing the gap with long, stalking strides.

"Funny thing about that. For a scientist, you really should do more research on your subjects." Holo stopped and shook his head, chuckling to himself. "Like how a certain someone doesn't stay down after getting blown up." He looked up and locked eyes with Bod. Holo's round pupils had narrowed to intense, serpent-like slits. The lights in the ceiling began to flicker. "Like how, a certain someone in this room is over a millennium old." His shadow stretched out behind him, seeming to rise up into a massive beast behind him. "Like how I'm a shadowmancer." Holo's grin cracked and showed his fangs again, and his shadow roared and lunged at Bod.

Bod dove to the side, behind a divider that helped compartmentalize his lab. The shadow crashed into the ground by his feet, shattering the tile into porcelain splinters before vanishing. Bod was wild-eyed. He'd never seen magic like that before, and didn't plan on seeing any more of it. He scrambled to his feet and took off running for the back door.

"You really think you can get away?" Holo's voice seemed to echo from every dark crevasse that he passed. He spied Holo ahead of him and he skid to a halt before turning tail and heading the other direction. He crashed head-first into Holo, who somehow was now standing before him. "Wow. Honestly, I'm not even impressed." Holo flicked his wrist, and inky black tentacles rose from Bod's shadow and wrapped around his wrists and ankles, holding him in place. Bod tried to struggle out of them, but their grip was firm and cold.

"What do you want?" Bod growled as he strained against his supernatural bindings.

"Oh, you know. The usual. Revenge," Holo hissed. He raised a hand and pushed back, moving Bod until his back was pressed against a wall. "And I think you and I will both enjoy it!"

"Enjoy revenge? What are you talking about?" Bod shouted.

"You'll see!" Holo took a deep breath and began drawing the shadows nearby into his own, increasing its size. The light in the room shifted, shining into places it shouldn't as the shadows moved. Holo moved in a strange way, almost dancing, moving the darkness as though it was a part of him. It was fluid, effortless, and almost entrancing. Bod's eyes were transfixed upon Holo and his shadows, cautiously awaiting the next move.

The shadows started to hiss like air leaking from a cracked steel drum. A cloud of black smog rose up around Holo as he turned the darkness into a fog. "Open wide," he told Bod. The black fog rushed toward Bod and surrounded his head. It pressed against his skull until he could feel a headache starting to throb in his temples. He opened his mouth to complain, only to be met with a mouthful of the acrid smoke. He coughed and sputtered, but it began to rush down his throat as though gusts of wind were being funneled into him.

Bod's yellow cheeks puffed out into two spheres along the side of his muzzle, and his throat bulged from the influx of smoke and air. His slender stomach surged out, bending his yellow belly plates around the swelling curve of his middle. Bod could feel the pressure welling up inside his stomach, the sensation equating to the kind of bloating one might experience after eating a big meal. Reflexively, he tried to burp up some of the cloudy gas, but the constant inflow pushed that belch right back into his guts where it gurgled in protest of its foiled escape. Bod's stomach was stretched to the size of a beachball, just a couple feet in diameter before Holo stopped.

"So, was I right? Taste of your own medicine, I thought it might be a treat," Holo sneered as he slapped Bod's bloated belly. A low boom reverberated through Bod's stomach, making him belch out a cloud of smoke.

"Urgh, I get it, alright? I'm... sorry? Is that what you want?" Bod asked as smoke leaked out of his nostrils.

"An apology? How trite! You think an apology is going to get you out of this? That wasn't even a good one." Holo turned away in a mock pout. "You're outright insulting me! Don't you know what revenge even means?"

"Yes?" Bod ventured, hoping to spare himself more of Holo's spite.

"Obviously not. It means that I'm going to do to you, what you did to me." Holo leaned in close to Bod's ear and pressed his lips together, letting a puff of air escape between them with a pronounced pop. "If you catch my meaning, that is."

Bod nodded and gulped, trying to swallow the ball of anxiety growing in his throat. Despite his concern over his situation, he could feel his cheeks warming with blush. His tail was

also starting to swish. "I understand! I mean, uh, please don't pop me? I'm really sorry, I mean it!" Bod ventured again.

"Hmmm... Nah." Holo snapped his fingers, and the lingering shadow smoke seemed to spring back to life. It swirled around Bod like a vortex and surged into his mouth and nose again. Bod struggled, pulling at the tentacle-like restraints that bound his wrists and ankles. The previously fluid tentacles had hardened like rock, and try as he might he could not wiggle free. He strained until the muscles in his arms and legs grew sore and tired, and he finally resigned his efforts and went limp in his restraints.

