

“Ridge Racer! Ridge Racer! Ridge Racer!”

“Okay, okay!” the tigress chuckled, booting up the game in question while ZX investigated the bags of food she had delivered.

“Mmm! Thanks!” he said brightly, digging out a bottle of soda and big bag of his favourite chips to get the evening started on a good note.

“No problem at all, sweetie,” she smiled, placing the keyboard, mouse, and controller where they were most accessible for ZX: atop his belly. “I’ll be at the party for a few hours at least, but I’ll pick something up for you on the way home. Sound okay?”

The fox beamed and nodded, already clicking through the game’s menus to find the race at which he’d left off.

“Atta boy,” she said softly, patting his thickly cushioned arm and then heading for the door. She paused at a mirror, checking out her flapper outfit one last time before leaving ZX on his own.

They had both been looking forward to that night and their respective activities for some time. The tigress had been delighted to be invited to her co-worker’s twenties-themed party as it gave her the first opportunity in a long time to immerse herself in her favourite fashion period and, hopefully, be surrounded by some glorious Art Deco for a couple of hours.

ZX’s plans were far less extravagant and, by the measures a lot of people used, nothing at all about which to get excited. However, ZX being ZX, he was thrilled by every minute of gaming and every scrap of food provided to him, which meant that an entire evening spent playing his favourite games with ample edible supplies provided by his roommate was something that had him literally vibrating with excitement.

The intense jiggling that had taken over every inch of his adipose-laden body – from his cheeks to his cankles – subsided shortly after his stationary bouncing had, for he had located the most recently unlocked race: it was the penultimate in this particular series and he had already failed to reach the required objective of first place twice. His brow furrowed into his game face; his car was selected, his fingers were ready, his mouth was full of chips, and tonight was going to be the night.

Nitrous straight off the start line! He blew straight past three cars before they reached the first corner, then slid neatly between the wall and a fourth as they rounded the bend. Drifting, he remembered from the last time he’d played, was the key on this circuit: after the first turn came a tricky series of half a dozen hairpins with barely enough time between them to flick the car around for the next; so easy to get wrong, but if he could just get his nitrous fully recharged for the long straight that followed...

Boom! Nailed it!

The fox flew along the straight, motoring past several more opponents who hadn’t quite been so successful around those downhill hairpins. The rest of the lap was along narrow, winding streets that gave little opportunity for overtaking, but plenty of chances to crash.

He had driven the perfect race as he crossed the line to begin the final lap. He was in first, though he had no clue whether his nearest rival was right behind him or several seconds back.

Hairpin, hairpin, hairpin: all navigated on the ideal line, the nitrous bar filling steadily with every successful drift.

He drifted a little too far on the fourth in the sequence, compromising his trajectory for the fifth; he would have to slow down a little to compensate.

Gah! Things went further wrong still around the next-to-last hairpin as the car slithered to the very outside of the track.

“Nooooooooooooooooo!” ZX whined as he hit the wall on the exit of the sixth turn and the red car he’d dispatched so cleanly a lap before streaked past him.

A blast of nitrous got him back on terms with the Red Devil, as he decided to call it on the spur of the moment. He knew he couldn’t get back past through the claustrophobic lanes the course took them down next – they reminded him of the long trudge to the kitchen when his roomie wasn’t around, barely scraping through over-narrow doorways – he would have to drift like a madman and hope he could boost his way to victory on the final stretch.

He was faster than the Red Devil, taking those twisting corners at lightning speed while whoever was driving ahead of him hit those apexes at a comparatively pedestrian pace; ZX giggled to himself as he imagined Satan in a racing helmet, glancing in his rear-view mirror at the blubbery mountain of fox fat chasing him down.

Disaster! The amusing mental image was his downfall: he’d gone on autopilot for a fraction of a second and hit the back of Beelzebub, sending him into another wall while the Hellmobile – *maybe that’s a better name* – made its getaway.

ZX blasted the nitrous as planned as he came out of the final turn, but Lucifer had saved up some boost of his own.

The hours passed in a fusion of deep frustration and deepest enjoyment as the fox time and again tried to defeat the antichrist and his dastardly track. Every time he managed to get one aspect of the race perfect some other part would catch him out; sometimes even the straights proved difficult as evidenced by him boosting directly into the wall several times.

In between races he polished off whatever snack on which he happened to be feasting, washing it all down with a big gulp of soda, then declaring his readiness for another try with a long, rich, resonating burp.

At last, though, after what felt like hundreds, if not thousands of attempts, ZX came skidding around the final corner in a class of his own, boosting across the finish line only to boast his mastery of the course to the pixelated crowd.

“I did it!” he cried jubilantly, throwing his paws into the air with a great wobbling of upper arms and man boobs.

“Nice job!” called a voice from the hallway.

ZX jumped, bouncing his keyboard and several empty wrappers off his prodigious paunch. His roomie was home and she had brought some presents.

“Pizza?” she offered, holding up a stack of half a dozen flat boxes.

His mouth opened wide in a broad grin, bright with innocent and genuine delight.

“Pizza!”