

Shinden's Puffday Flight

By: IndigoRho

Shinden let out a sigh of relief as he arrived at the airstrip. It was the white-and-gray sabertooth wolf's birthday, which was one of the most dangerous days of the year for his waistline. For some reason his friends loved expanding him then, despite his simple wish to be mobile. Air tanks, helium tanks, spiked blueberry pies, over-carbonated sodas—all merely a few of the various ways others had inflated him on past birthdays. Of course he'd managed to get most of them back in turn, but Shinden still felt he was excessively targeted.

Just that morning Shinden had succeeded in avoiding obvious attempts by his roommates to blimp him up. He grinned as he remembered leaving the devious pair creaking and bouncing along the ceiling of their apartment. Perhaps spending a few hours as his birthday balloons would make them think twice about holding him another “puffday” celebration.

Fortunately the wolf was certain he'd be safe at the airstrip and finally experience a birthday without becoming a blimp. He could just enjoy a nice, inflation-free flight instead.

“Shinden, I was hoping to find you here!”

Shinden froze instantly as he recognized the voice behind him. He turned to face the hefty midnight-blue cheetah heading his way.

“Indi!” Shinden smiled and waved, but he kept a suspicious eye on his friend.

He didn't appear to be carrying any suspicious tanks or hoses, no pastries or drinks. Still, Shinden wasn't about to give Indi the benefit of the doubt. The cheetah was rather persistent in his attempts to inflate him.

“I have to head out on a trip soon, but I wanted to make sure to wish you a Happy Birthday before I left,” Indi said. “When I called your place no one seemed to be home, so I got lucky and guessed you might have come out here to fly.”

The cheetah's claims made sense, and Shinden had heard about his trip. He allowed himself to relax a little. “Yeah, weather's great so I wanted to treat myself for my birthday. Nothing better than soaring through the sky.”

“Well hopefully you get to spend a lot of time in the air today,” Indi grinned, pulling out a stick of gum and tossing it into his mouth. He chewed a couple times before holding the package towards Shinden. “Want one?”

Shinden cautiously grabbed a piece. Even gum could make you swell under the right circumstances, a fact the wolf knew from firsthand experience. However, the gum didn't smell of blueberries—or any other fruit for that matter—and Indi was chewing away at some of it without any signs of expanding. Maybe it really was just a normal piece of gum.

Not wanting to spend his whole birthday paranoid, Shinden accepted the gift and began to chew. Thankfully there was nothing strange about the taste, a mint flavor that felt like a refreshing breeze rushing down his throat. Unfortunately that breeze persisted as it swirled within the wolf's stomach, causing his middle to bloat slightly.

As the two friends chatted Indi snuck glances at Shinden's middle, which was getting rounder and rounder by the second. Shinden himself was blissfully unaware, distracted by the conversation. The deception couldn't last forever, though. As Shinden was cheerfully describing his intended flight plan his voice broke, jumping a pitch or two so suddenly the wolf stopped talking.

“Durf?” Shinden frowned as his voice came out just as squeaky as before. An attempt to clear his throat sounded just as high pitched. It was as if...as if he'd inhaled helium.

With dread Shinden looked down. He was sporting a beach ball belly, his brown flight jacket just beginning to unzip as it struggled to handle his growth. He doubted his middle was going to stop swelling any time soon.

Shinden spit out the gum in annoyance, which prompted a chuckle from Indi. “Yeah that's not

gonna do you much good. The first couple chews are what inflates you—guarantees you end up nice and bloated! Fortunately my piece was something completely different.”

“Indi when I said I wanted to fly on my birthday this isn't what I meant!” Shinden squeaked, much to his frustration.

“Well it'll be more floating than anything else, but I promise the Shindenblimp will soar to some extent!” Indi laughed.

A scowl was the only response Indi got from the wolf. His flight jacket had come completely undone, a strip of white fur peeking out beneath his shirt. For a moment he considered hurrying off to the hangar to find something to deflate with, or at least a roof to be under, but there was no way he'd make it in time. More than likely he'd simply end up tiring himself out as he waddled and floated up; Shinden wasn't about to give Indi that satisfaction.

Shinden's beach ball middle had become a full blown balloon, the wolf forced to widen his stance as even his limbs began to puff up. His clothes were stretching to keep up with his expansion, but there was only so much they could do. His belt and pants creaked from the strain, jacket and shirt clinging tightly to the upper half of his rotund body.

The influx of helium was making Shinden lighter and lighter by the second. He wobbled frequently as he fought to adjust to his decreasing weight, and eventually felt as if a stiff breeze could send him rolling right down the tarmac. His snout and cheeks swelled, and even his ears appeared slightly puffier than usual.

With a whimper one of the inflating wolf's shoes finally lifted off the ground, followed shortly by the other. Barely a foot in the air, Shinden flailed about, slowly rotating till his nose was pointed downward. As he wobbled Indi retrieved a rope he'd kept hidden until then, latching one end to Shinden's belt with a clip.

“Can't have you escaping now,” Indi said, circling the wolf and poking his taut sides as he very slowly continued to rise. “I wonder how much I could make selling tickets for scenic blimp rides?”

“Less than I could make selling ad space on the city's largest cheetah balloon!” Shinden replied.

As Shinden grew bigger and rounder his limbs were gradually enveloped, leaving only his shoes and puffy paws poking out from his spherical body. He was gaining a noticeable sheen, just like a real balloon, undoubtedly another “fun” effect of the prank gum. The inflated wolf's hide creaked lightly as he moved. Even after becoming an orb as wide as he was tall he continued to swell in every direction.

Shinden's high-pitched voice prevented him from vocally complaining, but as he frowned in Indi's direction he noticed something of interest. The opposite end of the rope attached to him had coiled—and Indi was standing right in the middle of it. Indi was too busy gloating about his prank to notice he was in danger of being wrapped up, and Shinden certainly didn't feel the need to warn him. Perhaps he'd get some payback right away.

Sure enough, once Shinden had risen high enough the loop of rope beneath Indi's paw tightened, and the cheetah let out a confused chirp as he fell on his butt. Indi rocked back and forth as he tried in vain to reach the rope tied around his ankle. Soon he too was leaving the ground, the massive Shinden providing more than enough lift. The frantic cheetah meowed and shouted to no avail, doing little more than causing Shinden to bob up and down.

Shinden grinned wide as he watched his unexpected passenger panic. “What's the matter Indi? Only makes sense for you to take a test ride on the Shindenblimp if you're going to sell tickets!” The laughter that followed was squeaky but he didn't care.

“L-let me down you menace!” Indi pleaded, swaying upside down with his fingertips barely able to brush the tarmac.

“I don't know, it's suddenly rather nice up here,” Shinden replied. “Maybe I'll just drift around a while and enjoy the sights. Good thing you make such a good anchor, otherwise I'd float right off!”

Indi fumed, unable to believe he'd found himself in such a situation. He was *supposed* to be poking and teasing a wolf balloon, not being held captive in a humiliating position! The sore sport was

reduced to pouting.

As triumphant as he could be considering the circumstances, Shinden decided to make the best of things. He doubted he'd be stuck in the air for too long, and once he was deflated he'd likely still have plenty of time for a real flight. Of course he'd have to make sure Indi was sitting nice and tight in a hangar, filled with enough air to put him in a daze and ensure the cheetah didn't try any more pranks that day. The thought widened the smile on the inflated wolf's face.