

As I slithered along through the wet leaves and dripping bushes, I tried to resist the sneeze I could feel building up in my snout, lest my grip on my makeshift umbrella be lost. Holding the stem of an old, broad leaf in my muzzle, envying over and over the limbs that others might have been able to shield themselves with. Yet here I was, stuck awkwardly holding my head at an angle so that the leaf could catch the drops falling from above and keep them out of my eyes, a singular lack of lids making the removal of such moisture all the more aggravating. It served its purpose for now, yet with every bit of underbrush I had to slide through, that stem was getting rather worryingly bent and jostled. I had to wonder how much longer it would last, though my mind was more occupied on finding my way home.

Scents washing and mixing in the rain and visibility lowered to mere inches in front of me by the mists formed by falling drops, all I had to rely on was my hopefully-accurate sense of direction to get back to my den. My nice, dry, cozy den, just waiting for me to get back and □

A thunderous boom overhead made me suddenly grit my teeth, immediately regretting the action when the stem in my muzzle tangibly snapped. Gasping, I tried to adjust my grip, yet the falling rain mercilessly toppled the broken leaf, and my fears were realized when my lidless eyes were suddenly bombarded by drops of water, the world around me distorting into strange and surreal shapes. “Aaaah, great!” I yelled out, spitting out the broken leaf and trying to wipe my eyes with my tail, only for the falling rain to render my efforts useless.

Sighing as I accepted that my vision was a lost cause, I focused my attention on my other senses. With scent rendered unreliable as well, I had to rely on my hearing now, and the pit organs lining my upper lip picking up on lingering trails of heat, though these too were quickly being washed away by the cold rain. Virtually going blind, I cautiously felt my way through the underbrush, head low and feeling forward with my chin, hoping that I wouldn’t run afoul of something along the way.

After a span of time I had no hope of quantifying, the sensory pits on my muzzle suddenly picked up warmth, lifting up my head as I glanced half-blindly toward the source. For a moment, the instinct to run clashed with the need for shelter, and I dithered in the cold as I held my scaly lower lip in my needle-like teeth, before throwing caution to the wind; I was going to die of cold out here, but warmth meant either potential shelter, or something that was going to make sure I went a lot quicker than the cold would take me.

Gingerly, I approached the heat source, staying low to hopefully avoid drawing its attention if it happened to be alive. My body ached with the cold, yet I forced myself to hold still once I was near, watching for any hints of movement from the patch of heat that I could “see”. Whatever it was, however, it didn’t seem inclined to make a move, and so after a few moments of hesitation, I carefully slid forward once more, and gingerly felt at the heat source with my muzzle.

My heart soared the moment I recognized the shape. A den! This was a den of some sort. And a warm one, at that. That moment of elation came crashing down, however, when I realized what that could mean. Steeling myself, I cleared my throat and lifted my head, calling in down the den in the most amiable tone I could, “Hello? Is anyone home?”

Again I forced myself to wait, listening for any answer. When none came, I repeated the call, hesitating for an instant, before the pain of the cold finally forced me forward. If they weren’t home, but happened to return in the storm, I hoped that whoever lived here would be understanding of the intrusion.

Inside, the relief of the warmth was immediate, and I let out a long sigh as I slithered in deeper into the tunnel. Now that I was out of the rain, my vision was slowly starting to clear up, head

shaking to jostle the drops from my eyes. The moisture clinging to the orbs kept things blurry, but at least now I could semi-tell what I was looking at. The den was dark, as to be expected, yet not entirely so. Green patches of some unknown material let off a dim, gentle glow that wasn't even as strong as a candle, yet just bright enough that I could see the immediate path in front of me, regarding the moist earth warily. I could still feel and see the warmth around me; in fact, as I got deeper into the den, that warmth slowly grew, and those odd patches of green became more frequent.

As the water slipped down from my scales, I was more and more able to feel that the tunnel around me was singularly wet; and not with water, either. It felt heavier, more viscous than the normal moisture that a rain storm would cause. Still, I suppose it was better to be wet and warm than wet and cold, pressing on deeper into the ground. Just how deep did this den go, anyway?

