

Balloon Trick
By Angelus

Zangoose flew through the tall grass, cutting a path ahead of him with his sharp claws. He had heard rumors that a Seviper was in the area, and he wouldn't suffer a serpent to encroach on his territory. The grass around here grew over the top of his head, to the point that only the tips of his red and white ears poked out above the greenery. His razor-sharp claws mowed it down around him, thinning the grass so that he could dash ahead at almost full speed. His eyes scanned his surroundings, looking for any sign of a Seviper through the narrow gaps in the grass.

An unusual creaking sound reached his ears over the sound of rushing wind, and he hopped and turned around. His feet hit the ground and slid across the dew-dampened grass, so he plunged his claws into the ground, using them as brakes to stop his backward slide. He carved a rut into the dirt a couple of feet long before finally stopping. The Zangoose stood and shook his claws clean while he flicked his ears to catch the sound again.

ccrreeaakk...

He heard it loud and clear this time, and he walked towards it, ears swiveling to keep a lock on the direction the occasional creaking was coming from. He pushed through the grass, and all of a sudden it gave way to a natural clearing, giving Zangoose a clear view of the source of the creaking. He gasped in confusion and blinked, rubbing his eyes.

He had found the Seviper, though this one was blown up like a huge balloon. Its black-scaled body was over a dozen feet across and stretched into a near sphere, with his head and tail slightly sucked into his expanded body. The creaking was from the Seviper's stretched skin as it strained to hold in all of that air. The heat of the sun on his dark body was causing a slow, creeping expansion as the air within his body heated up.

"Aw crap, just what I needed, a Zangoose," the Seviper hissed with an exasperated roll of his eyes. "Today couldn't get worse."

"What..." Zangoose was too stunned to form a proper reply. His intense determination to oust a Seviper from his territory had been blown out the window upon seeing the bizarre state the snake was in. "What happened?" he asked, keeping a distance of a few feet. The last thing he wanted was to end up the same way.

The Seviper obviously blushed with embarrassment and snorted. "I-I don't wanna talk about it exactly..."

"Fine, but will this happen to me, blimp?" Zangoose asked.

"No, no, I doubt it. And it's not 'blimp,' it's 'Slough,'" the Seviper said, introducing himself as some air hissed out of his mouth.

Zangoose circled to be face-to-face with Slough, and was conveniently in the snake blimp's shadow. Slough's ballooned body rose more than four times Zangoose's height, and even more in width. The stretch was so complete, that Slough couldn't maintain the usual "accordion" scrunch that Seviper typically had. He was just an orb.

"You must have really pissed someone off! Probably got what you deserve, hah!" Zangoose took a step closer and laughed.

Slough scowled. "Yeah yeah laugh it up. If I could move you'd be filling out my coils already!" he snapped, brandishing his venomous fangs. They lightly poked into his body, and he yelped and pulled them back. "Th-that was close..."

"Big talk for a bigger blimp! Haaahaha! You're seriously gonna make threats when I could turn you into scale scraps?" Zangoose grinned and lifted his claws to eye level. The tips of them glinted, looking as sharp as the tip of a knife. "Balloons and sharp objects *really* don't mix. You nearly did yourself in with your own fangs!" He took a couple more steps in, almost within arms reach of Slough.

Slough clammed up and swallowed hard, face going pale. "H-hey, I didn't mean that earlier y-you know? I'm seriously in a pickle here, I'm so full I'm creaking, and I don't have any limbs! I'm stuck!" He rocked back and forth a few inches but ended up settling right back into his starting position.

"Psh, I can see that! But the fact of the matter is, I came here to get you out of my territory, and this just makes it way easier than I could have imagined!" Zangoose pressed up against Slough's body and pulled back an arm, his claws angled at Slough's blimped side. "See you never, blimp!" He closed his eyes and braced himself for the bang as he plunged his claws forward.

He felt them connect, but instead of a bang, there was a small, rubbery *squeak*, and his claws bounced back. "Eh? Hey, weren't you supposed... to..." He opened his eyes to find Slough's jaws opened wide in front of him, looking like a cavern. "Ulp..." There was nothing he could do in time. Slough's jaws clamped over his upper body, swallowing half of him in a single bite.

"Ghhk-! What the hell, did you blow yourself up just to lure in prey?" Zangoose shouted down Slough's throat. He could hear his voice echo back to him, accompanied by a hungry growl of the snake's stomach. "Lemme go!" He pressed his arms and claws out against the inside of Slough's throat. The flesh stretched out, but the elastic tension was high, and Zangoose couldn't get more than a few inches of space before he lost his grip and was squeezed tight again.

Slough's overfilled body bounced as the Zangoose struggled, making his skin groan and creak. His big fangs helped lock Zangoose into his mouth, and in a display of great skill, he tossed his head back and worked the rest of that Zangoose into his mouth. His forked tongue flicked over his meal's belly as it slid into his stretched jaws, the whole Zangoose vanishing inch by inch. It only took a few seconds, half a minute at most before the only thing sticking out of Slough's mouth was a pair of stubby, white-furred legs. He snapped his jaws shut around them and swallowed, sending that Zangoose down into his air-filled stomach.

"Psh, too easy. Seriously, you really didn't stop to think that maayybe it was dangerous to get so close?" Slough taunted his stomach. "Nah, I'm sure you only thought about how easy it is to pop a balloon. Well sorry, but this isn't even close to my maximum capacity. Gonna take a lot more than your dull claws to burst my bubble. Kshshsh!" he gave a hissing laugh, proud that his ploy had worked. He could feel the Zangoose still trying to stab at his stomach walls from within, but at worst, it tickled.

"Alright, I think I've had enough today, not gonna get better than downing a Zangoose anyway!" Slough closed his eyes and took in a deep breath, focusing, relaxing. His body rumbled and his stomach gurgled, and all of the air he had filled himself with pushed up, bulging

his neck and cheeks before blasting out of his mouth with a deafening “BHUUURRRRAAAAAAP!!” that lasted for several minutes. The force and duration made his eyes water as he burped out all of the air he had filled himself with earlier that day.

As he shrunk down, various Pokemon-shaped bulges became apparent in his body, many more than just the single Zangoose from moments earlier. There was a large, Charizard-shaped bulge that was still putting up a fight and occasionally glowing with fire. There was the jagged outline of a Nidoking, and the bulky silhouette of an Ursaring, among several others. Slough had lured quite the feast with his helpless blimp act.

"Aahhh, much better." He squeezed his body back into a scrunched accordion shape, tightly squeezing all the Pokemon currently filling out long stomach. "And now that I'm down to size, you'll all finally start digesting! It's just too tough to work you all down when I'm so full of air." He flicked his tail with a sneer, and his unwilling passengers all thrashed extra hard at the threat of being digested. Slough's coils bounced from all the movement, but even internal blasts of flame didn't phase him. "Sorry, but trying to pop me earns you a one-way trip to becoming snake fat. Go ahead, wear yourselves out, it's all the same to me~"

Slough grinned and slithered his way into the tall grass, disappearing into it with his payload in tow. After such a satisfying and easy lunch, he was ready to head home and show it off to his teammates.