

## Columbia State 32: Reckless Wagers

By: IndigoRho

The sharp clack of billiards balls colliding briefly interrupted the music and chatter filling the rec room of the Tau Tau Psi fraternity. A heavysset, blue-and-white spotted salamander held his breath as he watched the shimmering yellow one ball roll across the worn surface of the pool table, closing in on a corner pocket. The ball slowed to a crawl as it neared the goal, but at the last second managed to topple over the edge of the pocket. Josh let out a raucous cheer at his successful shot, despite the fact he was still two balls behind his competitor. He was usually fairly decent at pool, but booze and cockiness had cost him every match of the night, most of which had been against the smug chubby otter watching from the other side of the table. The salamander hadn't realized how skilled a player his frat brother Xavier was, especially when money was on the line, and an obsessive desire to win back some of his losses had just made things worse. Josh was convinced luck was back on his side, though, and his inebriated mind prompted him to make a rather fateful decision.

"Let's double the stakes," Josh said with as much confidence as he could muster.

Xavier laughed. "Dude, you said you were betting your last bit of cash on this game, you wouldn't have anything to hand over when I trounce you!"

"I'll put up collateral! Won't matter what it is, since *I'll* be winning in three shots anyways." Josh smirked.

"I don't want any of your junk man," Xavier said, annoyed that his friend was seemingly trying to delay an inevitable loss. "Just hurry up and lose."

Josh wasn't about to back down. "If you're so sure you'll win then why aren't you doubling the bet? Name your price, I'll accept whatever it is!"

Xavier shook his head and sighed. He knew how stubborn the salamander could be, but felt there was a surefire way to get him to move on. "Alright, wager yourself as a meal."

"Deal!"

Xavier stared back at his friend, dumbfounded. He'd expected Josh to struggle with an answer for a bit before backing off, but the idiot was so sure of himself he'd bet his own life without a second thought. "Did...did you hear me? If I win, I eat you. As in, you get turned into a pile of bones and some otter fat."

"Heard ya loud and clear Xav. Don't worry dude, the only thing getting fatter tonight is my wallet, after I beat you!" Before Xavier could respond again, Josh turned to a trio sitting on the nearby couch and called out to one of them. "Yo Scott! I need you to make something official!"

A stout badger/elk hybrid looked towards the pool table at the sound of his name, then lifted himself off the couch and trudged over, drink in hoof. The pair he'd been chatting with—a portly gryphon and a salamander identical to Josh—quickly joined him, curious about what was going on.

"What now?" Scott asked, his tone betraying annoyance from being disturbed.

"Just a quick wager. If I win, Xav pays me double. If I lose, Xav eats me," Josh said.

Scott gave a confused glance towards Xavier, whom he knew shied away from eating fatter prey. "Why?"

Josh frowned, as if he were the only reasonable one there. "C'mon Scott, not you too! I'm on a roll here, just make the bet official so I can rescue my cash from Xav."

The second salamander spoke up. "Bro, the only one who's gonna need rescuing is you, and I'm not in the mood to fight for your freedom tonight."

"Shut up Jacob, I've got this!" Josh glared at his brother. "There's a reason I'm the better twin!"

Jacob burst into laughter. "That doesn't make any sense, bro, you're drunk as shit. Just lose with dignity and swipe your next prey's wallet or something."

"Let him play, it'll make the game fun," The gryphon said in between sips of his beer.

"Damnit Derek, don't encourage him!" Xavier snapped.

Josh was quickly growing impatient, having expected to have been standing victorious by now. “The bet's already been made! I asked what I needed to toss down to get him to accept and he said myself and I agreed, so it's final!”

“I didn't think he'd say yes!” Xavier said as the others looked his way.

Scott sighed. “Well if that's the case I can't really say no. Alright, let's get this over with.”

Josh smirked at his perceived victory, and moved to line up his next shot. A quick tap and clack sent the six ball into a nearby pocket with no hesitation, and the four ball soon joined it. The game was now even, with Josh a fairly straightforward shot away from the win he'd gloated of. Xavier quietly breathed a sigh of relief, more than willing to lose the cash as opposed to eating his frat brother. The final shot was lined up perfectly, struck with just the right amount of force, and a pocket seemed like a guarantee...until the eight ball rolled over a barely visible tuft on the table and changed direction slightly. All five onlookers watched the ball stop just before the pocket, setting up a painfully easy shot for Xavier. The otter somehow appeared more devastated than his opponent, and glumly walked around the table to claim victory.