Even as I pondered the question internally, I slowly became aware of the walls widening around me steadily, a green glow like those along the walls coming from further up ahead, yet this one was more intense. That brightness brought with it a toasty warmth that appealed to the cold-blooded side of me, yet caution bade me to stop, and I paused my slithering progress as my head tilted this way and that. Never before had I seen anything like this; maybe I should start heading back...

The muffled, yet deep sound of thunder from above reminded me of exactly why I was here, and I gave a shudder at the very thought of going back the way I'd come. No way was I about to head back out to freeze to death, so I might as well keep going forward to solve whatever weird mystery I'd found myself in. Thus reaffirmed of my purpose, I continued forward, determined to figure out just what in the world I was looking at.

My pace slowed as the tunnels around me continued to widen, before opening upward and outward abruptly. I paused again as I glanced side to side, struck by the realization that what I'd found myself in wasn't in fact a den, but some sort of cave. And quite the massive one at that, lit brightly by the strangest sight I'd yet come across. A massive pool of green fluid sat in the center of the cave, glowing bright with both warmth and light. Curiosity getting the better of me, I inched forward to the edge of the pool, regarding it as it shimmered and rippled almost mystically, the surface slowly churning with visible currents.

"What in the world?" I breathed to myself, looking out over the pool's surface. The ceiling of the cave rose high above, and I could just barely make out the far side of the cave from the pool's illumination, the light refracting and bouncing off the ceiling in near-hypnotic patterns. It was strangely beautiful, the way those shimmering waves reflected off of the stone above, though the appreciation of that sight was cut off when I felt a moist touch against my front coils. Glancing down, I let out a gasp and quickly slithered back, a soft sucking noise popping through the air as I pulled away from the viscous fluid. Had I been moving forward without realizing it? Or...

Staring down for a moment, fear suddenly gripped my chest when I realized what was happening; the pool was slowly, very slowly pulling itself toward me, tiny tendrils of green fluid snaking out from the main mass, before scooting the whole enormous lump in my direction, sending slow waves through the gelatinous pool. No, not a pool... this thing was alive!

Panicked, I hastily turned and slithered back toward the cave's entry, only for dread to grip me at the sight I was greeted by. Those green patches that I'd passed by were coming together, forming a plug in the narrow hole I'd used to enter the cave and heading in my direction with similarly slothful, yet all-too-inevitable movements.

There had to be another way out, I told myself, turning again and searching along the walls, even as the main pool spread out to the sides of the cave, blocking me off from getting more than half a hemisphere to myself. Heart beating rapidly and nearly hyperventilating, I slithered from one side of the cave to the other, pacing the steadily-shrinking area desperately in search of some way, any way to escape the slimy being that was contracting toward me, suddenly all-too-sympathetic of each and every meal that I'd ever caught for myself.

I coiled tight around myself as the space I had left shrank down to less than my own length in diameter, head held high and flexing myself to appear as big as possible, simply out of instinct. "S-stay back! I'm venomous!" I warned desperately, hissing hard and showing off the fangs I had in hopes that whatever this creature was could see that I wasn't bluffing.

The warning didn't even slow the thing down, so I gathered up my courage and lashed out with a few warning strikes, not quite touching the weird thing that slowly closed in around me, yet that only served to make the gooey being temporarily form pseudopods that reached out to me where I pretended to strike, only to melt back into the main mass. "I'm warning you! One bite and that's it!" I hissed again, coils tightening and head lifting higher as I felt the moist creature brushing against my sides with those hair-like filaments. It was going to engulf me at any moment now, I just knew it.

"Alright, you asked for it!" I cried out, before lashing forward with my last line of defense, striking down toward the larger pseudopod that was forming and reaching out toward my head and biting down hard. I felt my venom glands pump as I struck, fangs piercing a thick, viscous membrane and pouring what I hoped to be a deadly dose of poison into the creature. Yet in spite of the strike, the blob didn't seem to take any notice, and my last hope of survival was dashed as I felt the slime flowing over my coils, crawling all over me with those amoeboid fibers as I tried to pull my head back for another strike. If I was going down, I was going down fighting!

