

PSI Gauge

By: IndigoRho

A glass floated above the counter, a rather nervous bartender pouring a drink into it. Once filled, the glass glided to the waiting hoof of a white goat with bright pink circles tattooed under his eyes. He grinned before taking a long sip, paying little attention to the bartender, or anyone else for that matter. No one in the bar particularly wanted his attention on them, either.

While the bar was normally raucous, chatter had diminished to mere murmurs ever since the goat had arrived and abruptly showed his dominance. A talented psion, he'd hurled a pair of off-duty private security into a wall without provocation, then started ordering drinks on their tab. Some patrons fled, but the regulars had begrudgingly grown accustomed to Karzyn's power trips. Station security's only attempt to arrest the psion had ended before it could even begin, and the beleaguered authorities of the backwater were simply hoping he'd leave on a ship sooner rather than later.

When a loud curse broke the relative silence Karzyn ignored it. When a glass shattered against the barrier he put up on instinct, he just sighed. Likely another drunk trying to play hero. Perhaps they'd be fun to play with.

Karzyn spun in his stool to face the direction the glass had flown from, his gaze falling upon a chuckling crocodile he'd never seen before. The reptile had light-gray scales, barely not white.

"Barrier specialist, eh?" the crocodile said. "No wonder security's giving ya free reign. No way they've got the equipment needed to deal with that sort of thing."

"Well if you're resorting to tossing glasses at me than I doubt you do either." Karzyn smirked.

He concentrated hard on the obnoxious stranger, attempting to sense any psionic energy emanating from him. Though not very skilled at detection, Karzyn could usually get a feel for if they had power or not. As far as he could tell there wasn't a single whiff of psionic energy around the crocodile. Not even latent potential. Even station security had managed to produce an untrained kineticist.

"Oh that was just my way of probing, getting a feel for what you're capable of," the crocodile said with utmost confidence. "Plus sometimes I get lucky and just knock 'em straight out. Less fun but saves energy. Name's Asher by the way."

A name as unfamiliar to Karzyn as the crocodile's appearance. "Glad you want everyone here to know the name of the unconscious idiot on the floor. If you're an aspiring bounty hunter you chose your first target poorly."

A bright pink glow enveloped a bottle of rum behind the bar. The bottle lifted up and then rocketed in Asher's direction. About twenty feet short of the crocodile the energy around the bottle suddenly became erratic, wildly altering its path so it hit the ceiling. Karzyn's smug look vanished. He launched a second bottle, imbuing it with a bit more of his power, but again it flew off-course.

The goat slid off his stool, a look of confused fury on his face. Somehow the crocodile was disrupting his psionic powers despite seemingly having none of his own.

"Your dumb little trick won't save you forever!" Karzyn growled.

A patron let out a startled yelp as his chair came out from under him, flying towards Asher from one angle while yet another bottle came from elsewhere. Asher was forced to do some dodging, but he was still able to throw off his opponent's aim.

"I swore every good psion knew about ekasil," Asher said as he started walking towards Karzyn.

Karzyn *did* know about the metal, though just barely. In the past it had been common in devices meant to subdue or weaken psions, disrupting their control. Newer, more efficient materials outright drained psionic energy, and had completely replaced their ekasil counterparts as far as Karzyn knew. Still, Asher shouldn't be invincible while using it, merely dangerous.

"Too cheap for the good stuff? You really are an amateur!" Karzyn yelled, half the bar beside

him glowing brightly.

Bottle after bottle launched at Asher, but the crocodile was already on the move. He weaved in between tables, dodging glass and occasionally furniture as frantic patrons ducked for cover. The gap between the crocodile and goat hadn't been very big to begin with, and Asher managed to close it with frightening speed. Karzyn was forced to abandon the barrage and focus all his power into individual projectiles, desperately trying to brute force his way past Asher's defenses. Even he couldn't overpower ekasil, though.

