

More than a Game

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Royal shuffled through a deck of cards, the pink poodle taking the occasional moment to read their text but mainly looking at the art. Most depicted colorful bottles, fantasy creatures, or wizards becoming the victims of strange spells. Not surprising for a game called Mage's Brawl.

"This is crazy, I don't think I've even heard of half these cards before," Royal said as he finished skimming the deck. "You seriously just found them hiding in the attic, Medley?"

The skunk sitting across from him grinned and nodded. "Yep! I accidentally knocked over a stack of boxes while putting stuff away up there and these came spilling out of the bottommost one. They've probably been there for years."

"I bet these are from one of the first sets or something. We should duel each other with them!" Royal asked, blue eyes begging from behind his glasses.

"Sure!" Medley grabbed the second deck. "I think I remember most of the rules."

The pair swiftly shuffled their decks and arranged themselves on the floor, drawing fresh hands and taking the time to examine what they'd pulled. A flip of the coin made Medley the starting player. After another minute of thought the skunk cautiously placed a card down in front of him, reading the text aloud for Royal's sake.

"Unstable Form: Target opponent becomes Liquid. Huh, never heard of that keyword," Medley muttered.

To both their surprise the text on the card began to glow, followed by a faint pulse of energy erupting from the card. Medley and Royal nearly jumped back, an odd chill running up Royal's spine. Before either could question the strange occurrence, Royal felt his paws moisten, almost as if they'd been dipped in water. The poodle raised a paw up to his face and realized with horror droplets of pink and blue dripping off it; he was melting. Only a drip at first, the transformation swiftly turned into a trickle, then a stream. His heart raced as a swirling pool of light and dark pink formed beneath him, fearful moving would only make the situation worse somehow. Medley was just as stunned, but could do little else than watch his friend's plight continue.

Royal's clothes quickly soaked through, becoming looser and looser as the poodle melted. His glasses slipped from his muzzle and fell to the floor, and his whole body grew wobbly and unstable, till he inevitably fell over. The poodle's arms dispersed with a splash when he tried to brace himself. The rest of his body held together for only a few seconds longer, then deformed into a pulsating pool that resembled Royal merely in color, not shape.

"R-Royal?" Medley said, hoping he was imagining the whole ordeal.

The puddle abruptly shifted and contorted, struggling to reshape itself, vague features of a poodle forming over time. Eyes and a mouth soon appeared on the liquid dog's head, followed by a scowl. "What did you do to me!" Royal demanded.

"I-I-I don't know!" Medley said, barely able to believe what he was seeing. "The cards must be cursed or something!"

"Oh sure, you just 'accidentally' cast a spell on me. Well two can play that game!" In a moment of frustration Royal snatched a card from his discarded hand and tossed it onto the playing field.

"Internal Downpour: Expand target opponent!"

Just like before the text of the card glowed and sent out an arcane shockwave, though now it was Medley's turn to feel the odd chill. A loud rumble echoed from within his flat stomach, which suddenly began to slosh and swell; he was filling with water. His new white-and-black gut pushed out from under his shirt as it rapidly expanded out of control, the skunk frantically pressing down with both paws in an attempt to deflate himself. Medley's shirt quickly grew uncomfortably tight, straining to contain his ballooning belly, until the seams creaked and tore from the pressure. He tried standing up once his middle was nearly two feet wide, but by then the water within him was far too heavy, and he

merely ended up rocking back in forth, grounded.

While initially happy to turn the tables on his friend, Royal was soon hit with regret and fear as he witnessed Medley blimp up more and more. He had no way of knowing just when the inflation would end, or if Medley's body could even handle being filled with so much water. Not to mention the fact an immobilized Medley would be unable to help him return to normal. Royal attempted to retrieve the card, but nothing he did budged it an inch, and persistent prodding resulted in a shock from the card itself. There was no reversing Medley's fate.

Medley yelped in fear as his shirt was shredded, his arms and legs both beginning to swell a bit with water now as well. On a whim he looked at the rest of his cards, picking one he desperately hoped would reverse his expansion, or at least prevent him from bursting apart. The card was played just before his limbs stiffened to the point of uselessness. Though the text wasn't spoken the card still glowed and worked its magic, initiating the Absorb Magic spell Medley believed would be his salvation. Unfortunately he'd incorrectly guessed the ability, with dire consequences.

Again Royal felt a chill, and suddenly he was being pulled in Medley's direction. The liquified poodle grasped at the floor for dear life, but the pull strengthened with each passing second, globs of his body flying off and soaring right into his friend's mouth. Both players looked at each other in dismay, neither in any condition to truly resist. Medley whimpered as his limbs began to sink into his massive water balloon of a body, watching in terror as Royal's unstable body was dragged closer and closer as if he were being sucked in by a vacuum. The skunk's hide was already creaking from being dangerously overstretched, and he doubted he could manage the addition of Royal.

The suction simply proved too much for the fluid dog, who found himself hurled off the ground and into his own friend's unwilling maw. Royal's body compressed and stretched with horrifying ease, cascading right down the skunk's throat unhindered, unable to even let out a distressed plea for help before he was slurped up. The water within swiftly diluted his form. Medley winced as he felt his body swell up more, bushy tail flailing about as his limbs sunk into his taut middle. The creaks became louder and longer, the pressure overwhelming. His eyes widened as he sprung an audible leak, followed by a thunderous *boom* as the skunk exploded.

The walls and windows rattled at Medley's eruption, a tidal wave of water and pink goo splattering in all directions and coating everything in sight. Amidst the chaos the magical cards held firm, their smooth coatings keeping them unmarked by the resulting debris. They dutifully returned to their deck boxes on their own, leaving no evidence as to what had befallen Medley and Royal, only waiting for the next game of Mage's Brawl to begin...