

Reshaping the Crew

By: IndigoRho

Faint hunger pains stirred Raf from his slumber, hefty hyena grumbling to himself as he resisted waking. As he tried to stretch out his arms bumped against something hard that sounded like glass, and suddenly Raf didn't care so much about napping anymore. Opening his eyes revealed he was in a rather cramped glass chamber raised above the ground, which barely seemed to have enough room for him to stand. The hyena slowly managed to get up, his memory returning to him in the process. He remembered begrudgingly exploring an abandoned space station with his captain, Rho, who was convinced there might be something of value there. Of course the place had been ransacked a dozen times over by scavengers already, but Raf didn't have much of a choice but to go along. Then there'd been the strange voice from behind, and the sharp sting of being stunned unconscious.

Raf simply rolled his eyes and sighed in exasperation. Dim lighting prevented him from getting a good look at his surroundings, though he guessed he was in a factory of some kind, and Rho was coming to in a similar glass chamber parallel to his. The orange-striped zebra appeared just as confused as him, though at least he had more space to move around in, seeing as he weighed half as much as the blubbery Raf. When Rho inevitably spotted him Raf responded only by shaking his head and frowning.

"Good, you're awake!" The voice from before got both their attentions, drawing their gaze down below. "That'll make this a whole lot funner for me."

A rather obese red panda stood at a computer console, smiling deviously. He was dressed in a beat-up spacesuit that clung tightly to his rotund middle, a helmet sitting nearby. Neither Raf nor Rho recognized him, which only meant he was good at not being caught...or didn't leave witnesses.

Rho banged on the glass hard. "Hey, you've got no right to hold us like this! We were just taking a look around the place, why'd you capture us!"

The red panda didn't bother looking up, still fussing with the console. "If I answered every pointless question I was asked I'd probably be in a holding cell right now," he laughed. "Besides, I'd be more worried about what that fancy machine your stuck in does."

Displays suddenly flickered to life and the machinery began to hum, Raf and Rho looking all around nervously. Without much fanfare the red panda who'd captured them simply pressed a button and waddled off, waving as he left the room. The two glass chambers let out a strong pulse that caused their occupants to twitch and wince, a tingling sensation spreading throughout their bodies. Though they still had no idea as to the machine's purpose, both knew from personal experience the pulse was meant to transform them into something. They didn't have to wait long to find out.

Raf's widened as he watched his paws gain an unsettling gleam before small droplets of liquid began dripping from them; he was melting. Heart racing, the hyena through his whole weight against the glass chamber, but all he managed to do was bruise his shoulder and splash drops of himself all over. Rho wasn't in any better a situation, a puddle of orange and white forming beneath his hooves. There wasn't any heat, any pain, just the unnerving feeling of being unnaturally limber while gradually lightening by the second.

Panic kicked in fast, the duo shouting and banging on the glass for help that'd never arrive in time, if ever. Their ship had two more crew members waiting for their return, but for all they knew the red panda had dealt with them already. Raf growled as he nearly lost his balance, his footpaws having completely melted away, fueling the pool of tan and white below. What had been trickling was now a steady stream of molten hyena raining off him. He was feeling less and less stable as time passed, growing dizzier as he sunk. Occasionally he'd glance over at Rho, who was melting faster thanks to his lesser mass, waist deep in himself.

Rho fumed as he frantically tried stabilize his body with his advanced jumpsuit, which normally had built-in transformation features as well. Unfortunately the suit had also been affected by the pulse, displaying holographic errors as it turned to goop. In a rage he lost what little footing he still had,

almost slipping fully into the orange and white lake he'd become. He splashed and flailed, struggling to keep his muzzle above the surface. The zebra couldn't hold off the inevitable for long. With a terrified neigh he sunk, leaving behind ripples and a few fleeting air bubbles. Watching the zebra vanish made Raf whimper, knowing a similar fate was about to befall him. He stood as still as possible to prolong his doom, all sense of feeling in his body rapidly fading. A final plea for help came out as an incoherent, garbled mess, Raf blacking out as his liquification finished.

