

An Even Match

By: IndigoRho

“The winner is...Ness!”

Raf grumbled under his breath as he heard the now all-too-familiar sound-byte of the game's announcer declaring the victor. The large, grumpy hyena had been “coerced” into playing Smash Bros with his friend Nate, and while Raf was competent at the game Nate was far more skilled. Normally he wouldn't have minded the long string of losses, but Nate had also managed to convince him to agree to a stipulation in which the loser would eat a donut. As expected, Raf had spent most of the last hour essentially stuffing himself with donuts as a result.

“You're definitely getting better big guy!” Nate said cheerfully, giving Raf's gut a playful pat of encouragement.

“I'm gonna be immobile before I ever beat you in a match,” Raf pouted in response, already scarfing down his punishment donut.

While Nate *was* enjoying seeing Raf gobble up more and more donuts, he also wanted the grump to have some fun in between. “That gives me an idea! I think I've got the perfect way to even the playing field.”

The plump cat got off the couch and hurried to a nearby closet, digging around for a few minutes before pulling out a small, sleek metal canister, along with some kind of remote.

“It's the latest micro air tank from CatCo!” Nate said proudly, showing the device off to an unimpressed Raf. “Super compact, but with the same capacity as a tank a hundred times its size!”

Raf was still confused. “And how does that even the playing field...wait how does that even work!”

“Science!” Nate grinned.

“That doesn't explain it!”

“Innovation!” Nate didn't skip a beat.

Raf's face contorted. “That's even...nevermind! So how is this going to help?”

Nate tossed the canister in his open mouth and gulped it down like a pill. “I'll use it to inflate myself until playing becomes harder!”

The cat pressed a few buttons on the remote, and suddenly a light hissing noise echoed from within Nate's stomach. His modest belly quickly rounded and puffed up, swelling out from under his shirt. He shifted on the couch as his gut grew, giving it a few playful pokes and pats in the process. Once it'd expanded to a little over two feet wide he stopped the air flow.

“Might take some trial and error to find out what size works best, but I'll let you control the remote from now on.” Nate tossed the remote to Raf, who still didn't seem convinced by Nate's plan.

“Sure, sure.”

The two friends started up another round. While Nate's expansion had a slight effect on his abilities, it apparently wasn't enough, and once more the cat ended up victorious. Raf grumbled some more, fidgeting with the air tank remote as he ate his donut. Nate grinned as his belly started swelling again. He could feel his legs and arms puffing up ever-so-slightly, making them stiffer while still being moveable. With Nate's gut at over three feet wide, Raf stopped.

Nate was forced to lean further out from the couch so he could actually see the TV over his balloon belly, his paws pressing down onto it as he held the controller. “Definitely a bit trickier than before, you've got this bud!”

Despite the second bout of inflation, Raf still couldn't keep up with Nate. The cat's middle squeaked and creaked as he played, distracting Raf more than himself, but Nate overcame his awkward position with expert ease.

“We'll figures this out—oof!” Nate was interrupted mid-sentence as his middle began to inflate again, Raf already on the remote.

The controller slipped from Nate's grasp as his arms swelled too big to maintain a solid grip, tumbling down his belly and onto the floor. He wobbled about on the couch as he continued to blimp up, inevitably losing his balance and rolling right onto the carpet himself, letting out a surprised *meow!* As his body expanded and took on a slightly spherical shape, his arms were engulfed up to his elbows and his legs up to his knees. Eventually Raf decided to turn off the remote.

"Whoa, he-he, didn't expect things to go this far!" Nate laughed, rocking back and forth on his bloated middle. "Gonna have to switch controllers, though, can't really use the normal one with my paws this far apart."

Raf found a suitable replacement and helped his blimpy friend grasp them. After a few moments to adjust to his condition, Nate selected a new character and started the game up. For once Raf scored the first KO, though Nate didn't make it an easy one. Despite being almost completely immobile, Nate was quick to adapt, regaining the upper-hand and snatching another victory out from under his friend. He chuckled and gave a sympathetic grin in Raf's direction. The hyena responded by popping a donut in his mouth and glaring as he turned the remote back on.

Nate meowed as he felt himself begin to expand. His forearms and legs rounded out so much they essentially became domes connecting his puffy paws to his rotund body, his neck swelling to become a cushion. The cat wobbled and creaked, his swaying tail going stiff as it inflated as well. Only when Nate was a large, creaking sphere did Raf feel content with turning off the airflow. Fortunately Nate had managed to hold onto his controllers this time, and the cat nervously selected his character for the next round, hoping Raf would finally pull off a win. After all, Nate didn't have the capacity to inflate any larger, and there was always a chance a frustrated Raf might test his limits out of spite.

"G-good luck!" Nate barely managed, his cheeks puffed up round.

Raf gave the inflated cat a menacing poke in his taut side. "You'd better be trying your best, no throwing the match just to please me!"

"Hey now, I've got a reputation to uphold, I wouldn't dream of throwing a match!" Nate insisted in between creaks.

Raf merely harrumphed. As the new game began, the impact on Nate's reflexes was noticeable. Just as before Raf achieved the first KO, and this round Nate had a much harder time taking Raf out in turn. Faint squeaks echoed from Nate's body as he played, while Raf countered with grumbles and an embarrassing belch. Though things were close in the final seconds, Nate slipped up just enough for Raf to take advantage and finally secure a victory.

Raf let out a triumphant cackle that he swiftly silenced, blushing at the outburst. Nate, on the other hand, breathed a sigh of relief. "Told ya the air tank would work. Eventually."

"I guess." Raf had already returned to his usual state of grumpiness.

Another short belch made the hyena painfully aware of how stuffed his own belly had become from eating so many donuts, which evaporated what little joy the victory had given him. He'd still nearly grabbed the last donut from the box out of instinct, but his paw stopped just short of putting it back.

"Well Nate, looks like you finally get to eat a donut then," Raf said, holding the pastry up sinisterly.

Nate had been winning so much he'd forgotten the rule could even apply to him. "Oh! Uh...uh, isn't the inflation punishment enough?"

"Nope, rules are rules." Raf hefted himself up off the couch and waddled over to Nate, waving the donut closer to the cat's face. "It's just one donut, surely you've got room for it."

Nate gulped, too much of a blimp to do anything but wobble. Perhaps this hadn't been the smartest idea...