

Missing Label:

By: IndigoRho

Bod focused intently on the piece of machinery in front of him, barely blinking as he made subtle tweaks to the complex components within. Even the slightest mistake could have huge consequences if gone unnoticed, and the red dragon wasn't fond of failure. Of course, the fact that *he'd* most likely be the one to suffer from the device's failure was additional motivation to succeed. While Bod was enthralled by his work, the fat blue cheetah meandering around the room behind him was obviously bored. Indi was essentially mechanically illiterate, and prone to blanking out completely once things became technical. He'd dropped by Bod's lab early—ironically because he was bored—and had spent the last half-hour exhibiting zero patience and being a borderline nuisance.

Indi spun around in an office chair that groaned beneath his weight. “Yo Bod, is there anything to drink around here?”

“Yeah, there should be a few bottles of soda and some water in the minifridge,” Bod said, never taking his eyes off the device. “Can you grab me one of the waters while you're at it?”

“Sure.” Indi tried scooting over to the fridge in his chair, but his bulk simply proved too much, forcing the lazy cheetah to stand up and waddle the rest of the way.

Despite what Bod had said, the fridge was anything but “mini”, and Indi found it nearly barren aside from a few bottles that appeared to have lost their labels at some point. Indi wasn't too picky about the brand, though, and quickly grabbed something for himself and Bod. He'd popped the lid off his soda and chugged half of it by the time he'd reached Bod's workstation. Bod had worked up a considerable thirst himself, downing the water almost as fast as Indi had his drink. There was an unexpected hint of flavor in the liquid, though the dragon shrugged it off so he could return to his task.

As soon as Indi finished his soda he let out a thunderous belch that rattled beakers and nearly caused Bod to punch a whole in the device with a screwdriver. Rather than feel embarrassed, Indi took pride in the display, patting his gut with a paw and acting like he'd achieved a grand accomplishment. A second, smaller belch interrupted his private celebration, though. Then a third, and a fourth. The cheetah tried to cover up the sudden belching fit with a paw, muffling them slightly. While he had yet to notice, every time he burped his belly swelled a little, steadily growing rounder and straining the buttons of his green shirt.

“Whoa Bod, what the—uurrrrrp—heck kind of soda did you stock that—uuuuuurrrrrppp—fridge with!” Indi managed. “I mean, it tastes great, but it's—urrrp—carbonated like crazy.”

“Nothing new, maybe you grabbed one from a bad batch or something,” Bod said, more interested in his work than Indi's soda problems.

Two of the buttons on Indi's shirt snapped apart as his gut continued to swell, though the belches covered the noise. “I guess that makes sense. I'm starting to get hungry now, though. You almost finished with that thing?”

“Just a few more minutes. Don't worry bud, you'll be stuffing yourself huge in no time.” With his attention split between completing his work and placating his impatient friend, Bod missed the faint hissing coming from his own, slim middle, which had started to round out slightly.

“Cool, I can't...” Indi swiftly clamped his paws down on his maw as he felt another large belch approaching, and his speed paid off as he blocked it completely. Unfortunately the act did more bad than good, as his belly suddenly ballooned out dramatically, snapping apart the remainder of his buttons all at once.

Indi finally looked down, and chirped in dismay as he realized his gut had grown considerably. He pressed his paws into his taut middle and gave it a shake to figure out what was filling it. The act only made things worse. His belly swelled as soon as he moved it, and the cheetah was forced to suppress another string of belches, which in turn only caused him to bloat up even more. Having often been the victim of inflation pranks, Indi's first thought was that Bod had laid an elaborate trap as

revenge for one of the many times the cheetah had pranked him. Indi turned towards Bod to accuse him of foul play, but the movement led to him ballooning outward so much he lost his balance, falling onto his massive belly with a loud chirp.

Bod looked over his shoulder to glare at the cheetah, though his look quickly turned to one of confusion as he saw Indi's unexpected expansion. "Indi what the heck are you doing?"

"Stop playing dumb Bod, you spiked your soda, didn't you!" Indi shouted, paws flailing as he desperately tried to stand back up, his middle swelling even more. "Taking advantage of my unwavering trust to turn me into a cheetah blimp! Shame!"

"How would I have known you'd ask for a soda? And why would I inflate you here when I already arranged a much more clever trap at dinn...oops." Bod stopped himself far too late.

Indi's paws no longer touched the ground. "Ha, I knew it! This is why I was gonna put a bunch of inflation patches on your seat the minute we got there!" Of course that wasn't the actual reason the cheetah had been plotting against his friend. As he tried to bluff, though, he noticed something odd with the dragon. "Uh, Bod, you been sneaking a few puffs on an air tank or something."

Bod raised an eyebrow before cautiously glancing down. The dragon's eyes went wide as he looked just in time to see the first of his yellow chest plates separate with an audible *click*, his middle as round as a beachball. Only now did he feel a warm pressure building in his middle and the almost sizzling hiss that accompanied it. On instinct Bod tried to force his gut back down to size with his claws, but doing so prompted a sudden burst of expansion, his chest plates loudly spreading away from one another. A slight puff of steam escaped his lips in the process.

"What'd you do to my water!" Bod immediately accused, his belly growing more unwieldy by the second.