Karzyn stumbled backwards as he found Asher right in front of him, the crocodile swinging a baton he'd pulled out. The force of the baton striking his barrier staggered him. More strikes followed, all aimed at some vital part of the goat, his barrier dutifully protecting him. He could feel it being faintly warped by the nearby ekasil, but not shattered. A bit of his confidence returned to him.

"What now, croc! I'm invincible as long as I'm conscious, and all the ekasil in the sector isn't going to disperse my barriers!" Karzyn boasted with a nervous laugh.

Asher wasn't phased. While the goat laughed he'd managed to gently slip a lid-shaped object under Karzyn's shirt and onto his chest. At such a slow speed it hadn't been perceived as threatening, and no barrier had formed to block it.

Karzyn jumped back in surprise, lifting his shirt to examine what had been stuck onto him. It looked like a pressure gauge, which left the goat confused. Rightfully paranoid, he swiftly tried to pry it off with his telekinesis. As soon as Karzyn used his psionic powers, though, his flat middle unexpectedly ballooned outward. The needle on the gauge—which hadn't budged an inch—wobbled upwards.

Wide eyed, Karzyn tried again, only to swell up even more in response. He looked like he'd swallowed a beach ball, his belly now fully exposed. A distressed poke proved his middle was taut, some kind of gas obviously filling him. Karzyn wasn't completely sure what was happening to him, but he suspected that using his psionic powers would only make him inflate.

"W-what the hell is this thing!" Karzyn shouted, cautiously attempting to pull the gauge off with a hoof. It didn't budge.

"Just a favored toy. It converts psionic energy to harmless air," Asher snickered. "Turns out psions are a tad less dangerous as blimps."

"Whatever, I can still beat you senseless without using my powers!"

Asher responded by swinging his baton at Karzyn, which bounced harmlessly off a weak barrier put up on instinct. A hissing sound accompanied the goat's belly inflating. Before Karzyn could react he was struck twice more, nearly falling over as he bloated. His reactive barriers weren't something he could consciously hold back, which meant he was powerless to stop Asher from inflating him.

The blows kept coming, and soon the goat was falling backwards onto the floor, his body big and round. His limbs had puffed up to the point of being useless, his cheeks enormous. He flailed his hooves as he wobbled back-and-forth, helpless.

"I gotta admit, barrier specialists are the funnest psions to deal with," Asher said in between swelling strikes. "They almost always have that automatic psionic response, so once a PSI gauge is on them I can inflate them at my leisure."

Karzyn let out a distressed bleat. His hide was beginning to creak as it was stretched out, his bloated sides pressing up against the bar and stools. The pressure inside him was already immense, inhibiting his concentration greatly. Despite being immobile Asher kept provoking his barriers, the goat blimping up more and more with each passing second. His earlier bravado was gone as he found himself wondering if the crocodile was planning on popping him.

"P-please stop! I surrender!" Karzyn begged, groaning as his hooves and head began to sink into his spherical form. His horns were just barely poking into his taut hide, yet another danger.

Asher prodded the wobbling goat balloon as he checked out the display on the PSI gauge. The needle was shaking, nearly at max. The crocodile grinned and put his baton away.

“Well you're certainly worth more intact rather than as scraps, blimp,” Asher said. He carefully began to roll Karzyn out of the bar, the astonished patrons laughing at the goat's embarrassing predicament. “If I were you I'd get used to being a ball, because you're gonna remain inflated until I've transported you somewhere with a bounty collection office. Might take a week or two depending on how distracted I get.

Karzyn whined and bleated in response, his face flush red as he was rolled like a ball. He doubted his reputation would survive the incident.

“Of course I've also heard that remaining spherical for an extended period can make it permanent. Something about a side effect caused by the psionically-charged air filling you.” While Karzyn couldn't see it, Asher's grin was devilish. “I've always wanted to see for myself if that's true...”

Karzyn's panicked wobbling only made Asher laugh. He could already tell he was going to have a very, very enjoyable trip with the captive goat...