For a moment the two chambers of goop sat silent and still. A new hum arose, and suddenly two vents on the bottoms of each chamber opened, their contents emptying through tubes into a solid metal tank standing below and between them. Draining the chambers took time, the hyena and zebra having been melted into a thick goop that sluggishly flowed down the pipes. The process didn't continue until every drop had been moved into the central tank, though. More noise and hissing came from the mysterious tank after, lights flickering as what little power remaining was diverted solely to it. Minutes later the sound finally subsided, the machine's process apparently complete.

Slowly the tank split apart, creaking open to reveal the work within. Standing perfectly still was a large pool toy, and a curious one to say the least. It didn't resemble Raf or Rho, but instead appeared to be an amalgamation of both. The toy had a vibrant orange and pink mohawk that was molded to be slightly messy, atop a head that mostly resembled a hyena's with hints of equine. A painted on face gave a confused look rather than Raf's persistent scowl or Rho's grin. Its body was white with orange spots, and considerably rotund, making it look even fatter than Raf had been. Rho's hooves had been adopted, though they were puffy and useless. Not that an inanimate pool toy had any need for fingers.

Eventually the pool toy toppled over, bouncing and rolling away from the tank and into the console the red panda had been using earlier, lifeless. For a couple hours that's how it remained, in danger of becoming just another piece of discarded junk on the abandoned station, until a black goat eventually wandered into the room. August was one of the other crew members from Raf and Rho's ship, and he'd started searching the station shortly after losing contact with his friends. His attention was immediately drawn to the out of place pool toy. He looked it over thoroughly, recognizing the features of the others, and while he wasn't sure *how* such a strange transformation had occurred he was certain the toy had been made from his friends.

August quickly grabbed the massive pool toy and hurried off to the ship, often having to forcefully shove his squeaky prize through doorways due to its girth. Once back, the goat dug out some of his own personal equipment used for transformation, hoping he could fix Raf and Rho before their consciousness became permanently lost. After constant tinkering he slapped a patch on the pool toy's belly and activated it, taking a deep breath. The pool toy wobbled abruptly from the immediate shock, and then its limbs started twitching ever so slightly.

Twitches became more defined movements, and soon the pupils on the toy's painted eyes were shifting as well. The pool toy's sealed mouth opened, letting out a groan as it gradually returned to life.

"A-Aug? I feel...I feel weird," the pool toy mumbled in a voice containing hints of both Raf and Rho's.

"Uh, well, it looks like you got yourselves fused and turned into a pool toy somehow." August wasn't sure they'd realized that fact yet.

The amalgamation looked down at his puffy hooves and body, his scattered thoughts suddenly making more sense. He let out a sigh reminiscent of Raf, but with more direct anger than the usual passive frustration. "Ugh, this is just...just great."

"What the heck happened out there?" August asked.

"There was a fat red panda, and then I—we were in glass tubes, and...melting?" Having memories of two very different perspectives was disorienting, especially when he was dealing with a whole new personality that didn't quite match either Raf or Rho's. "Please say there's a way to unfuse me, I mean us—this is so weird!"

August smiled nervously. "P-probably?"

The frown the amalgamation gave instantly invoked Raf. "What do you mean *probably*?"

"If you'd just been fused together that wouldn't be an issue, but there were a lot of steps involved here!" August said. "You were melted, molded, turned into an inanimate pool toy, and then finally returned to consciousness. I can't fix that level of complexity with the stuff onboard. We'll need to head to a station with dedicated facilities, maybe set-up a consultation, then deal with tests and appointments so..."

"So I'm gonna be stuck like this for a while," the pool toy grumbled, trying to imagine enduring being fused *and* inflated for all that time.

"J-just think of it as an adventure, uh, Rhof?" August chuckled nervously.

It was apparent right away that the pool toy amalgamation wasn't necessarily fond of the name, but he also wasn't in the mood to argue against it. "Sure. Rhof." He'd have rolled his eyes if possible. "Alright, let's get going. The less time I have to spend as a big blimp the better."

The pair cleaned up and headed towards the bridge, Rhof grumbling as he managed to get stuck in the doorway. He squeezed through with lots of creaking, something he'd just have to get used to for the time being...