

It's a Blast – Jac vs Indi

By: IndigoRho

Indi stretched in his seat, the plump midnight-blue cheetah letting out an exaggerated yawn of boredom. “Jac this is the worst part of the trip. There's just nothing to do but sit for hours!” He whined.

To his left a pool toy fox was busy keeping an eye on their ship's course. “You *could* always run an analysis of the survey information we gathered. Or inventory all the samples we collected. Or note down which supplies will need to be restocked. Or...”

“Alright, alright,” Indi interrupted. “Sitting isn't so bad after all.”

Before Jac could make a snarky remark an alert came across his console. “Huh, getting some really weird energy readings from a nearby nebula. Didn't see those when we were passing by earlier.”

“Probably just a ship, then.”

“Too big to be a ship—at least any ship normally in the area. I'm taking us in for a closer look.”

Indi objected weakly, but Jac ignored him.

The mysterious energy reading didn't change until the moment the ship had entered the nebula completely, when it surged dramatically. Jac and Indi had no time to react as a flash of light blinded them.

Jac and Indi felt the backs of their chairs vanish, but as they instinctively braced themselves they didn't fall down. In fact, they were standing, somehow, despite never getting up. As the flash subsided and their eyesight returned, both were stunned to realize they were each behind a podium—and that a large, cheering audience was before them. They appeared to be in a studio of some sort.

Amidst the confusion Indi let out a chirp and a squeak in surprise. The flash that had brought them to the strange studio had also transformed the cheetah into a living pool toy. He creaked as he frantically examined his new form, struggling to adjust to how much lighter he felt filled with air.

Jac couldn't help but smile at his clumsiness. “The new look's an improvement! Maybe it'll be permanent,” he snickered.

Suddenly a panel retracted in the floor and a robot rose up to increased cheers. “Welcome everybody to another episode of “It's a Blast!”, the most popular—and only—interdimensional game show!

While the audience applauded, Jac and Indi were left even more confused than before.

“Our first lucky contestant today is Jac!” the apparent host continued, waving an arm at Jac but still facing the audience. “He is an accomplished emperor, explorer, and expander! And his opponent is Indi, the ship's cat!”

“Hey I do other stuff too!” Indi assisted, but by then the Host had already moved on.

“Now for new viewers out there, let me go over the rules of this specific game. Two players have been teleported from a random dimension to engage in a game of chance. On the podiums in front of each there are three unmarked buttons. One will inflate you, one will *deflate* you, and the last will do neither, but will boost the power of the next pump—whether for yourself or your opponent only time will tell. Of course the buttons are randomized after every press, so the players will never be sure which does what!”

The audience was particularly fond of that aspect, while Jac and Indi understandably were not.

“Over multiple rounds each player will simply press a button, and if the result causes you to pop or completely deflate, you lose!”

A hose snaked its way out of Jac's podium, while a robotic hand swiftly opened his valve so the hose could enter, a puff of air briefly escaping. The same thing happened to Indi.

Indi pulled at the hose to no avail. “I don't remember signing up for this! What if we just don't play?”

“Oh in that case the pumps will be turned on full blast and two new players will be brought in once your scraps have been cleaned up!” Laughter erupted from the audience as Indi stopped messing

with his hose. “Though I'm certain you'll both be eager to play once you learn the grand prize: a year's supply of fresh seafood!” The Host pointed at a nearby curtain, which swung open to reveal crate after crate of seafood.

A loud chime rang out, and both the Host and Indi turned to face its source: Jac's podium. The fox had slammed his puffy mitt down on one of the buttons. “What? It looks really good.”

Behind the two contestants a screen lit up, showing smiling face shots of each with the number five below them. In between Jac and Indi's faces a bold “+1” also appeared.

“It looks like the first round is beginning with good luck for Jac, who has avoided getting inflated or deflated and boosted the pump!” the Host declared.

Indi gave Jac a scowl and looked down at his own podium. Sure enough, there wasn't any difference between the three, no hint at what they would do. His mitt hovered above one, then another, before selecting the third. There was a loud buzz instead of a chime.

Right away Indi's podium began to whirl. The cheetah winced as he felt the air steadily sucked out of him. He'd hit deflate. His whole body creaked faintly as it became less rigid, less round. Legs nearly buckled as the lack of air weakened them, and Indi felt tired all of a sudden, as if he were out of breath.

By the time the pump stopped Indi was forced to lean into the podium for support, afraid he'd crumple otherwise. The “+1” disappeared from the screen, and Indi's face shot changed to be slightly concerned and noticeably deflated. Below the five changed to a three.

“Jac currently has a comfortable lead, but the game is far from over!” the Host bellowed to applause. “And Indi, don't worry about getting too deflated to press a button. If for some reason you're unable to, one will be randomly selected for you!”

The assurance did little to improve Indi's mood.

Just like that the first round of the game had ended, and now it was time for Round Two. Emboldened by his early luck, Jac confidently hit a button—only to hear the buzz of an incorrect answer. His podium whirled, air sucked out of his body. He didn't deflate as much as Indi had, but it was enough to make the fox feel odd. Indi's choice also produced a buzz, but he was relieved to feel the air rushing into him and not out. Both pool toys were even heading into Round Three.

More bad luck for Jac, a buzz and a whirl as he lost more air. He didn't need to brace himself like Indi had at that point, but he was far from feeling a hundred percent. His ears drooped slightly and his tail sagged, while his snout looked a bit crooked. Indi—on the other hand—was rewarded with a chime and boosting the pump.

The first three rounds had gone by shockingly fast, though Jac and Indi weren't sure if they should feel relief or not. Neither were eager to end up as a pile of vinyl—ruptured or otherwise. Being at the whims of fate only made the experience more nerve wracking.