That effort met with sudden, unexpected resistance, and I felt a weird, sucking grip on the inside of my maw. Dread again filled me as I realized I had it wrong; I didn't grab that transparent tentacle, it had grabbed me, tiny tendrils holding firm to my teeth and fangs as I tried desperately to pull back, yet the gel that was sliding up my form held me firmly in place as I was swallowed up by the fluid that flowed up to my neck. Just as I was sure I was going to be pulled in entirely and drowned, I found that fluid tugging sensation stopped once only my head remained out of the slime's form. It proved a small blessing, as even with my head above the surface, the tendril in my mouth still blocked off my breathing, forcing me to hold my breath as I squirmed and struggled within the sludgy form. I could feel that pseudopod feeling around the inside of my mouth with those hairlike filaments, making me gag once it found the back of my throat, yet not seeming to find what it was looking for.

I didn't have time to contemplate this; with how desperate I was to drive off the monster, I'd let out quite the hiss during my strike, and was now regretting it as my lung burned for oxygen, vision starting to swim from holding my breath. This is it, I thought to myself, this is the end. At least it's a warm way to go...

No longer able to hold that breath, reflexes took over as I started to cough, violent expulsions of air pushing the slime in my maw back slightly, and I could have sworn I felt it pause its searching as I kept breathing that same bubble of air in and out. Those tendrils felt around the edges of my trachea as I coughed, and I had a feeling that's exactly what it had been looking for, bracing myself for the painful filling of my lung with alien fluid.

Yet, it never came. Still, with only my own stale breath forming a small bubble to breath in and out within the creature, I could feel my consciousness swimming. With any luck, I'd pass out before this thing began whatever it was going to do to me. Suddenly, I felt fresh air hit my tongue, and my body reflexively took in long, desperate breaths, vision slowly unclouding as the sweet, sweet air of life was breathed back into me. The slime hadn't pulled itself free of my muzzle by any means, and my swimming eyes slowly focused on the creature that held my maw hostage, only to furrow my scaly brow. A thin tunnel, almost like a long straw had formed in the being's transparent form, leading from my mouth out to the creature's skin, forming a hole for the air to reach my trachea, where the strange filaments held themselves securely. Fear mixed with confusion at this sight. If it wasn't trying to drown me, then what in the world did this thing want?

That question hung in the air as I felt the slime continuing to push sluggishly into my maw, making me gag several times as it pressed against my esophagus, slowly working its way deeper into my throat. Was this thing... trying to make me eat it? I had to admit, the flavor wasn't entirely unpleasant, a strangely-sweet, earthy taste like someone had mixed mushrooms and fruit together, but I wasn't having any of it! I tried to shake my head, knowing that my struggles were entirely in vain against the sheer strength of the thing that held me in its fluid grasp, yet I couldn't help but squirm and wiggle regardless.

The further into my gullet the slime went, the more I tried to fight back, yet my coils were tiring after a long day in the cold and wet, the fight slowly dying down to pathetic twitching within the transparent flesh of the beast. Past a certain point, and I couldn't keep myself from swallowing out of pure instinct, the unconscious action merely speeding the tendril's path down my throat, and I shuddered as I felt the hot presence enter my gut, only to pause it its pace as I felt the ticklish sensation of the slime's cilia feeling around the walls of my stomach. I could only imagine how exactly the thing knew it had come to its destination, yet the moment it had, I felt the whole monster suddenly contract, and a muffled yelp sounded through the thin pipe I had to breathe through as my throat bulged hard.

