

Joey surfaced his head up from under his blankets when he heard a scuffling of paws close to his bed. A dirty shaft of morning light cleaved between the curtains, leaving his bedroom in a cold dimness, which was eclipsed by a trio of nearby shadows. It took the kangaroo a few seconds to specify the shapes of the dark blurs in his vision, which seemed to hold a kind of electrified vigil towering over his bed. The blurs slowly became personified, turning into the shapes of his three roommates.

In the middle stood Anthony, a tall and skinny deer with half-broken antlers and a bushy coppery red mop of hair. His frame seemed even thinner than usual, as he was flanked by the other, more corpulent two, standing around him like guard dogs. They were Terry and Victor, a Red Panda and an Alligator, and they stared at Joey, cracking their knuckles like they were ready to rough him up.

Joey felt this was some dumb prank to try and scare him. They did dumb things like this all the time, making him rather desensitised to it. Yet, a sense of genuine apprehension crept up on the kangaroo, and he tried to shake the grogginess out of his eyes. Joey wanted to ask what the hell they were doing around his bed, when the deer bowed over him.

"We broke your record, mate," Anthony said with a grin splitting his face, and his elfin green eyes narrowed with smug maleficence, "Now what was that you were saying you could beat us with your hands tied behind your back?" He noticed the confusion on Joey's face and snickered.

"The hell are you talking about?" Joey asked. Now all three were laughing.

"He forgot, didn't he?" Terry said, his ringed tail wagging with enjoyment.

Joey still was not quite sure what they were doing, but from the sinister chuckling and the darkness of his own room, he had a premonition this was more than just a scare prank. At least some explanation would have been nice.

"Forgot what?" Joey said, sounding louder and more irritated this time.

"Oh my. So sleepy still. Maybe we have to jog your memory," the deer touted and shook his head in reproval, "Don't you remember telling us you are the best at Double Dash ever?"

"And also that you always jeer in our faces that we suck?" Terry added.

"And every single blue shell you ever held onto until the last lap?" said Victor.

Joey blinked. Was this really what this was all about? Completely normal trash talk that every friend does when playing games? He rolled his eyes, and decided to turn his back towards the rest of the room, putting the blanket over his head.

"You guys are crazy. Go back to sleep. It's Saturday morning," he groaned, his voice sounding muffled under the warm blanket.

The three immediately robbed the kangaroo of any comfort and warmth by yanking his blanket away, leaving him in just his collar and underwear. Joey shivered as a winter's morning nip skimmed over his fur and he creaked with his throat in frustration.

"Quit whining, and we haven't even slept yet. Didn't you hear? We broke your Double Dash record, and I am pretty sure you did literally say you could beat us with your hands tied behind your back."

"Oh my God. I was joking, guys. Go. To. Sleep," Joey wanted to take the blanket again, but his wrist was halted when Victor grabbed it with his huge mitt-like hands, and his sinewy arms as thick and rough as tree branches easily overpowered Joey.

Anthony seemed to have all the qualities of a maniacal imp written on his face. His antlers might as well have been replaced with demon horns. He said to Joey: "We aren't though. It's time we get our revenge for all the hours of bragging we had to put up with," and gave Terry and Victor a signalling nod

Joey was grabbed by one arm on each side by the two anthros, each about twice Joey's size. They heaved him off his bed, and led him out of the room against his struggles and protests that demanded to know what the hell they thought they were doing. Victor and Terry dragged Joey along, like they were cultists preparing him for a sacrifice.

Led by Anthony, they entered the living room. It was a lot warmer here than in Joey's bedroom, as the heater had been going all night. It had a typical student house feel: it was cosy, had

a big comfortable couch – which functioned as a hang-out spot, eating space, gaming nook, and occasional bed – and a large TV, one of their central sources of entertainment in the house. The rest of the room was arranged in a disorganised and lived-in fashion with all sorts of shelf-fillers, pencils, DVDs and books. The TV was the only light source, discharging a buzzing blue glow into the room.

The coffee table had been cleared to the side, creating a big open space in the centre of the living room. A heap of clothes lied on the floor: something looking like an oversized white sweater, socks, and something leather Joey could not see well, because it was covered by the sweater. Everything was also surrounded with several padlocks for some reason. Joey did not like it at all, but as he tried to pull back, the two anthros threw him towards the ground. Joey landed with a dull thud on the carpet.

Anthony grabbed the sweater and unfolded it. It was not oversized after all, except for the sleeves. The whole garment looked like it was stitched together with heavy cloth, black straps running over the front and back and down the sleeves, like a....