Bod was forced to guzzle smoke from the air pushing down his throat. He wasn't strong enough to resist the pressure, and it overwhelmed his best attempts to close his throat. He was barely able to breathe through all the smoke that swirled around his head and into his mouth. He could feel the pressure in his stomach increasing and could feel the stretch in his skin pulling on his yellow plated scales. His toes curled and his tail whipped, lashing against the wall.

He grunted as his waistline expanded against the hem of his shorts. The fabric refused to give as his middle expanded, creating an uncomfortable pressure in his hips. The air pushed upwards instead, puffing out his chest to join the curve of his stomach. He tipped his head up to keep his chin from pressing against his chest.

Even with the pressure mounting upwards, it continued to push out against his shorts. His belt strained around his waist until the leather was creaking from the strain. The metal buckle started to tear the leather as it was pulled apart, and it began to bite into his stretching flesh. Bod winced, his eyes welling up with tears. Just when he thought he could take it no longer, his belt buckle ripped open, and the metal latch snapped off and flew forward. Holo sidestepped it and it clattered against the opposite wall.

"Wow, close one! You almost managed to counterattack!" Holo said as he stepped around to stand to one side of Bod. Holo dragged his sharp claws across Bod's expanding stomach, making Bod's skin twitch with anticipation. "Not yet friend, not yet." He pressed his claws in deeper, but Bod's body still had too much give to it for the claws to puncture his skin. "Yeah. Not even close." He withdrew his claws and petted Bod's stomach, appreciating the bounce it had gained with its size.

Bod's increasing circumference further strained his pants, until finally the button holding the hem together popped off as well. Without its support, the zipper pulled apart, and Bod's stomach sprung out, enlarging into a much more uniform sphere. He groaned with relief as the pressure in his middle lessened significantly. His relief was short-lived however, as his growing circumference started straining his yellow belly plates.

His middle had grown beyond the reach of his arms, not that he could move them. His skin had stretched too far, and was pulling tight on the seams where his yellow scale plates were fused to his red skin. One by one those plated started to separate, making snapping and popping sounds as they came apart. Bod winced and flinched with every scale that came apart, and his red skin stretched clear and wide between his plates. They started to look like a poorly cobbled-together yellow mosaic against a bulging red background.

"Heeyy, look at that! You're coming apart at the seams pal!" Holo teased as he slid a claw between Bod's separated scales. "This is looking familiar... That's right, I think this happened to me too!" He raised a hand in a stop motion, giving Bod another respite.

“Er, more or less!” Bod replied, trying to stay positive in the face of his demise. “You sure put up a fight though! Tried to fly away, nearly kicked me in the face! Good thing I had that hose fastened to your face with a muzzle...” Bod heard his words leave his mouth and doubled back. “I mean, I’m sorry! I should have let you go! I shouldn’t have tested my invention on you! Gik!” Another blast of smoke was shoved down Bod’s throat.

“Wow, you are remarkably unapologetic. We’ll see if you still feel that way when your hide starts creaking!” Holo snorted.

“No! Come on, at least give me a chance to fight back, like I gave you!” Bod insisted and he writhed.

“That was purely an accident. I learned from your mistakes!” Holo said with a wide grin. “But I’m still going to blow you up, no stopping that.” He drummed his fingers over Bod’s skin, enjoying how the sound reverberated across the tightening hide. “Hmm. Lets try this your way! Say put.” Holo flicked Bod’s snout and then slunk off, tracing his way back toward the lab entrance.

Bod could hear the sound of Holo’s talons against the tile as he walked out of sight. Bod couldn’t fathom what the crazy shadow dragon was planning, but he wasn’t interested in staying around and finding out. He wrapped his tail around one of the shadows that gripped his legs and squeezed it tight, pulling against it with both his tail and leg. He grunted with the effort, hoping to pull himself free. The shadowy bindings started to give, and he grinned with the success he found. With a last strong tug, he managed to wrench his leg free. He pressed it against the wall behind him and pushed, and the other three restraints began to falter. “Come on, come on! Just a little more!”

“A little more what?” Holo returned with a leather strap slung about his shoulder.

“Holo! Crap!”

“Are you really trying to get away? Psh.” With a flick of his claw he re-bound Bod and turned him around so that his belly was facing the wall. Holo slid the strap off his shoulder, and with some difficulty managed to strap the pack to Bod’s back. Bod couldn’t see it, but he knew what it was by the way it felt. It was the same portable backpack pump that he had used to blow up Holo.