Derek—and oddly enough Jacob—snorted at the result, while Scott shook his head in disappointment. For a moment Xavier considered throwing the game, but he knew doing so would mean breaking the fraternity's time-honored traditions, maybe even hurt his chances of becoming chapter president one day. Instead, he took his shot as expertly as he had all the others, sealing Josh's fate with a tap. Never before had a victory felt so much like a loss to the otter.

“Well, it's a damn shame but let's get this over with,” Scott said, walking over to Josh and giving him a apologetic pat on the shoulder.

Liquor still clouded Josh's mind, and the salamander didn't seem to be taking his impending doom very seriously. “Ugh, I was so close! Like, two inches closer and I'd have had it!”

Jacob chugged the rest of his beer before wrapping his arm around his twin brother's shoulder. “Well bro, it's a bummer to see ya go, but honestly you brought this on your stupid self.”

Derek got a good laugh out of Jacob's response, having not been close enough to either twin to care if one was eaten.

“This is so dumb, have you seen how fat Josh is?” Xavier whined, still confused as to how the casual night had gone in this direction. “I'm gonna get huge!”

“Oh stop complaining ya baby,” Jacob said. “You'll gain *maybe* fifty pounds or so from old Otter Pudge here. That's not hard to exercise away.”

Josh glared at his brother. “Hey, I haven't been digested yet!”

“Emphasis on 'yet'. Wonder if I should lie to mom and dad about how you went out,” Jacob mused, surprisingly calm about his brother's fate. “Telling them you lost a one-sided bet might get them angry at me. Maybe I'll say a professor got you.”

“Just don't tell them I'm the one who ate him,” Xavier said. “It'd make dinner at your place super awkward, especially with how your family handles remains.”

Jacob gave his twin a demeaning pat on the head. “What, you're not excited to have a past meal's skull staring down at you from the wall while you eat?”

“Stop acting like I'm already a pile of bones!” Josh demanded. “You'll both look silly once I've crawled out of Xavier's stomach in a few minutes.”

“Oh my God if that was your backup plan then you deserve to be eaten bro, I don't care how drunk you are!” Jacob laughed.

Scott let the trio have their fun for a bit, but was eager to move on. “Alright. Xavier, do you want him clothed or not?”

Xavier was already half-way through removing his own shirt, which would've been shredded consuming someone as large as Josh. “Just leave his briefs on, I don't want to get stuck with hoodie aftertaste all night.”

Josh began pulling off his hoodie, exposing his massive blue and white belly with a jiggle. He—

like most active preds—had been eating people since high school, and had the slick, massive gut to prove it. When he'd first started hunting he'd tried to pace himself and stay in relative shape, but failed utterly within a year. His peers had proved too delicious, and gorging on anyone who annoyed him was just plain fun. Jacob had remained slimmer for a year longer, though even he eventually bulked up once Josh started using his weight to push him around. Both twins had spent years trying to convince their old friend Xavier to get huge with them to no avail. While the circumstances were less than ideal, Josh was about to change Xavier's mind the hard way.

Being nearly nude somehow made Josh look larger, at least in Xavier's eyes. Despite being on the verge of consuming a close friend, all Xavier could think about was the horrible amount of weight he would gain over the next couple days. His size didn't shift as dramatically as most preds, so he didn't have a closet full of expensive, durable expandex clothes. At best he might be able to scrounge up a pair of sweats and a bland shirt that *might* fit. Xavier was already planning a workout regiment in the back of his mind to deal with the obnoxious amount of pudge Josh was about to saddle him with.

"Claw-first or head-first Josh?" Scott asked once the salamander was disrobed.

"Head-first, please. I'd rather not have to stare at Jacob's smug grin the whole way down," Josh said, still strangely calm about the predicament he was in.

Xavier dropped his shirt on the pool table and headed towards a recliner near the couch. "We're doing this sitting. I'd rather not end up stuck on the carpet after I eat lardo here."