The seams on Indi's shirt—which had rolled up his chest as he inflated—tore apart. His middle was so round that any excess movement threatened to roll the ballooning cheetah, so he nervously maintained his balance by being as still as he could given the circumstances. "I didn't do anything to your dumb water! Don't blame me cause you cheaped out an bought some weird store brand stuff!"

A steady stream of steam began to waft out of Bod's mouth, though the venting didn't appear to inhibit his expansion at all. As a magma dragon, Bod was used to water occasionally reacting to him in some way, but not this dramatically. "Huh? There wasn't anything store brand in that fridge, just a few normal things and...oh no."

Bod hadn't paid the bottle of water any mind before, but now that he was actually looking at it, things were just as he'd feared. The dragon tried to keep his lab organized, but the last few days had been so hectic he'd stored a few of his more volatile failed experiments in the fridge as a temporary measure until he could move them to a secure containment chamber. His completely drained water bottle had held one such experiment, and he could only assume Indi's "soda" had held the other.

"All those options and of course you grabbed the bad experiments instead of actual drinks!" Bod said.

Indi winced as his hide grew tauter, a few creaks coming from his overinflated body. "They were pretty much the only things in there, and you didn't label them at all!" The pressure was just beginning to feel uncomfortable, and Indi was concerned the expansion wasn't stopping. "W-when do the effects end!"

"Not till long after we've both been reduced to piles of confetti!" Bod was cradling his belly in his claws, feeling his hide stretch inch by inch. "If I'm lucky I can reach a pump in time and deflate myself, though."

Indi let out a brief sigh of relief before thinking about what Bod had said. "Wait, what about *me*?"

"Only got time to keep one of us intact and you're probably about to burst buddy, so tough luck!" Bod answered, much to the cheetah's dismay.

Bod grinned as he let Indi brood on his fate, setting his sights on the industrial pump he'd built

into the far wall just for emergencies like this one. Not wanting to waste precious time, the dragon rushed towards his salvation, his balloon belly bouncing with every strained step. Unfortunately such haste was his undoing. Every reckless step disturbed the concoction in his stomach, fueling the reaction and causing Bod to swell even more. He didn't realize his mistake until far too late, and Bod didn't even get half-way to the pump before losing his balance and falling right onto his cushioned middle. A burst of steam hissed from his mouth and nostrils while his body groaned as it blimped further.

“Ha, that's what you get for ditching me!” Indi shouted in triumph, before a loud creak quickly reminded him of his own predicament.

Despite indulging in inflation regularly—often to the point of popping—Indi wasn't quite as durable as his friends, and could expand to about six feet in diameter before tearing apart. He'd never been great at estimating size, but the intense internal pressure and persistent tingling sensation were clear signs he was nearing his limit. Worse yet, his belly had expanded atop something small yet sharp, which was slowly digging into his weakening hide. Indi let out a pitiful moan as he felt the weight of his blubbery body pressing down on his middle, unable to think straight as the end approached. A single belch was the final straw. The cheetah let out a quiet burp, which wobbled his gut just enough to scrape against the edge of the bottle cap beneath him, creating a tiny tear that swiftly spread across his entire body.

A brief chirp of surprise was drowned out by a much louder bang as the immense build-up of carbonated gas tore the cheetah apart while escaping. Bod closed his eyes as blue scraps of hide flew across the room, littering every corner and pelting the dragon. The force of Indi popping also caused Bod to sway back-and-forth on his own middle, leading to another sudden swell. He was already as large as Indi had been before exploding, but Bod's body could stretch twice as far as the cheetah's on a good day. Not that the feat was of much consolation to the dragon. Creaks, groans, and hisses echoed around as Bod continued to grow, his back nearing the ceiling and his right side a wall. The sensitive hide originally shielded by his belly plates was on the verge of becoming translucent from being stretched so thin, thought he foggy white cloud of steam building in his middle wasn't much to behold.

Bod still held onto to a slight hope he'd outlast the volatile drink he'd chugged, though even if he did he was certain he'd be fragile enough to be popped by a stiff breeze. He tried not to think too much about how inconvenient the re-formation process was for him, how exhausted he'd be once his body rebuilt itself from the largest scrap, all the potential lost productivity. Ignoring the creaks was impossible, though. His body was finally pinned to the ceiling by his ballooning belly, and Bod grunted as he looked upon the mess his oblivious friend had left after bursting, knowing he was about to add to it himself. He'd be finding bits of hide for weeks considering his luck. The first tear formed on the center of his upper chest, right where a yellow plate connected to his hide. A tiny geyser of steam hissed from it, giving Bod far more time to contemplate his doom than he'd of liked.

New geysers formed soon after on the other chest plates. The dragon's body rumbled right before the swarm of tears spread to meet, and Bod exploded into a thunderous cloud of steam and scraps. His yellow plates were flung in all directions with more force than the normal hide bits, bouncing off the walls and knocking things over while not being overly destructive. When the steam cloud finally settled and dispersed, the only evidence left of the accident was the mess of blue and red confetti, along with the assortment of scattered yellow plates. The second Indi and Bod re-formed they would likely continue their argument over who was to blame, but until then the pair would peacefully hang out as hide scraps.