

Sheep Ball

By: IndigoRho

Seth tapped a hoof to beat of the music playing through his headset, the sheep mostly paying attention to the various readouts and reports entering his terminal. Late shift on the bridge was boring, but relatively stress-free, which was all Seth really wanted. Not like there was much to do on a small storage station anyway. The only excitement he'd had all night was when the sensors bugged out a short while earlier, and even that simply involved a bit of troubleshooting before it seemingly fixed itself.

An abrupt clattering sound managed to pierce the song Seth was listening to, and he swiftly muted the volume. Silence. He stood up, scanning the bridge for anything odd, but nothing was out of place.

Probably just part of the song. Seth thought to himself, hoping he wasn't starting to hear things. Not everyone could handle the extended isolation of the late shift, and he'd been told of some who'd left the position because they were hearing or seeing things that weren't there.

Sighing and shaking his head, Seth brushed off the thought. Nothing like that would ever happen to him.

Just before the sheep was about to return to his chair, he spotted something moving out of the corner of his eye. Nervously Seth focused on it, in time see a small silver ball come to a rolling stop on the floor nearby.

It had a silvery sheen, like mercury, but was solid. Seth had never seen anything like it on the bridge before, and wondered if it was just a paperweight or decoration he'd overlooked.

"Now where did you come from?" Seth mumbled, leaning down to pick the strange sphere up.

Suddenly the surface of the ball rippled like water, Seth shouting in shock as it launched right at him. The ball dove into the sheep's open mouth, causing him to gag for a moment before being forced to swallow. It was cool to the touch, sending a chill down Seth's spine as it dropped into his stomach. A bland aftertaste was left in his mouth.

Coughing and gasping for air, Seth stumbled a little, a look of dread on his face. He didn't know what the ball was or why it'd fed itself to him so aggressively. He didn't know if it was poisonous, or some weird creature trying to use his stomach as a nest. In a panic he used his wrist computer to activate a self-diagnostic built into his uniform. Simple holographic displays appeared on his chest, but aside from an elevated heart rate he was fine.

Calming down was a challenge, and Seth tried to tell himself it was probably just part of a dumb prank by other members of the crew, that it wasn't anything to worry about.

The rapid sensation of bloating in his gut foiled his efforts instantly.

To the sheep's horror his flat middle began to balloon outward, inflating. Seth let out a fearful *bahahahah* as alerts sprang up all over his suit. Pushing down on his growing gut provoked a thick, faint *slorsh* sound, though he didn't *feel* like he was getting as heavy as he looked. The self-diagnostic was equally struggling to determine what was filling him, offering a sixty-three percent chance it was rubber of all things.

Unfortunately it didn't have any clue as to how to cease his swelling.

Only seconds had passed but Seth had already rounded out considerably. He couldn't walk, just waddle, and even that proved increasingly awkward. His uniform was stretchy enough to remain intact—thankfully—along with his dutifully durable belt that now wrapped around his significant circumference. Seth's jacket had been unzipped, likely the only reason it hadn't been shredded. It soon became somewhat tight around the sleeves once his arms began to puff up just like his middle.

All too late Seth considered returning to his station to send out a distress message. He barely made it a couple feet before shuffling forwards became impossible, nearly rolling over and into his chair in the process.

Seth continued to bleat nervously as he blimped up, convinced he would keep swelling until he

popped like a balloon. The rest of the crew were just going to find clumps of wool and an empty uniform.

The sheep's strained hide creaked ominously as his limbs were partially enveloped by his round body, head sinking in. The self-diagnostic was still blaring warnings, as if Seth didn't know what was happening.

Just as suddenly as the inflation had started, it stopped.

Seth allowed himself a short sigh of relief once he realized he wasn't growing anymore.

"Ah, perfect! I was worried you weren't far enough away from the controls for this to work."

Seth couldn't see the source of the voice that came from behind, but it wasn't one he recognized. Worry returned again in full force. He bleated and wobbled as his taut sides were grabbed, the sheep roughly spun around.

Before him was a plump, bespectacled blue jay. They were wearing a bodysuit that matched the color of the ball that'd attacked Seth, and were splitting their attention between a display on their own wrist computer and the various alerts going off on Seth.

"W-What do you want with me!" Seth whimpered.

"With you? Nothing at the moment," the blue jay replied. "I'm far more interested in all the wonderful rare resources your station has to offer!"

The blue jay strolled past Seth and began looking through the bridge computer.

"So, how does it feel to be filled with liquid rubber?" the bird asked, rather casually considering the circumstances. "It's fun, right?"

"What? No! I feel like I'm gonna pop!" Seth said, still wobbling.

"Oh don't worry, my ball drones haven't accidentally popped anyone in a long time. The newest batch has been designed to safely immobilize the target with a nearly one hundred percent success rate!" There was an obvious tone of gloating from the blue jay, as if he were expecting a congratulations from his helpless victim.

Seth wasn't impressed. "Please, just don't pop me. Take whatever you want!"

"Well I was going to get what I needed regardless. Name's Indi, by the way." The blue jay's eyes lit up. "Excellent, a full inventory of the current stores along with the crew list and postings. Shouldn't be too much to handle."

"What are you...what are you going to do?" Seth asked.

Indi wiped the security logs and footage before standing to face the round sheep. "I'm always eager to discuss my work! I'm an independent chemist of sorts. Liquid rubber is one of my specialties, especially its manipulation, expansion, and absorption. Just like some have discovered ways to directly control robots with thought inputs, I've found a way to control rubber! Just as long as its been properly synced and prepared. I can't just go around commanding random boots and tires!"

The long laugh that followed wasn't joined in by Seth, who was too fearful to ask anything else. Indi was more than eager to continue, though.

"Unfortunately some of the resources I need for my work are pricey, and getting grant money has proved nearly impossible, so I've been forced to get creative." Indi smiled, poking Seth with a talon. "Of course that means it's important to not leave any evidence of my little shady ventures—or witnesses."

Seth's heart sank, and he frantically shook his head. "I won't say a word, I swear!"

"Well of course you won't once the conversion process is complete. That ball you gulped down earlier has been steadily transforming you into rubber this entire time, and soon you'll just be a big mass of it yourself. I've been running low, so thank you for helping replenish my supply." Indi gave Seth a friendly pat on the belly before taking a few steps back.

All at once the swelling renewed, and so did Seth's terrified bleating. The pressure he'd felt before was gone, even as the rest of his arms and then hooves were completely enveloped by his rapidly expanding mass. His hide turned gray, then silver, taking on the same sheen of the original ball

of rubber. Seth let out a final, distressed *bahahah* as his head sunk deep into his body.

The sphere that Seth had become wobble for a minute as he resisted the transformation, but he couldn't hold out forever. Eventually it ceased to move.

With a few silent commands from Indi the large rubber sphere warped, slipping free of Seth's uniform and leaving it and all of the sheep's belongs behind.

“Alright, let's go find us some more material,” Indi said, before heading towards the bridge's exit as he brought up a map of the station. The ball dutifully followed, ready to add more crew to its mass if instructed.