The whole group followed Xavier, who sat down on the chair with a look of disdain, as if he were being punished. Working together, Scott, Derek, and Jacob carefully lifted the over three hundred pound Josh and angled him into position, his gut swaying rhythmically the entire time. Xavier sighed and opened his maw wide to "welcome" his excessive meal. Josh stuck his claws out straight ahead, like a diver, grimacing as he felt Xavier's hot breath and tongue against them. As soon as his claws poked the back of Xavier's neck the otter took an involuntary gulp, steadily followed by another and another as the consumption began. The salamander's rubbery skin made swallowing him painfully easy, and he practically glided down Xavier's saliva-drenched throat, especially since he wasn't resisting in any way.

Xavier groaned as he felt Josh's blubbery belly pour over him, knowing his lips would soon have to stretch across its horrible width. Although lizards were one of his favorite prey—second only to felines—there was no way for Xavier to enjoy the free meal. For starters he still wasn't very fond of eating a friend, even if he did tend to hang out with Jacob more, and while plenty of preds loved being fed, Xavier simply wasn't into it. Of course the worst aspect was, as always, simply how fattening Josh was. As Josh's elbows slid into Xavier's maw, the otter got one last good look at his drunk friend, who still didn't seem to realize how dire his situation was. Perhaps he was doing the dense salamander a favor.

While Scott remained fairly solemn about the whole affair, Derek and Jacob did little to hide their apparent enjoyment of the fates about to befall both Josh *and* Xavier. They snickered as Xavier's eyes twitched when he swallowed Josh's head, teased the salamander's exposed gut in between pushes, and actively taunted their frat brother about his new status as food long after he became unable to hear them. Xavier tried to mumble a complaint at the pair, but a mouthful of Josh's thick moobs made even that impossible. He wasn't at all surprised Derek was taking joy in the likely digestion of a fellow frat member—the gluttonous gryphon was infamously open about the number of friends and even relatives he'd eaten over the years—but Xavier wanted to be confused by Jacob joining in. *Wanted to.*

The twins had drifted somewhat since going to college, and Xavier had noticed both were a lot less concerned on occasions the other went missing at pred-filled parties. They hung out with different people, rarely hunted as a team anymore, and their drunk boastings of who could eat who had gradually gone from joking to serious over time. He doubted either Jacob or Josh would have gone out of their way to consume one-another regardless of their cooling bonds, but he suspected the consumption of one would lead to a less genuine mourning from the other. Still, Jacob's casualness about his brother's

end was a tad off-putting even for Xavier; he hoped he never grew to feel that way about *his* brothers.

Xavier's private musings were interrupted as he was finally forced to deal with Josh's immense gut. His previous pity about the salamander's fate vanished in an instant as his lips were spread further than they'd ever been before, Josh's soft pudgy gut practically oozing into every corner of his mouth. Barely a week earlier Xavier had swallowed his younger brother's overweight friend, Jordan, and he swore the experience had been oddly enjoyable, despite his preferences. Of course, Xavier had been far, far drunker then, not to mention obsessed with gulping the adorable jaguar down at least once. Josh was a whole different story. The feeling of Josh's arms slipping into his stomach didn't help, either. Xavier's chubby little belly began to swell, growing with every swallow. His brown hide stretched, and he fidgeted in the chair as Josh's claws pressed into the lining of his stomach, the bulges hidden by the unswallowed portions of the salamander's own gut.

The recliner itself groaned as more of Josh's weight was directly applied to it, though the furniture was guaranteed to hold close to a ton. Soon the salamander's legs and tail were resting on Xavier's bulging, ridiculously bloated middle, giving his feeders even more opportunities to torment him on the way down. Xavier's belly was jostled and prodded as he desperately tried to swallow the last half of Josh swiftly, his paws blocked from swatting away his dickish frat brothers. Out of the corner of his eye, he could just barely see the damage being inflicted on his waistline past Josh's thick legs, and groaned in dismay. Feeling his throat and mouth slowly shrink down as the widest parts of Josh emptied into his stomach provided a sliver of relief.

Josh's claws disappeared into Xavier's mouth, leaving just his fat, rubbery tail on the outside, which the annoyed otter had to slurp like a noodle. He was a gulp away from finishing his unwanted meal when Derek grabbed the tip of Josh's tail just firmly enough to halt his descent. Xavier glared at the gryphon, but an attempt to voice his displeasure only loosened his grip on Josh, allowing Derek to pull him out a couple inches. There was no doubt Derek was merely toying with the pred and prey, with no actual intention of retrieving Josh and preventing the night from ending unfortunately. A quick smack to the back of Derek's head by Scott ended his game, though, and Xavier swallowed the last of his friend as if he were starving.