“Hold him still!” Anthony barked.

Joey got up to flee, but the Red Panda and Alligator muscled him back down. Before Joey knew it, they were forcing him into the hem of a straitjacket, putting his arms through the sleeves, and making them go through loops and belts. They had worked him on his belly, their gargantuan hands pulling every strap extra tight, creasing the canvas fabric, and making Joey vent his discomfort with low grunts. His arms were locked in front of his chest, crossed over each other and hugging his body closely. The jacket also had two belts on the back for Joey's tail to go through, ensuring it remained behind the roo's back and would not come back down. No funny business with his tail would happen under Anthony's watch.

Joey heard how Anthony sealed the deal by clicking a bunch of padlocks on the jacket so Joey could not pull the straps loose. A pair of crotch straps prevented him from pulling it over his head, and his arms couldn't move apart from his body because of the strap that ran over his chest and biceps. As soon they were done, Victor and Terry got off Joey, allowing the kangaroo to sit up.

“I'll go get the rest,” Victor said, before going back into the hallway, leaving the other two behind with Joey, now that Joey was incapable of fighting back.

“Well, not quite tied *behind* your back, but it's cosy, right?” Anthony grinned like a shot fox.

“Fuck you! This isn't funny!” Joey yelled.

“Actually I believe it's hysterical!” Anthony said, while turning on the GameCube.

“Go fucking break your other antler with a bowling ball, you douchenugget!”

Anthony rolled his eyes and grabbed the leather device that was hidden under the straitjacket at first, and said: “You're awfully cocky for someone in a straitjacket. I should do something about that tone.”

He brought the leather closer to Joey's eyes. The kangaroo gulped as he realised it was a muzzle. Anthony immediately slipped it over Joey's jaws, before he could bring out another word. The web of straps went over Joey's face, flattening his thick dark grey mane as Anthony buckled it behind his head. He then stuffed a key in another padlock to click it shut and pocketed it.

In the meantime, the game had started, and Anthony flipped the menu to view the records. Joey could not believe his eyes when he saw that they had actually done it. All of his records were beaten: time trials, cups, every cc class, everything! Even in the All-Star Cup did Anthony manage to finish under 30 minutes. Joey felt a pit in his stomach, and all the warmth in his cheeks soaked into the environment. He could not help but let out a shrill whimper, sounding all the more pathetic under the thick layer of cow hide keeping his jaws together. Anthony anticipated Joey's shock at the revelation, and he turned his head towards Joey with a cocked eyebrow.

“What's the matter? Afraid you're not quite the champ you think you are, chump?”

Joey growled with indignation. He wanted his controller now. Joey could not simply accept defeat, not after being humiliated and stuffed in bondage. He had to win back first place, whatever it took.

“Don't think I am going to give you my controller. You're gonna wreck it with those claws of yours!” Anthony tut-tutted, “Terry, can you help keep Joey's feet still?”

Joey protested as loud as possible, while Terry came to grab Joey's feet. Anthony procured a pair of nail scissors, and calmly made the first cut through Joey's claws. With some pressure, the first claw fell off. It may have been physically painless, but as it happened, Joey let out a hurt squeal. His feet were getting slowly and *permanently* disarmed, his big toe claws falling on the carpet one by one, despite all of Joey's resistance. The kangaroo watched with a broken heart at the clippings lying on the floor and back at his feet. What remained on his toes were harmless nubs.

“Think of it this way, mate. You always made fun of my broken antler, and now you get to be Stumpy Claws,” Anthony smiled, as Joey let out a muffled whine, and he swept the claws away.

Now that Joey did not have claws to worry about, the deer could easily slip on a pair of socks. They were oversized and thus a perfect fit on Joey's macropod feet, going knee high on his calves. The roo twitched his ear and grumbled. The socks were thick and fuzzy, making it even harder to game with his feet, his toes wiggling in their pockets. Joey's goddamn roommates were making it less and less fair on him.

Victor walked back into the room, carrying a cardboard box against his musclegut belly, and three bags of popcorn on top of it. The contents in the box made a lot of rumbling, and metal clinking sounds. Joey could only figure those were the sounds of straps of even more bondage. The alligator's jagged-toothed snout curved into a wide smile when he entered and saw Joey sitting on the floor.

“Haw haw, isn't he cute?” Victor said, as he put the box on the ground with much noise.

“Mrrrf!” Joey felt a wave of embarrassment over his face. The warmth returned to his face, ripening his cheeks like tomatoes.

