

Trial by Juice Part I

By: IndigoRho

“We're not being ransomed, this is obviously some kind of elaborate trap.”

Khendar groaned as unfamiliar voices stirred him from his slumber. The hefty deer couldn't remember going to sleep, and sluggishly forced his eyes to open, wondering if he'd simply passed out after an indulgent lunch again. As his sight adjusted to the light, Khendar realized he was in a cramped, sterile-looking room with white tile walls and floors, and he wasn't alone. Four others were with him—a bull, a goat, a dragon, and a cheetah—all standing and apparently arguing with one another. Nothing was recognizable to the deer, neither the room nor any of the people with him.

The most confusing aspect of the situation, though, were the harnesses each of them wore around their waists. Harnesses with hoses leading into the back wall. As Khendar woke up further, he discovered with dismay he was outfitted in the same odd getup as them, unfortunately confirming the tubes went straight into the rear.

The goat spotted Khendar's movement first. “Great, the big guy finally decided to wake up.”

“W-where am I?” Khendar asked, slowly hefting himself off the floor while struggling with his harness. “And what the heck is this thing!”

“Why would we know!” the bull snorted, pacing back and forth in the limited space available. “We're obviously in the same situation as you are, we're not gonna have magical answers for you! I bet you're gonna ask about the stupid puzzle thingy on the wall next, aren't ya?”

Khendar had been so distracted he hadn't even noticed the puzzle in question, prominently displayed on the wall opposite the tube dispenser. He could tell it was a jumbled picture—though he wasn't sure what of—the kind made of tiles you'd have to shift around until it was completed. A piece was noticeably absent, though Khendar quickly spotted it sitting on the floor in the room's center. The deer very nearly asked about it, before deciding getting snarked at by the frustrated bull wasn't worth the bother.

“Lot of talk for someone who asked the same questions about a dozen times already,” the goat jumped in, adjusting his glasses. “Are you going to accuse him of being our captor, just like you did with each of us? Still a ridiculous charge considering *you* were the first to wake up.”

Before the bull could begin arguing back, a speaker in the wall crackled loudly to life, causing everyone to cover their ears. A gravely, heavily distorted voice filled the room. “So nice of all of you to join me today. I've been watching each of you very, very closely for such a long time now...observing...judging.”

“Ha! If I were the one behind this then how could I be chatting on the loudspeaker right now!” the bull asserted, still wanting to get the last word in.

The omnipotent voice continued in the background, oblivious to the distraction. “...I couldn't even begin to list all of the terrible things you lot are guilty of, the people you hurt on a daily basis. You don't deserve the second chance I'm so graciously presenting you with today.”

“It's not hard to record some lines and play them back remotely,” the goat countered.

The dragon had finally grown tired of the bickering. “Will you two shut up! How can you possibly be arguing at a time like this!”

“You're not helping,” the cheetah mumbled under his breath.

Unfortunately he was overheard, prompting the dragon to snap at him as well. Khendar was feeling completely overwhelmed. He still hadn't fully awoken, the four strangers with him were embroiled in an argument that didn't make sense, and the menacing voice from the loudspeaker was increasingly difficult to hear over it all. The deer wished he could simply go back to sleep.

Eventually the bull threw his hands into the air in a huff. “I'm tired of this crap!” He grabbed the puzzle piece on the floor and stormed over to the wall, shoving it into place with little thought. “There, your dumb puzzle's complete, happy?” A harsh buzzer sound answered him.

"I expected as much of you, Greg," the loudspeaker taunted. "Always rushing your way through life, never learning, never showing an ounce of patience. At the very least you won't have to wait much longer for the end to come. Enjoy the free juice."

There was a moment of confused silence, until something cold began to flow through the tube in Greg's rear. The bull yelped and jumped a couple inches, wincing as he felt his stomach filling with liquid. He looked down in horror, all eyes glued to his swelling middle. Greg frantically pulled at the hose pumping him with juice, trying to remove it or rip it open or even just slow the inevitable. Nothing he did had any noticeable effect. His shirt was growing tighter by the second, fighting a losing battle against his expanding belly, the seams already tearing in places.

The dragon and cheetah were freaking out—stumbling away from Greg as if he were somehow contagious—while the goat appeared far more annoyed than concerned. Khendar, meanwhile, was trying his hardest to disguise how turned on he was by the bull's inflation. He absolutely adored bigger guys, so of course he couldn't help but want to see Greg get larger and rounder, regardless of whether or not he burst apart in the process. Greg's panicked movements provided plenty of delightful belly wobbling, too.