Xavier coughed and gasped for air as soon as Josh's tail was sucked into his stomach, exhausted from gorging. Initially his belly felt almost painfully full, and every small shift from within caused him to wince or groan. All of Josh's weight was atop the otter's chest and lap, effectively pinning him to the recliner and prompting an overwhelming sensation of vulnerability, despite the fact he was amongst friends. Of course, so had Josh earlier, and the salamander was now locked in the acidic pressure cooker that was Xavier's stomach. The whole experience was so unpleasant, Xavier was tempted to start shotgunning beers in the hope he wouldn't remember a second of it.

Jacob grinned and gave the belly bulge that was his twin a teasing pat. "Well bro, it was nice knowing ya. I'm sure you'll excel at being pudge, though!"

"I'm still alive you ass!" Josh shouted back from within Xavier, his words muffled but audible. "Just wait, escaping a stomach is super easy!"

"Yeah, you're only leaving Xav's gut in one way, and I doubt either of you will enjoy the experience much," Jacob said, prodding the bulge again. "Damn Xav, after stuffing yourself with my dim tubby reflection I doubt you'll be the thinnest in your family anymore. Glad to see you following in Zeke and Xander's heavy pawsteps!"

Xavier gave a death stare at his friend. "Zach'll still be fatter than me, and I'll burn off Josh fast, you'll see! Won't be a single ounce of him left on me in a couple months, tops."

"What a shame, I was really hoping I'd get to say hello to bro every now and then by giving your gut a shake," Jacob smirked.

"Ugh, when did you become such a shitty brother." Xavier rolled his eyes in disappointment. "I know you two still get along, why don't you like, challenge me for his freedom or something? Spare me the hassle of Josh's calories!"

Jacob shrugged. "Eh, Joshy here's been wasting second chances since we were pledges. I've personally pulled him out of two different stomachs this year alone, and half my bulk came from eating vengeful friends and siblings of his poorly planned meals. I'm tired of delaying the inevitable."

"C'mon dude, I'm sure it's just a phase. I don't have the wardrobe to handle this sort of thing!" Xavier begged.

"Nope, mind made up," Jacob replied, rather coldly. "Your sacrifice is appreciated, Xav, otherwise I'd of probably eaten the idiot before the semester ended."

Surprise returned to Xavier's face. "I call bullshit, you don't hate Josh *that* much."

"Pfft, it's not hate, he just looks really damn delicious. Besides, *he's* just as guilty. Bastard tried eating me at the Winter's End Bash!" Jacob said, jabbing Xavier's squirming gut to emphasize each word.

Derek had been content to merely watch the squabble before, but was drawn in by the new revelation. "Damn, shame he didn't succeed. Xander totally would have broke four hundred pounds if we'd had to feed him Josh stuffed with Jacob!"

"Yep, really would've been worth it getting digested twice over just to see a pledge get fatter," Jacob said with obvious sarcasm. "And the jerk might have tried to snack on me, but he never got close. He just tried slurping me down while I was enjoying my meal's last hurrah."

Xavier's belly wobbled. "Bro, that was just a joke, I swear! I was really fucking high!"

"Great joke Josh. I spent an hour getting that kangaroo shit-faced drunk so he'd upchuck you, ate him cause he'd admitted to attending the party *just* to eat you, and then I had to fight you off with a damn broom after!" Jacob vented. "And you got eaten cause of a stupid bet then, too!"

Xavier had never had someone argue with his gut before, and already hoped he'd never experience again. "Alright, alright, enough! So Jacob's sure as hell not gonna rescue me from Josh." He gave a pitiful look towards Scott. "C'mon Scott, do me a solid. Wreck me at checkers or belching or whatever and be Josh's savior."

The hybrid frowned and scratched at the base of his antlers. "Xavier I hate seeing Josh go like this, but I can't show favoritism in frat bets; it'd be unprofessional."

"Stupid technicalities." Xavier could feel Josh blindly groping at his stomach walls, no doubt attempting the find the sphincter so he could make his gloated escape. Unfortunately for both of them, slick claws weren't the best at gripping slimy surfaces. "Man, I kind of liked being able to claim I *hadn't* eaten a friend before."

"I don't see what the deal is," Derek said. "Some friendships are better off ending as a fresh layer of fat. And some people are just too tasty for their own damn good." The gryphon's attention seemed to drift, as if he was remembering a particular meal.

