

Raf's Explosive New Year

By: Indi

"I'm not a firework!" Raf growled, wobbling for emphasis. The hyena was almost completely spherical, his paws and head just barely jutting out from his blimpy body. His overstretched hide creaked louder than his overstretched white bodysuit, which shone in the light and made him look like a giant ornament or snowball. The black belt around the equator his waistline had become was slightly smaller, digging in just enough to squeeze the round grump.

"Yeah, you're more like a bomb. You'd even look like one if you'd worn that fancy new black bodysuit I got you," a blue jay said, carefully poking the bloated hyena's side with a talon. Indi's friendship with Raf was self-proclaimed, and tended to involve a lot more terrorizing than hanging out.

Raf winced at the spike in pressure from the poke, and tried to escape the pointy talons that menaced him. He only managed to wobble. "I'm not a bomb either! You can't just fill me with your damn explosive...*whatever* and blow me up!"

"Well how else are we supposed to celebrate the New Year?" Indi asked.

"Any other way! *Mrrrmph!*" Raf's face twisted as his fury caused him to swell more, paws sinking deeper into his round form. The creaks got louder, and he swore there was a strange heat building up within him. He knew he shouldn't have accepted the drink Indi had offered him. It'd inflated him so rapidly he'd barely had time to react, managing a couple steps before rolling onto his immense middle. It didn't help that he'd been large to begin with, a solid six hundred pounds. At that size inflating to full could only take seconds.

Indi felt the heat coming off of Raf and grinned. "Don't go off *too* early, firecracker. I'm so glad I perfected that explosive elixir in time for New Year's. Volatile stuff, obviously, but I've got a feeling the light show that ensues will be unforgettable!"

"Speak for yourself, I'm just going to be a blast mark and toasted scraps when it happens," Raf grumbled.

"And once the next you's been popped out of the cloning machine you'll get to see the recording whenever you want!" Indi grinned. "Heck, with how good the scanner is you might even have some memories of the second you blew."

"I don't *want* those memories." Raf winced again, his head sinking. The pressure was hard to ignore, and the heat was spreading. He doubted Indi would reverse the process, but he wasn't eager to explode yet either. He could already imagine how much he'd be teased about it. And of course there was the danger it'd become a new tradition, with Raf being turned into a bomb against his will anytime the crew wanted to celebrate.

A particularly ominous creak caused Indi to step back, but he quickly regained his courage and approached the explosive grump once more. Indi was a tad bit overly fond of inflating and popping others, taking advantage of the cloning system to justify his selfish desires. He'd even burst himself on multiple occasions, and had a stash of spare beaks to prove it.

But Raf was still his favorite to burst. There was just something wonderful about seeing the hyena become as big and round as physically possible, swelling until he literally couldn't hold together anymore. The grumbles and groans. The wobbles and worried looks as a leak sprung. The sudden widening of his eyes when the inevitable arrived. He was just immensely poppable.

"Feeling the heat, Raf? That's you turning combustible. At this point it'd be impossible to turn you back to normal." Indi gave Raf a small nudge, hearing the barrage of creaks the simple act provoked. "You should start puffing out smoke any second now as well. Every firework has a fuse, after all~"

"I'm not a—" Raf couldn't finish the protest, as his cheeks abruptly puffed up. Holding it in failed, and soon he was coughing up a small cloud of smoke. It continued drifting out of his mouth and

even nostrils a little bit after. Not enough to silence him completely, but it certainly wasn't enjoyable.

"A fall from a short height or a firm poke could set you off now. You'd make an impressive explosion, but you wouldn't be quite perfect going off prematurely." Indi resisted prodding his grump bomb further. He could do that another time, when there wasn't a chance of ending up fried in the process. Of course he'd still consider the experience worthwhile even if he ended up as ash. "Once you're complete, you'll unleash a plethora of colors and booms! Not on the same scale as a firework show planetside, but delightful nonetheless."

Expressing frustration was growing harder for the growing hyena. His face shifted wildly from anger to confusion, his concentration disrupted by the heat and pressure and smoke. He was very faintly glowing, though his bodysuit hid most of the new change. "Not...not cool..."

"Let's agree to disagree." Indi checked a clock and nearly jumped with glee. "It's almost time for your explosive finish, Raf. Eat up and blow up!"

Indi shoved a small pellet into Raf's half-open maw, and the hyena swallowed it on instinct. Almost immediately there was a rumbling in his middle, and Indi backed off. Raf creaked up a storm as he started blimping up again, his paws pulled into his volatile body entirely, his snout barely sticking out. The heat was like a bright summer day, the smoke billowing. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw himself glowing. Then his head sunk entirely.

The press of a button raised a personal shield around Indi. He watched the perfect sphere that Raf had become intently. It was quaking, creaking almost non-stop and glowing bright. There was a brief increase in Raf's vibration, before he exploded into a colorful ball of fire.

Flames of red, orange, and yellow burst forth, followed by pinks and greens and blues. Smaller sparks of color shot out, bouncing off the walls and floors of the room and exploding as well. There were cracks and blasts and plenty of shaking. The whole show was fleeting, lasting seconds. But it was just as incredible as Indi had hoped.

Once the last spark and flame had died out, Indi dropped the shield and got a closer look at ground zero. Where Raf had stood there was a large scorch mark, and little else. His bodysuit had been incinerated in the explosion, along with any hide scraps. Cleaning the mess up would actually be easier than a normal bursting.

"Oh Raf, I can always count on you to put on a spectacularly explosive show!" Indi laughed. "I think I can still improve the formula, but for now this'll still be fun to replay." The happy blue jay requested a clean up in the room and started to walk away. "Have a happy New Year, Raf~" he told the scorch mark as he left.

If it could've frowned, it would've.