Thoroughly unimpressed, the goat ignored the bull's peril and walked over to the puzzle himself, removing the incorrect piece. "Greg you probably already know this, but you're an idiot. This is one of the simplest types of puzzles, especially considering how few pieces there are, and I bet even *you* could solve it if you put a couple second's thought into it." The goat began moving the tiles at a glacially casual pace, obviously not in any rush.

"H-hurry up, I bet if you solve the stupid puzzle I'll stop inflating!" Greg shouted, his shirt ripping to pieces and falling to the floor as his gut continued ballooning outwards.

He could barely move anymore, the weight of the juice making even waddling a struggle. His pants didn't last much longer, and as they shredded his swollen junk was exposed to the others. The bull was rapidly becoming spherical, his chest no longer distinguishable from his immense belly, his limbs growing stiff as they puffed up. Sloshes and splashes could be heard echoing from within him. The room was exceptionally small, and Greg's out-of-control expansion quickly forced the others to crowd together around the goat as he worked on the puzzle, their eyes nervously watching the swollen bull closing in on them.

Khendar continued giving the occasional glance towards the puzzle for a brief time, but eventually his attention was solely on Greg, who was practically a balloon by now. "I think the picture's a cat, yeah definitely a cat. Maybe." He almost mumbled, resisting the urge to step forward and press his hands deep into the inflating mass of bull.

The goat rolled his eyes and stopped what he was doing, turning around to glare at Khendar. "Seriously? It's a carton of juice, how could you possibly mistake that for a freaking cat?" He was only a couple tiles away from completing the puzzle, but belittling the deer was suddenly his priority.

"Finish it up before I burst!" the bull begged.

Greg's bloated sides were pressing into the walls and his hands were barely jutting out from his blimped up body. The pressure within was growing, his hide actually letting out an increasing number of mournful creaks and groans as it was stretched beyond its normal limits. He suddenly lurched forwards a bit as the juice inside him shifted and disrupted his balance, pinning the others to the wall without warning. Khendar blushed as he felt the bull's body press into him. Since he was rather obese, the deer hadn't had the pleasure of being squished by another very often, but even his girth couldn't match that of the overinflated Greg. Even better was the fact that he was, in turn, squishing the much thinner trio with him, delighting in their squirms.

"Oh, uh, s-sorry," Khendar apologized, still attempting to hide how much fun he was having.

The creaks were getting louder and more frequent, Greg's eyes wide in fear. "N-no, please stop the juice, please! You can't pop me, this isn't fair, this isn't fair!"

As the bull pleaded to unsympathetic ears, his bloated middle started pushing up against

Khendar's pointy antlers. Greg whimpered when he felt the points dig into his taut hide, painfully aware of the pressure. There was no escaping the inevitable. He let out a terrified yelp as the antlers finally pierced him, bursting apart in such a flash it was as if he'd simply vanished. For a brief second the four remaining captives were freed from the bull's bulk, only to be immediately pushed back against the puzzle wall as a tidal wave of juice erupted from Greg. They flailed and splashed as they suddenly found themselves in a shallow pool, tossed about by the waves from the explosion's aftermath.

The goat was the first to stand back up, nearly waist deep in juice and clearly annoyed. "Ugh, that idiot got me all soaked, good riddance!"

"Don't think the game's over just because our hastily departed guest is gone," their captor's voice returned. "You won't be able to move on until you've completed the puzzle, and I believe you'll soon discover the juice from Greg's hose is still flowing strong!"

Sure enough, the depth of the pool had visibly risen since the goat had stood. The group quickly began scouring the flooded floor for the final piece, their efforts impeded by the opaque juice and general fear. Only the goat appeared unfazed by the danger, one hundred percent convinced he would survive the ordeal, with or without the aide of the others. After a couple tense minutes the cheetah uncovered the piece, tossing it over to the goat so he could finish the puzzle. As soon as the piece was in place, a celebratory jingle played over the speakers, followed by a loud click.

A low, previously unnoticed door abruptly swung open, causing the pool of juice to aggressively drain through it. As the closest, the goat was snatched by the current almost right away, losing his balance and getting sucked head first down the giant tube the door lead into. His tube dutifully followed, a seemingly endless length unraveling from the wall. The cheetah and dragon were next, both far too light to resist the pull for very long, their surprised yells echoing throughout the tube. Khendar's girth kept him stable longer, but even the blubbery buck eventually stumbled, gliding right into the distressingly narrow tube. When all the juice was drained the door slammed mostly shut, Greg's abandoned hose trickling to a stop while the four remaining ones continued onwards.