"I have never been more thankful to *not* be your friend," Xavier said, shaking his head at his frat brother.

The conversation apparently reminded Jacob of something, as the salamander suddenly waddled over to the pool table to grab his twin brother's phone. "Oh man, I just realized another good thing about Josh biting it!" He giddily exclaimed as he looked over the phone. "I've had a huge meal crush on his friend Drew for ages. Like, damn, the guy just *needs* to be food. Just couldn't think of a good way to eat him without Josh knowing. If we delay telling others about Josh getting eaten I may be able to lure Drew over and pretend to be my bro to catch him off-guard!"

Xavier's gut fidgeted a little more aggressively. "Bro I don't eat your friends so you'd better not eat mine!" Josh shouted.

Jacob leaned in close to the complaining belly and gave it a condescending pat, much to Xavier's annoyance. "Josh, once you're gone your buds are fair game. If you really want to ensure they don't end up on my waistline you'd better find a way to escape Xav's!"

Josh kicked and elbowed his fleshy prison, as if that would somehow help, before redoubling his efforts to get free. "Xav, don't let Jacob be a dick, post my digestion right away in the unlikely

chance it happens!”

“Fuck, hitting me doesn't help!” Xavier grumbled. “And I'm not in the mood to babysit your friends. Besides, Jacob's idea sounds kind of fun, I want to see if it works.”

Within Xavier's stomach, Josh cursed under his breath as he failed once more to pry open the sphincter, an unexpected lurch disorienting him and forcing him to search again for his only exit. He didn't understand why getting out of a stomach was proving so difficult. Drunk, exhausted, and lightheaded from the gradually depleting supply of oxygen, Josh's chance of survival was diminishing quickly. The pool of digestive juices he was sitting in were rising steadily, too, though they had yet to start eating away at his flesh. Xavier knew his meal was fading.

A short belch escaped Xavier's lips and he groaned. “Ah crap, having trouble keeping the air fresh in there, I think Josh is almost gone.”

Derek had already moved on to watching tv, and offered his condolences from the couch. “Tough luck dude! It's a shame I'm not the one who got to eat you!”

Even in his twin's final moments, Jacob appeared unfazed. “Well Josh, I'm not good with long goodbyes, so let's finish this up!”

The salamander pushed down hard on Xavier's bulging gut, forcing a long belch from the surprised otter's maw that noticeably shrunk his stomach. With the last of his air gone, Josh was submerged in stomach acids with no space to move. His frantic spasms still caused Xavier's belly to shake wildly, and the otter very nearly threw up from the resulting nausea. Xavier didn't consider the last-second opportunity to save himself from unwanted pounds, though, and almost instinctively did everything he could to keep Josh down. Fortunately the salamander's struggles were short-lived. Bouncing soon reduced to wobbling, then nothing. Josh's fate as food was essentially sealed.

A twinge of regret came over Xavier as he felt his friend begin the slow process of digesting, but his own inebriation and lingering apathy towards Josh prevented the full impact of what had happened from setting in. Instead Xavier mainly felt frustrated and inconvenienced. “God dammit this is gonna be such a pain in the ass!”

Jacob gave a final poke to the bulge in Xavier's middle to ensure his brother was gone, before simply wandering away to the couch to watch tv himself.

Scott rested a hoof on Xavier's shoulder. “Sorry man. In the morning I'll dig out some clothes for you to borrow while you digest Josh.” The hybrid left afterward, already dreading having to add Josh's picture to the fraternity's memorial wall the next day.

The offer was of little consolation to Xavier, who leaned back into the recliner in a huff. His night had turned sour so unexpectedly. All he'd wanted to do was drink a little and hang out with his friends. Derek inviting himself had been annoying, but everything had been going smoothly enough until Josh had gotten boastful of his pool skills and decided to try and make some easy cash. Now the foolish salamander was being slowly churned into a thick, fattening soup, doomed to never make it past college. Memories started trickling to the surface of Xavier's mind, of when the two had first met, of countless sleepovers, of early hunts and their time as pledges. Xavier brushed them aside swiftly, though, focusing on any past minor inconvenience the salamander had caused. He wasn't in the mood to mourn, not with all the weight he was about to gain. He'd likely get stuck with an overhang or a jiggling gut, and his face would get so terribly round! The otter squeaked in dismay, and his stomach gurgled in reply.