“Hey, uh, no need to use that, I already know it works!”

“Yeah, and I know it works too,” Holo cooed.

Bod could feel Holo fiddling around the settings on the backpack, and he became more and more nervous with each passing second. Holo’s hands slid down Bod’s back and tugged down his shorts a little ways, and Bod responded by slapping Holo in the head with his tail. “Oi!” Bod shouted. “What are you doing back there? Quit it!”

Holo grunted and wrestled with Bod’s tail to keep it steady, and Bod yelped as he felt a length of rubber hose get shoved up his rear end. “Come on Holo, it was just a joke, really!”

“So is this!” Holo replied as he flicked the backpack on. It rumbled to life and began to pump a steady stream of air up Bod’s rump and into his stomach. His already large belly stretched out even further, making his belly plates look smaller and smaller as the red backdrop they were on grew. By now, his stomach extended several feet out from his torso, and air had started to leak into other parts of his body.

His red rump had taken on a generous swell of its own, one that pushed his lowered shorts down until they fell off of him completely. The base of his tail had also started to take on air, giving it a thicker appearance where it draped over the growing bulge of his butt cheeks. His chest had started rising higher as more air was forced into him, and he could feel his chin bumping against it when he tried to look down. His thighs began to fatten with air, and his forearms did the same, stiffening as the air pressed against the joints.

His body was ballooning into a sphere that threatened to swallow his limbs and head. As his stomach ran out of room for the air, it squeezed under his skin and flowed elsewhere in his body to try and equalize the pressure. His sides creaked as they ballooned out, and soon his back was puffing up with air as well. His neck bloated up with his chest until his skin started to squeeze around his head. His cheeks puffed up as well, forcing his eyes shut. He grit his fangs together as the pressure started to become painful.

The backpack inflation device Holo had strapped to his back was digging into him, and the leather straps were starting to give as his arms inflated like two massive sausages shoved through them. His recently expanded back caused additional strain, pushing the pack away and making it squeeze the fronts of his inflated shoulders. The prototype straps gave in before Bod did, though, and the machine clattered to the ground. The jolt kicked it into high gear.

Bod's skin began to shine, reflecting light as it pulled tight. It looked almost like rubber as it ran short on elasticity, and Holo moved close to admire his reflection in Bod's overtaxed hide. As Bod swelled into an ever more round shape, his body began to suck in his limbs. His arms and legs had retreated into the blimp he had become, leaving only his hands and feet poking uncomfortably out of the dimples they made in his form. His tail had puffed up considerably, and retreated somewhat into his body to try and offer some of its slack to the too-tight skin.

The sounds of creaking skin and scales echoed across the empty lab, heard only by Holo who was enjoying them immensely. Bod's skin began to tremble as it approached its absolute limit. No longer able to stretch, it just rumbled and twitched as the pressure inside rose higher. Smoke and air hissed from Bod's nostrils as the pressure reached critical levels, and Holo turned his back to Bod and covered his ears as Bod's snout whistled like a tea kettle.

Even with his ears covered, Holo was deafened by the bang. The shockwave of air that erupted from Bod's ruptured body tossed Holo across the room and sent him sliding across the tile floor until he collided with one of the temporary walls. His ears rang from the volume of the explosion, he couldn't even hear himself groaning as he staggered to his feet. The temporary wall that Bod had been pinned against had been flattened into splinters, and some of the lighter machinery had been blown askew.

Little bits of Bod rained down from the ceiling; glittering scraps of red and yellow confetti. Holo caught a few in his claw, chuckled, and tossed them to the floor. He stepped over the cracked crater of tile where Bod had exploded and retrieved the now broken prototype pump backpack. The force of the blast had split the backpack open, turning it into a small pile of metal wreckage on the floor. Holo grimaced and picked it up, not having intended to blast apart the prototype. He found a table that had survived the blast and set it on top, affixing a small note to it to apologize at least for the demolishing the machine.

The last thing Holo did was use his wings to fan the scraps of Bod's body into a neat pile, to help speed up his regeneration process. With luck, the energy it would take for him to

regenerate would make him forget everything that had happened, and the note he left would serve as clever misdirection, preventing Bod from wanting to get revenge on Holo's revenge. Even with that hope, he began to think of ways to avoid being caught off guard again. If he could help it, he wouldn't be turned into another blimped-up test subject anytime soon.