

Inflatable Containment

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With a begrudging screech a set of heavy metal doors slid open, revealing a triumphant mouse. Cole had spent the last half-hour trying to force open the lock to the ancient door, and thankfully his considerable experience exploring Allagi ruins had come through. The mouse was one of the many who made his living scavenging technology and relics from the long-vanished civilization. At times he'd been incredibly successful, scoring a find that could pay his expenses for months, though more often than not he merely found broken junk barely fit for salvage. Still, despite the constant insecurity of his profession he couldn't imagine doing anything else. He was his own boss, got to travel across the whole sector, and never had to worry about spending the whole day in a small cubicle at a more conventional job.

The mouse's eyes darted across the new room he'd gained access to, hoping for a lit panel, precious metals, or even just a closet full of abandoned trinkets. Museums and private collectors *loved* Allagi artifacts, whether they were simple toys or broken statues. Unfortunately the room seemed frustratingly barren at first glance, with blank walls and cracked display screens. There was nothing to hint at its original purpose, and while the room didn't appear stripped in any way it didn't have anything of value either. With a disappointed sigh Cole wandered further in, hoping he'd be able to find *something* to justify spending so much time on the lock.

Irritation led to negligence on Cole's part, the mouse failing to scan for potential traps or security measures, or to question the odd hatches that lined the base of one wall. As Cole grumbled and poked at the panel that seemed *least* wrecked, a ring of lights lit up around one of the hatches, which proceeded to silently open with ease. A large, pale blue and white serpent slithered out, its translucent rubbery skin reflecting the dim light. The snake's body was thick—two feet wide at the very least—and made only the faintest creaking sounds in motion. For reasons unknown the Allagi had favored automated drones of rubber and latex rather than the more sensible metal, and despite their fragile looks they could be formidable foes, especially when allowed to ambush their targets.

Cole finally accepted the display he was messing with was broken beyond repair, and only then did he spot the snake's reflection. The mouse immediately spun around backed himself against the wall, heart racing as he got a good look at the strange beast. He'd seen smaller Allagi drones from a distance on a few occasions, but Cole had always done his best to avoid them; something as big as the snake was well beyond his expertise. While Cole was frozen in fear, the snake was more than eager to make the first strike, lunging at him with surprising speed. Cole didn't have enough time to react, yelping as the serpent latched onto his shoulder and began twisting him, swiftly wrapping the mouse up in its puffy coils.

Rubbery creaks and panicked cries for help filled the room as Cole futilely tried to break free of the drone that had him tightly bound. Of course there was no one else in the ruins who could possibly come to his aid, and he couldn't reach his communicator either. The snake wasn't truly constricting Cole, merely maintaining just enough pressure to prevent him from escaping before he could be properly detained. As Cole continued squirming he looked up, eyes widening as he saw the serpent open its maw and swallow his head in a single gulp. His struggles intensified and his voice became muffled as the snake began to steadily gulp him down inch-by-inch.

Though the “throat” of the snake didn't look slick Cole still passed through it with painful ease. He felt like he was being eaten by an inflatable sleeping bag, surrounded on all sides by cushiony rubber. Overwhelmed by the ordeal, Cole completely overlooked the tingling sensation pulsing throughout his body, heralding a far more worrisome change. His hide slowly gained a shine with each swallow, taking on the appearance and form of latex. Cole's features were simplified, fingers fusing until his paws were puffy and useless, his fur becoming a painted-on pattern, whiskers flattened to mere lines. From his navel grew a twisted knot, like the end of a balloon, one appearing on his tail, too.

As dramatic as the transformation was, Cole was too distracted to notice until he started to inflate as well. There was a hissing sound from within him, his flat stomach abruptly swelling with air, pushing back against the rubber walls of the snake's gullet. He'd been swallowed entirely by then, the serpent stretching out to better handle its growing captive. Realizing he was now a living balloon made calming down impossible for Cole, who wiggled about in a frenzy as he slipped deeper and deeper into the snake. His limbs were bloating, squeezed by his rotund middle till he was essentially immobilized, the squeaks of rubber and latex rubbing together drowning out his own annoyed grunts.

The bulge traveling down the snake's body was expanding more and more with each passing second, having turned from a barely noticeable lump to a wobbling sphere. The drone's rubber hide was durable enough to withstand its inflated meal, capable of handling prisoners well over twice his size if necessary, ensuring Cole would remain both immobilized and contained. Cole's own puffed up belly had pushed right into his snout—effectively muzzling him—and the mouse could do little more than whine and twitch, completely at the drone's will.

With the intruder expertly dealt with, the snake began slithering back to the hatch it had come from. Though the bulge made by Cole was wider than the opening its inflatable nature made it possible to compress, and with some effort the drone was able to force its way through—along with the terrified Cole. As the rubbery tail slid out of sight the hatch shut tight, the room in the ruins just as quiet and empty as it had been a few minutes before...