“Since you are *such* an amazing gamer. I am sure that this will not be difficult for you. If you can beat the current record in the All-Star Cup – that is 29 minutes and 45 seconds – we will let you out,” Anthony said.

Joey nodded uneasily. That time was lightning fast. Even with his hands, he had never been able to complete all tracks under half an hour. He would have to get really good at playing with just his feet really fast somehow. He was decent if he used his tail as well. He showed it off to the others countless times, but now it was locked behind his back, and Joey felt regret for all of those show-offy demonstrations.

“And for every time you have to try again,” Anthony continued, “We'll add one extra piece of bondage from the box.” He laughed as Joey let out a soft, scared whimper.

“Feeling nervous, roo? You could also always own up and admit you're nothing but a big chicken loser, and we'll let you go,” said Anthony, the glee in his eyes lighting up as he watched frustration flicker up again in the kangaroo.

Joey shook his head steadfast. He was not a chicken or a loser and he would prove it! Like he expected the answer, Anthony gave the controller to Joey with a suppressed chuckle, and went to sit on the couch, joining Terry and Victor. They all opened their bags of popcorn and sat back for some comedy entertainment.

The kangaroo fumbled with the controller. Wearing socks made it so slippery to work with his feet. His tail tip agitated behind him, pulling down on the jacket and providing an additional challenge for Joey to keep balanced. Luckily, he managed to use it as a sort of stool to lean back against, and he wrapped his toes around the clunky Wavebird.

After navigating through the menu, Joey began to get a bit of confidence again. His left inner toe had nestled itself perfectly on the thumbstick, and the others held the controller stable. On his right side, he could use his middle toe to hold the button to control the kart's throttle. He practiced a little in the character selection screen. Maybe he was a natural at this after all!

After picking his drivers and his kart, he let the game start. The first race was Luigi Circuit. It always was. It was one of the most standard race tracks to play on. The game's cheerful music and oversaturated colours popped into the roo's senses. The heavily cartoonised characters made the

game so sugary to look at that it was almost hurtful. He took a deep breath through his uncovered nose. Joey had to get it right the first time for all he knew.

Joey tried to block out the laughter behind him, and the occasional piece of popcorn that his roommates flicked at the back of his head. The race started, and Joey grumbled in frustration at his botched attempt to accelerate at the proper time. All the other karts were ahead of him, and a big red '8th' was announced on the corner of the screen.

Terry, Victor and Anthony erupted with a loud guffaw, and hurled even more taunts at Joey.

"Great strategy there! Except you're meant to actually hit the gas, dude!"

"You roos sure are much better at getting hit by cars than driving them."

"Bottom place is looking pretty good, huh?"

Joey could not afford to let himself get distracted. As rude as they were, they would win if he let them get to him. It was not like Joey could talk back to them. Instead, he just let out a low grumble into his muzzle, his brows furrowed as he let the TV's light flood his strained eyeballs.

Somehow Joey scraped together enough speed to drive past one of the opponent karts, to much booing from his incredibly 'supportive' audience. He drove through one of the blocks, and the game graced him with a special item to even the odds. Joey usually was not the one actually using it, but he had been hit by it many times: the blue shell. It would always hit the kart in first place. Joey let it fly, with the hope of somehow making up for the time he already lost.

Joey found a red mushroom when he drove through the next block. The track turned into a tunnel-like blur as he swerved over the straight and used the boosters on the outside of the corner to speed past several more karts. He was in the middle of the pack now, with the bigger guys. The toes of his sock clinged to the thumbstick pulling all over the place as Joey drifted past Donkey Kong, bringing himself to third place and one more lap to go.

Shells whizzed past Joey, only showing up as green blurs and narrowly missing the wheels of his kart. Joey ignored the noise of his hissing roommates. They did not matter right now. Joey did not care if they did not side by him, he was *killing* it, his feet tirelessly pressing buttons to speed drift through the race tracks.

Like a nimble wasp, Joey whizzed towards the second and first places karts, competing in their own struggle to gain a lead on each other. Joey directed his kart just a little closer and knocked himself against the kart of the right, making them collide into each other. Joey sped over the last straight when the one sound he did not want to hear announced itself. A whizzing of a rocket that only meant one thing. The screen gave him a second-long warning that a big blue object travelled towards him at 80 miles an hour.

Anthony, Terry, and Victor oooh'd. Joey felt sick to his stomach when it hit, and he lost his lead already with just one turn to go. The two karts he just outpaced zoomed by, and Joey had to build up speed fresh again, watching the other karts approaching him fast, driving by. He slogged over the finish line. Fifth place. Finishing so low had not happened to him in years. His times showed up as well: 1 minute 45 seconds. Joey grumbled into the tight muzzle. The rest of his races had to go at 2003's old world record pace.