In mere seconds, I suddenly found myself much, much too full, and that feeling was only getting more intense with every forced gulp I had to take. It was like the gelatinous beast had formed a firehose right down my throat and was now pumping itself with all the strength of a waterfall right into my stomach. Shuddering, I squirmed helplessly as I felt my gut filling to a ridiculous degree, stretching beneath my scales and steadily forcing my hide to swell outward around it. Again I tried to turn my head away, yet the struggle had exhausted my muscles to the point that all I could do was whimper through the hole I'd been given to spare my breathing.

I was fuller than I'd ever been before, now, and fortunately the beast allowed me the mercy of sluggishly pulling my tail through the muck to rub at my bloated midsection. I felt tight already, wincing and shivering as ever more of the sludge flowed into me like a relentless river, until with a sudden shock the scutes on my underside started to separate, exposing pink skin to the hot goo around me. I let out a shuddering moan, the release of my plated hide starting to stretch again relieving some of the pressure on my stomach, yet still I was continually filled like some sort of balloon. I had to wonder how I hadn't burst already, feeling my swelling gut take up more and more of the length of my coils, my whole form spreading outwards into the corners of my vision through the glowing, transparent liquid.

Another sensation began to register alongside the incredible fullness, the shock of it diverting my attention away from the stuffed feeling as I felt soft currents starting to flow around me,

pulsing back and forth across my swollen belly and pushing my tail out of the way to do so. Confused as to the purpose of this, it suddenly hit me as I felt those currents sliding over my swollen form; was this thing rubbing my belly?

It certainly felt like it, from the way those currents caressed my filling gut. It actually provided a strange bit of relief, though that didn't exactly make up for the fact that the monster pumping me up like its own personal water balloon. Still... it wasn't a bad feeling, now that the panic in my chest was starting to die down. For some reason, in spite of being filled with more than enough sweet goo to surely reach max capacity several times over, that overwhelming fullness was starting to abate, dying down into a feeling more akin to pleasant satiation. It didn't take a genius to figure out that was some effect brought on by the slime itself, yet still... weird as it was, I actually found myself starting to enjoy the treatment.

No doubt drugged out of my right mind, the repressed logical part of my brain attempted to scream, yet in that moment, worry gave way to surreal serenity, my breath coming in slower, more even huffs as I slowly, ever so slowly accepted what was happening, the strain on my face giving way to a tiny, yet growing smile. That wasn't all that grew, either; in the space of the time it took for me to go from sheer panic to sedated euphoria, my coils were now nearly half as wide as I was long, and still swelling steadily. Now and then, I managed a question in my inebriated mind, asking myself why this might be happening, or what exactly this creature wanted, yet those worries were inevitably melted away by the now-pleasing sensation of the slime's rubbing currents against my gut, combined with a blissful sense of satiation as I just kept filling, an oblong, scaly ovoid with a tongue that flickered lazily within the pseudopod that flowed into my muzzle. I swear I felt that limb starting to caress under my chin, though I wasn't sure if that was a drugged hallucination or the reality of my situation; not that I particularly cared anymore, downright eager as I was for more of the whole experience.

Soon, I could feel my swelling coils pressing slightly against the back of my jaw, nearly-spherical body sloshing almost like the very slime that had rendered me into this state, my glazed eyes staring up at the patterns that shifted above me. They really were so beautiful, I thought to myself, barely registering as the flow of slime into my gut steadily petered out, though even with my veritably drunk state, I still recognized when my maw was suddenly free of that invasive arm of gel. My muzzle hung open after the slime's retreat, at least until that pseudopod gently touched against the underside of my chin and closed my jaw for me, brushing under my jaw as the mass slowly retreated back into its pool, pulling me along with it.

In my dreamy state, I simply allowed myself to be handled like the ball I'd become, not that I'd have had much agency with how incredibly bloated I was. It was all I could do just to wiggle my stumpy tail, head forced forward by the swell of my own neck. I was being cradled on my back just on the surface of the gelatinous being, in the center of the pool, where it rocked me side to side with gentle currents. Full as I was, I could do nothing to resist the steady fading of my consciousness, vision swimming briefly while I licked my muzzle, and a smile on my face as I drifted off into dreams.