

The Inflatable Satellite

By: IndigoRho

Xander shifted as he stirred awake, his back sore. The otter was reluctant to open his eyes, eager for another hour or two of sleep. He may have continued doing just that if he hadn't heard an odd *creeeak* accompany his movement. His eyes shot open and he sat up, a chorus of creaks echoing out. He looked down upon his chubby middle and saw not brown fur but semi-translucent vinyl. A cylindrical air pump was where his navel should've been. When the otter went to nervously poke it he discovered his paws had become puffy mitts. Xander was a pool toy.

Fairly confused, Xander stood up and took a look around. He appeared to be in an airlock on his ship, though he couldn't remember how he'd gotten there, *or* how he'd somehow been turned into a pool toy. The otter certainly hadn't been drinking the previous night, and swore he'd fallen asleep in his own bed and not squeaky.

"I bet this is some dumb prank of Kyler's," Xander mumbled under his breath as he awkwardly padded over to the control panel near the entrance. It'd been quite a while since he'd last been a pool toy, and being hollow was an odd sensation for someone used to experiencing weight.

Xander's new mitts weren't the most dexterous, and he quickly gave up on trying to use the manual controls. At least everything on the ship could still be voice activated.

"Computer, open interior airlock door."

"Request denied, Command-level lockdown engaged."

Though Xander's friends were resourceful, there was no way any of them could've locked the door *that* well. Frustration was slowly turning into worry.

A familiar voice came over the room's intercom. "Finally awake, Ensign?"

Xander immediately snapped to attention. "Y-yes sir, Captain!"

"I'm sure you're wondering about your current situation but fear not, it's nothing but a simple reassignment," the Captains said.

Reassignment? "Uh, I'm not sure I understand, sir."

"Well to put it bluntly Ensign, your performance as of late has been far from satisfactory. Frequently late to shifts, numerous mistakes on reports, damaged equipment." Xander winced a little at every accusation, none of which he could truthfully deny. "Fortunately for you I believe the best solution is to simply move you into a more fitting role."

Xander breathed a cautious sigh of relief. He still had plenty of questions, though. "Thank you for your patience, Captain! But, um, why am I a pool toy?"

"Well it'll be far easier for you to perform your duties as a satellite in a form that doesn't require oxygen to function," the Captain replied, as if it should've been obvious.

Xander's jaw dropped. "A satellite! Captain, you can't actually be serious!"

"Oh, but I *am*. No chance of ever being late, almost entirely hands-off so there's nothing for you to mess up, and plenty of time floating around to think about how to improve your work ethic." The Captain's tone gave away his likely grin. "You'll be able to start as soon as you're a more suitable size."

Before Xander could respond a loud hissing sound interrupted his thoughts. The air pump in his navel had started up. The otter's small belly immediately began to swell, growing rounder and rounder by the second as air flooded into it. He batted at the pump with his paws in a frantic attempt to shut it off, but his efforts had no effect.

"Blimping you up will make you easier to track and stabilize your orbit. Also means you won't go careening off-course due to flailing."

The creaking was almost non-stop as Xander continued to expand, his vinyl hide stretching out. His belly had become a large, taut ball, and air had started puffing up his limbs and face as well. He couldn't reach the pump anymore to wail at it, not that it would've done him any good. With no control over the pump all Xander could do was stand and watch—and hope maybe the Captain was just

pranking him.

“You're doing swell already Ensign!” The Captain's chuckling filled the airlock. “Now this is meant to merely be a temporary assignment—just a few weeks, maybe months, nothing major—but if you perform well enough I could see it becoming a bit more...*permanent*.”

Now Xander was *really* worried. He'd grown too puffy to walk, and even waddling put him at risk of toppling over onto his round middle. Still, the otter found himself slowly moving towards the center of the room, fearful of swelling into something with a sharp edge and ending up as scattered scraps.

Then came the pressure. As Xander's body turned into a massive sphere his internal pressure increased, the sensation clawing at his mind. Idle thoughts immediately drifted to the pressure and how he could feel it pushing at his overstretched hide. Soon he had to actively concentrate to think of anything else. His bloated cheeks flushed red from embarrassment, eyes wandering more and more often. The ever-present creaks and hisses didn't help, either. Inevitably he fell into a deep daze, unable to understand a word the Captain was saying to him.

“Looks like you're nearly ready, Ensign. I must admit, the round shape really suits you well!” The Captain mused, despite being convinced Xander was oblivious to him.

The pool toy otter's creaking sides pressed against the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. Xander took up most of the airlock, yet the pump was still going strong. It was programed to ensure Xander reached a specific size—and remained there until ordered otherwise. Unfortunately the confines of the airlock were impeding the ensign's growth.

Warning klaxons went off as the exterior door slowly began to open, air rushing out into the void of space. As the door opened wider Xander was gradually pulled towards it, creaking louder than ever before. The otter himself was utterly unaware of his surroundings, only thinking of the sudden increase in pressure.

Once the door had opened fully, though, Xander was only pulled halfway through it. He was stuck. The pool toy's whole body wobbled as the vacuum tried to claim him, making progress inch-by-inch. Inevitably space won out in the end.

Like a cork popping out of a bottle Xander was launched into space, the spherical otter spinning as he settled into a stable orbit around the planet his ship had been above. The view was absolutely spectacular, shifting between vast cloud-covered oceans and multiple moons. Xander's glazed-over eyes saw none of it. His sight blurry, the otter thought of nothing aside from how inflated he was, how intense the pressure was. At least time would seem to pass quickly in his new position...