

Ensign Air Tank

By: IndigoRho

Captain Rho Taliesin made his way through the ship with a far sterner look upon his face than usual. Crew members were quick to stay clear of the hefty orange-striped zebra's path, offering polite acknowledgments but little else. It was best to avoid the Captain when he was in one of his rare moods, *especially* as he was holding an air tank in one hoof. Someone was bound to end up as a blimp—or worse.

Rho liked to consider himself a personable, even forgiving captain at times, but negligence was one of his sore spots. Negligence could be dangerous on a spaceship. In an emergency situation crew might be forced to rely on spare air tanks scattered throughout the ship, air tanks that *should* have been checked and replenished regularly. By chance Rho had conducted a spontaneous surprise inspection, and had discovered empty tank after empty tank. He knew they were frequently used for pranks by the crew, but that didn't excuse the fact someone wasn't refilling them. A someone named Ensign Hash Taggart.

At last Captain Rho arrived at the sip recreation hall, where the unlucky ensign was allegedly at. Conversations quickly died off as he entered, crew members suddenly deciding they needed to be elsewhere. Soon the room was empty aside from Rho and a slim geoffroy's cat engrossed in a VR game of some sort. *Hash*.

A smile came upon Rho's face as he slowly approached the oblivious cat. A few pokes at his wrist computer revealed that Hash's game involved rampaging through a city as a giant, and the cat was clearly enjoying his virtual increase in size. Inspiration struck Rho.

"Afternoon, Ensign!" Rho bellowed once he was right beside Hash.

Hash jumped and in surprise, his tail sticking straight out as he nearly fell to the floor. He frantically pulled off the headset and put it down, offering a nervous salute to the Captain. "S-Sir!"

"Sorry to pull you from your little game, but there's something we need to discuss." Rho held up the air tank.

Hash's eyes widened, the cat cowering noticeably. His response was all the confirmation Rho needed to know the ensign had been willfully negligent.

"Oh, uh...w-what is the issue, Captain?"

"Now Hash, playing dumb isn't going to do you any good," Rho said in a gentle tone, wrapping an arm around Hash's shoulder and pulling him in close. "I understand, I really do. You thought checking the tanks would be tedious, that no one would notice if you skipped it just *once* and had a little fun instead."

Though naturally smaller than Rho, Hash seemed to have shrunk in comparison out of fear. "I-I was going to get to it right after my break, I just...um, last track of time!"

"Easy to lose yourself in virtual reality like that," Rho nodded, not that it made Hash feel any less nervous. "Though if you really wanted to be bigger, all you had to do was ask. It's something I excel at."

"No need to worry Sir, it's just a—*meooooooooooooooooow!!*"

Hash's eyes bulged as his pants were pulled down and something big and cold shoved up his rear. His face contorted and he blushed, but the joy was short lived. From somewhere nearby he heard a faint hissing sound, followed by an odd sensation within his stomach. When he looked down he realized his flat middle had started swelling, fast. Captain Rho had shoved the air tank into him.

"Fortunately for us there were still a few full tanks here and there," Rho said, holding the ensign firmly in place and preventing him from wiggling free or dislodging the tank. "Now you can be the big cat you clearly desire to be!"

Ensign Hash's belly was already as large as a beach ball, giving the cat a comically-stuffed look. From experience he knew the tanks held a deceptively considerable amount of air, and were easily

capable of filling up a person completely. His smaller stature also meant there was the potential to *overfill* him. He wasn't eager to dwell on the possibility.

"C-Captain, please, I'll get right to filling those air tanks, and any other job you need me to do, just get his tank out of me!" Hash begged, still futilely struggling against the zebra's firm grasp.

"Nonsense, this is far more important than that! In fact, you should consider it a direct order to be the biggest cat you can possibly be." Rho pressed a finger hard into Hash's taut middle, prompting the ensign to gulp.

Hash was far more used to gradual inflation, but the tank jammed up his butt was on full blast. He felt like a living balloon, belly expanding in every direction as it grew bigger and bigger with each passing second. His chest and limbs were just starting to puff up as well, subtle changes that inevitably immobilize him if the air tank wasn't removed soon. The cat's mind raced to think of a way out of his punishment, but it was impossible for him to concentrate with all the hissing and creaking. There was a good chance he'd have to rely on either mercy or luck, neither of which seemed likely.

Captain Rho finally released his grip on the ensign once he was certain he was too inflated to reverse his predicament. Hash wobbled, immediately attempting to reach the air tank and stop the flow of air. Unfortunately his limbs had grown too rigid and puffy by then, the cat's frantic paws unable to even brush up against the tank. He meowed in dismay.

"I've learned my lesson Captain, I'll never slack off again!" Hash insisted. "I'll work double shifts, I'll cancel shore leave, I'll give you the names of everyone who's been swiping tanks for party nights!"

In the course of his desperate spiel the bloated cat managed to topple over onto his increasingly spherical middle, immobilized. He rocked back and forth atop his ballooning belly, face red with embarrassment. His cheeks had puffed up along with the rest of him, arms and legs gradually starting to sink into his round body. Standard uniforms were designed to stretch, and the ensign's had done so dutifully, growing right alongside him.

"Wow, Ensign, you're even bigger than I am now!" Captain Rho laughed.

Rho circled the blimping cat, poking and prodding and teasing him with glee. All Hash could do was whine and meow in response, powerless and thoroughly outranked. He didn't dare say anything worse than a polite plea, and even his squirms were rather subdued considering the circumstances. The pressure within him was becoming impossible to ignore, but the flow of air hadn't seemed to slow down in the slightest.

"C-Captain, I'm getting—*mmmmph*—getting too big!" Hash whimpered as his head sunk into his body, which was nearly a perfect sphere. Even the slightest poke sent shivers across his entire, overstretched hide.

"I'm sure you can handle a bit more, Ensign Blimp, you just have to believe in yourself!" Rho said, again giving Hash's middle a stiff poke. The cat's hide was as taut as a drum, and he moaned at the prod.

The creaks were getting louder, Hash's head spinning. He felt as if he were a deep breath away from exploding. "I c-can't—*mrrrmphh*—take much—*hmmmmph*—more!"

Hash's breaking point came abruptly, and instantly. The over inflated cat didn't even have time to react as he popped, a deafening *Boom!* filling the room as hide scraps were thrown in every direction. Rho simply closed his eyes as he was pelted by the burst ensign, chuckling to himself in the aftermath. Ensign Hash's uniform had been tossed about but remained intact, as if the cat had simply abandoned and scattered his clothes. The air tank was on the far side of the room, dented and no longer hissing out air.

Rho's foul mood had faded completely, a wide grin on his face. A command summoned a small robotic cleaner to vacuum up the scraps, which the Captain would have collected in a jar for later. Later in the day he'd need to write up an official report of the incident, in which he would describe how Hash had managed to pop himself on accident after an out-of-control inflation session. Some time after that

—maybe in a few weeks if he were feeling particularly generous—Captain Rho would put in a request for Hash to be re-formed and returned to duty. The ensign wouldn't retain his memories of what had *actually* happened, and—as usual—would like be incredibly embarrassed about exploding—*again*.

Since the cat had a history of “accidentally” bursting, Captain Rho was tempted to request he be re-formed a tad bit more durable next time. Then Hash could serve as a comfortable inflatable bed.

Rho sighed happily, strolling away from the Hash scraps as they were vacuumed up behind him...