The kangaroo writhed against the sleeves of the jacket, which crinkled and creaked. The padlocks kept the straps from coming loose even a bit, forcing him into a tight embrace with himself.

"You gotta keep going, roo. Or do you want me to add more bondage now?" Anthony chuckled, watching the kangaroo trying to free himself in vain. Joey looked back and saw Terry was recording the whole ordeal on his iPhone. He blushed and turned his focus back on the screen.

The next few courses went better. Joey felt like he finally grasped the trick of using his feet to steer while keeping the controller in balance. His feet got sweaty with nerves, as he raced through an assault course of items in Baby Park, but he somehow managed to survive the chaos. Several first places gave Joey some hope of freeing himself, but his luck vanished on Peach Beach where his kart got stuck in the tides and Joey fell easy prey to the Cataquacks. Anthony, Terry, and Victor were having the time of their lives watching Joey try to avoid every destructive element the game

threw at him, simultaneously fighting with his bondage and keeping his feet from slipping off the controller.

Joey's feet shakily held the controller as the game announced the final course. Not only was Rainbow Road the longest course of the game, but it was also the most difficult. Joey needed to finish three laps of balancing on a narrow, winding road made out of literal rainbow – hence the name of the track – where many places had no guardrails at all protecting the kart from falling into a miles deep abyss. He took a deep breath to stay focused.

Victor returned from the living room with drinks, passing them around on the couch. Joey would have loved to have some, but his roommates had waited long enough to see his attempt, shouting at Joey to get on with it.

Right off the bat, Joey had the best start he could think of. He sped off with a boost and began the race in first place. Two of his rivals tailed him. The first part of the track involved two hairpins with the first item blocks laying up for grabs. Joey got a green shell which he threw back and slammed into the bumper of one of his rivals, gaining a little bit of a lead on his chasers.

He flew off a ramp, on a lower part of the track, when something joined the chase that Joey really could not use at that moment. A red shell homed in on him, and blasted into Joey, making him stop short, and lose his edge on the rest of the racers. The kangaroo let out a long vexed sigh, and let his anger out on a kart that pulled up next to him by ramming it off the course.

Joey forgot about the track ahead of him. He had to swerve hard to the left, his whole body emphatically moving along with his kart, as he tried to keep himself from falling. The controller was so slippery. The socks had been drenched in sweat from Joey's exertions. His toes fumbled to keep it stable, and because of that he lost several precious seconds. Joey's heart was pounding out of his chest as he zigzagged and teetered over the edge several times trying to avoid the flying shells.

In his first lap, Joey set a time of 1 minute and 10 seconds, but now the whole race track was littered with banana peels and dormant shells. Joey slipped over one and skidded off the track, into the abyss. The couch-sitters went into a full-blown eruption of cackling as the screen faded to black for a few seconds, as Lakitu had to come save the kart from smashing into the earth and placed Joey's kart back on the tracks with a fishing rod.

The whole pack already drove past him, and Joey had to manage another upset if he wanted to get out of the straitjacket. His shaky paws slipped and the controller fell on the carpet. His kart stood still on the track and Joey huffed and wiggled forward to try to pick it back up. He could not afford to waste any time like this. Anthony, Terry, and Victor had been waiting for his fall to happen the whole cup, and roared with laughter as Joey fell on his side. He could still race, though. He put his feet on the controller as it lay on the ground and started driving again, though he was already close to getting lapped by the first place rivals. Joey did not even *want* to look at his lap time, he was just trying to survive and sit back upright.

The third lap was no less disastrous. The karts lapped Joey left and right and he got caught in a slew of objects that knocked him around like a ragdoll. It was a traipse just to get over the finish line. Joey finally managed to sit back up, panting and sweating as the race ended. He failed. He absolutely, disgracefully, monumentally failed.

Anthony gave Joey a slow, sardonic applause, and said: "Bravo! Bravo! What a show!"

Joey stared at the screen, frowning with disappointment at his own time. He *had* it, right until the last race. His arms strained against the straps of the jacket, pulling them taut. His despondent moans sounded muffled under the thick leather muzzle.

"Well, it's time to see what you'll get next!" the deer said as he sprang up from the couch with an excited bounce and rummaged through the box. He picked out a pair of leather ankle cuffs and smirked.

"This'll do!" he said, while watching the roo's big oblong ears droop in submission. Joey would have to get used to a lot of canvased self-hugging from now on.