

The Alchemical Beach Ball

By: IndigoRho

“So...why is there a giant beach ball in your living room?” Indi asked as he stared blankly at the solid white sphere.

The rather hefty midnight-blue cheetah had dropped by to visit his friend Rho, who had appeared far more interested in homework than hanging out.

“My finals project, just like I said before.” Rho was still focused on his pile of notes, the portly orange-striped zebra not even bothering to turn Indi's way.

Indi did little to disguise how unimpressed he was. “I thought you were in some fancy Applied Alchemy course. Shouldn't you be turning coal into silver or brewing a healing potion or whatever?”

“Looks can be deceiving. Kind of like how you *look* like a blueberry but are actually just a really fat cat,” Rho teased.

“Real funny coming from a marshmallow,” Indi grumbled back.

Despite the earlier warning to avoid the experiment, curiosity got the better of Indi. He poked the side of the giant beach ball, and was surprised to feel his paw sink right in. The cheetah immediately tried to pull his paw out but could barely budge it an inch; the beach ball was like glue.

Confusion turned to panic once Indi realized his paw was sinking in deeper.

Pulling harder only seemed to make the situation worse. He pulled with his free arm, leaned back with all his weight, and frantically flailed a good deal.

Color began to spread outwards from the insertion point, a dark midnight blue that matched Indi's coat precisely. Eventually Indi even noticed some black spots appearing.

Rho, help, your beach ball's trying to eat me!!” Indi hissed.

His friend was already grinning as he turned around, seemingly unsurprised by the turn of events. “Excellent, I was beginning to wonder how long it'd take you to initiate the second phase of the experiment.”

“Not funny dude, help pull me out before I get engulfed!”

Indi was elbow-deep in the gooey beach ball, and an unfortunate slip caused his other paw to get stuck as well. He chirped wildly in response.

“See Indi it's less a beach ball and more of a containment sphere,” Rho said, as if presenting the project to a class. “It envelops and absorbs anything or anyone that comes in contact with it, storing them in the form of...well I guess it *does* end up becoming a beach ball in the end. Easy to deflate and transport so the thing contained can be dealt with elsewhere. It's pattern even shifts to resemble what it holds, so convenient!”

“I already knew it wanted to eat me, now make it uneat me!” Indi's large belly brushed against the beach ball, the cheetah sinking in faster than ever.

“Oh don't worry Indi, I'll make sure you're released once the project's been turned in and graded in a couple weeks,” Rho said cheerfully. “Course reversing the process is still a bit tricky, might take some time for me to work out all the kinks. Oh well, it'll be fun!”

Before Indi could protest further he felt Rho place a hoof on his back. With a firm shove the zebra pushed his friend face-first into the ball, Indi's tail sticking straight out in surprise.

Rho carefully observed the envelopment of Indi. The cheetah's struggles pulled at the liquid vinyl material, but not enough to significantly reverse his fate. A full third of the sphere had become blue with black spots, light shining off its glistening surface. As the vinyl poured over Indi's head and back it rippled slightly before solidifying again.

Even with only his rump and legs sticking out Indi continued to squirm, not that he had any hope of escaping on his own. If he *had* shown any signs of progress Rho would have simply shoved him right back in, of course.

While the exterior of the beach ball had been liquid, the interior was something entirely else.

Dim light pierced the sides of the ball, but all Indi could see was the puffy vinyl pressing against his face. It was like sliding down the gullet of a balloon. The material pushed at his gut from all sides, practically kneading it as he descended deeper—at least he thought he was descending. The whole experience was disorienting, and the strong smell of vinyl made concentrating difficult.

The beach ball wobbled as Indi flailed, his legs rapidly sinking out of sight. There'd been audible creaks from the vinyl stretching. Engulfing Indi was essentially inflating it.

Inevitably all that remained were Indi's paws, and soon they too were enveloped until Rho was alone in the room once again.

The once white ball was now entirely midnight-blue, with a modest smattering of spots scattered here and there. A cacophony of creaks echoed out as it permanently solidified. Rho gave the ball's side a pat, feeling nothing but taut vinyl. The final experiment had been a success.

Rho gave the ball a wide hug, grinning as he heard it squeak in his grasp. He rolled it and hugged it and even gave it a little bounce. To the casual observer it was simply a regular—albeit ridiculously big—beach ball. Deflating it would only reinforce that assumption.

Rho's hoof found the valve of the beach ball and casually pulled it open, a rush of air hissing out. He moved the ball up against a wall and leaned into it with all his weight, relaxing as he waited for it to completely deflate.

Deep within the core of the beach ball, Indi was curled up tight. He felt weightless, vinyl squeezing at him all over. He lacked the will to struggle even a little, vision fading in and out. In the back of his mind he swore he could hear a hissing noise, but he was too out of it to care. As the vinyl collapsed around him he blacked out completely.

Deflating the massive beach ball took quite a while. No matter how much Rho pushed he never felt his hooves touch Indi, even once the ball was far from being a ball anymore. With glee the zebra hefted himself atop the deflating ball, enjoying it like an air mattress and burying his muzzle into the vinyl.

So much work had been put into creating his project, and it'd worked perfectly. Indi had been engulfed and absorbed, the ball itself made inert and incapable of swallowing anyone else. Sure the practical uses of such a creation were questionable at best, but Rho was confident he'd get a good grade out of it. If anything he now had a way to keep friends closer than ever—they'd just need a little shove at first.

Eventually the beach ball was flattened and folded up as neatly as possible. Rho lugged it over to a heavy duty bin and placed it inside, writing “Indi” on the side in large print. He didn't want to forget the cheetah was in there, after all...