Two more chimes rang out during Round Four, and the pump boost rose to “+3”. “Our contestants have managed to boost the power of the pumps a fair bit going into Round Five!” The Host chuckled. “If either has the poor luck of hitting deflate they'll undoubtedly have all the air sucked right out of them! But if they hit inflate, they'll end up rather bloated and creaky! Hitting boost will only delay and empower the inevitable, but no matter the result our viewers will get quite the show!”

Jac snuck a peak at the screen, and the pump boost that dominated it. It was only a number, but it was an ominous one for a pool toy who very much wanted to retain *some* air. He hesitated longer than usual over the buttons on his podium, selecting one with uncertainty.

The resulting buzz made Jac gulp. He looked down at the hose, and when the pump came to life he momentarily relaxed as he felt fresh air gushing into his valve. It only took a few seconds for Jac to return to his normal capacity, but of course his inflation had only just begun. Swiftly the fox's belly ballooned outward, his vinyl creaking as it stretched. His limbs were puffing up, face getting rounder.

As Jac's middle pressed against the podium he took a few careful steps back, the hose thankfully extending when necessary. Jac let out a nervous “meep!” as he found himself too pumped up to move.

Even once the inflation ceased the creaking lingered for a bit, returning whenever Jac made the slightest wobble.

“Now *that's* a good look for you, Jac!” Indi laughed. “A fitting size for an emperor.”

The cheetah's smug attitude faded the second he hit a button and heard the buzz. More air was stolen from him, and once again he was left leaning against the podium.

“Our contestants are quite the contrast, yet they're both equally close to defeat!” the Host said in an excessively cheery manner, much to Jac and Indi's annoyance. “With Jac at seven, only a few more pumps will take his hide past its limits. But with Indi at three, he's at risk of becoming an inanimate pile ready to be folded up and placed into storage! And of course starting with Round Six all of the point values will be doubled. They'll inflate more, deflate more, and boost more. Who will be the last pool toy left standing? We're about to find out!”

Jac struggled to reach his podium once the next round began, creaking up a storm as he tried to overcome the barrier his belly had become. He could only reach a single button—and just barely—having no choice but to press it. A chime rewarded him. As promised, a large “+2” appeared on the screen, the point values of the buttons having increased.

Knowing he had a one in three chance of losing all his air, Indi inevitably pressed a button. There was dread after the buzz, followed by relief once he started swelling. Not nearly as accustomed to being a pool toy as Jac was, Indi stumbled about as he grew bigger and rounder and creakier. With his paws so puffed up he quickly lost balance and rolled over onto his middle, chirping as he felt a brief surge of pressure. Once he'd settled it was clear he wouldn't be able to reach a button anymore.

It'd taken only a single round to tie the two contestants up again, both wobbling and creaking. Their face shots on the screen looked nervous as well, puffed up cheeks and snouts reflecting light.

Still restricted to a single button, Jac pressed it after some effort. Unfortunately his luck didn't continue. Hissing accompanied the swelling, and even Jac couldn't stay standing as he blimped up. Another “meep!” when his middle pushed into the podium, the pool toy looking more like a beach ball than a fox. The creaks were louder and longer than ever. Jac felt tremendously full and taut, as if one more puff would burst him. The pressure left him vaguely dazed.

Jac being so close to popping wasn't enough to rid Indi of his own worries of becoming a scrap pile. He made a weak effort to reach a button—any button—but didn't get close. Eventually one lit up on its own, and a buzz and a hiss prompted Indi to chirp. The cheetah rose atop his belly as he expanded further, just as much as Jac had. The studio filled with the sounds of the two contestants creaking, only occasionally drowned out by cheers and laughter from the audience.

Indi swelled right up against Jac, nearly rolling him over in the process. When the pump stopped both were sitting at nine. Someone popping was all but guaranteed, and the audience loved it.

“We're heading into Round Eight, which looks to be the final one with how blimped up our two contestants have become! Time to find out which one will go home a winner, and which one will...Have a Blast!”

Jac and Indi both looked towards Jac's podium as a button was chosen for him. There was a buzz, and a moment of silence as they waited to see if the fox would gain or lose air. A muffled *mmph!* came from Jac as he felt his internal pressure increasing, air rushing in. His eyes darted all around as he felt his vinyl being stretched thin, far too thin. He was pushing into and over the immovable podium, into the studio lights above.

It was the strained seam down his middle that failed in the end. In a flash one tear became many, Jac lifting upward from the force of so much air escaping all at once. A few scraps of vinyl flew into the crowd—snatched as souvenirs—but for the most part Jac remained intact. He fell back to the floor flat and deflated, asleep until he could be repaired and reinflated.

Indi was far too inflated to actually celebrate his victory, still feeling like a pin could pop him at any second.

“And after an incredibly blast from Jac our newest winner is Indi!” The Host shouted, giving

the cheetah a hard pat on the side that made him chirp in distress. “We hope to see you all next time for another exciting episode of “It's a Blast!”.”

The blinding flash returned, and when the late retreated he found himself back on the ship. Unfortunately the cheetah hadn't been returned to normal, or even deflated, and was wedged tight in the cockpit. Jac was draped over the grand prize of dozens of crates of seafood in the back.

Indi whined as he felt numerous things poking his taut and fragile hide. The command console, the seats, a spare space helmet, the crates. The pressure was immense, Indi unable to keep his focus. Creaks drowned out his whines. Inevitably he ruptured, the deflated pool toy bouncing around the cockpit before landing in a heap on the floor.

With no one at the helm the ship was left adrift. Someone was bound to come across it eventually, and hopefully they would be generous and repair the pair of burst pool toys abandoned in the cockpit. Hopefully...