

A Co-op Experience

By: Rando Shywoulfe

“Well, now what to do?” I muttered to myself as I examined the surroundings I found myself in.

A couple of days ago, Peter had gathered The Whatevers together and said that we'd been in the house for too long and that it was time to go somewhere in town to hang out. He then talked about this retro arcade place that had opened a couple of days ago, and everyone around town was talking about how much fun it was. The combined nostalgia and enjoyable games had caused it to rise in popularity. He said it seemed to be the place for furs to go when they wanted to hang out and thought that it would be fun for the group to go down and play games for a couple of hours one day.

Most furs were receptive to the idea and agreed without hesitation. Though I was a little nervous about going into a place with large crowds of furs I didn't know, I also thought it might be good practice for myself, so I agreed to it after a bit too.

Soon enough, at the end of the week, we were trekking down sidewalks still cold from the melted snow towards the arcade. When I got inside, I was hit by the flashing lights and electronic noises that blasted throughout the place. Multiple furs were packed in there hunched over machines, their focus on whatever game they were playing. The smell of sweat and processed food wafted through my nose and it took a second for my ears to adjust to the loud noises.

I turned to Peter in the hopes of sticking with him, but when I looked to where he'd been, all I saw was a mouse tail getting consumed by the crowd around me. Not knowing what else to do, I walked over to a self-serve token machine and inserted a couple of dollars, which gave me some game tokens. After stuffing them in the pockets of my jeans, I stuck my hooves in my hoodie pockets and started walking around, making sure my antlers didn't clip anyone as I walked by them.

After walking around for a bit, I was starting to get discouraged. Most of the games I found didn't interest me, and the few that did had lots of furs waiting around them to play as well. I was beginning to think I'd have to search for Peter and watch him play whatever games he was playing when I spotted something out of the corner of my eye.

An arcade machine titled *Fur Fighters 4* stood near a far wall towards the back of the arcade. I'd passed it earlier, but a large crowd had gathered around it, so I had moved on in my search. However, passing by it again, I saw that the crowd had thinned, and one of the furs seemed to be walking off. This excited me because it was the one game I'd heard about before coming here, and I was interested in trying my luck at it. It was supposed to be one of the few games that had two teams of two battling against each other in a fighting-type arena. I'd been intrigued

by the idea of battling with and against different furs, and felt this game would be perfect to try out.

Wanting to take advantage of the free spot, I started to make my way over there, but when I saw who was standing there, my nerves stopped me in my tracks.

Standing there in a white tank top and tan cargo shorts was Louis, a black panther who was one of the most popular members of the group. He was always surrounded by members of The Whatever's, and he seemed to have a plethora of friends that he'd hang out with during the get-togethers. My problem was that I wasn't sure what he thought of me. I didn't think he hated me, because he didn't go out of his way to avoid me or treat me poorly, but I wasn't sure he liked me. Maybe it was just my anxiety interpreting things the wrong way, but I felt like the few interactions I had with him hadn't gone too well, and I worried he didn't enjoy whenever I talked with him.

As a result, I was nervous interacting with him and the conversations I did have with him left me feeling anxious and scared as to what he thought of me. I knew it wasn't fair of me to assume he didn't like me. After all, his popularity with the group was warranted as he was a kind and helpful individual who got along well with most furs. It was just hard for me to convince my brain of these facts, and it would be too weird to ask him what he thought of me.

Seeing him at the game I'd been hoping to play, I was conflicted. On one hand, I wasn't sure he'd be okay with me asking to play with him, as he would probably rather play with one of his actual friends. On the other hand, it was the one game I'd been most excited about trying out when coming here, and I wasn't sure I'd get another chance at an open spot.

Before I could make a decision, Louis turned behind him and saw me staring at him. To my surprise, I felt myself walking over to him. When I approached him, I saw that while the beagle and lemur playing against him were regarding me with curious looks on their faces, Louis gave me a wave and a smile in greeting. Deciding to take the plunge, I looked him in the eyes and started talking.

"Hi. I, uh, was wondering if you'd mind if you wouldn't mind another player." I said, holding my hooves behind my back, waiting for his answer.

"Sure. You're more than welcome," he said without hesitation.

I was a bit surprised at his answer, and for a few seconds suspected him of being sarcastic, but I could see his tail wagging behind him, so it seemed like he was genuine. I stepped up to the empty spot next to him and grabbed the joystick with one hoof, keeping my other hoof on the buttons next to it.

We began playing, and it became clear straight away that his playstyle was different from mine. Louis often charged right into attacking the opposing team, using whatever moves he could to

do as much damage to them as possible. Meanwhile, I held back, unsure how to proceed and trying to use some of my long-ranged attacks to do damage without getting too involved in the fight. The lack of cooperation between the two of us resulted in multiple losses to the opposing team. I could sense Louis was starting to get frustrated, as his ears were flat against his head and his tail lay motionless. This made me panic because I figured I was just reinforcing the bad opinions he had of me. I tried my best to implement what he was telling me to do, but the panic caused me to fumble when I tried to correct them.

After our fifth loss in a row, I let go of the joystick and slid down to the floor. I could feel myself getting anxious and knew I would need to step away. I was worried this would happen to play with someone who I wasn't sure what their opinion of me was. I took a couple of deep breaths to try and calm myself, and when I looked back up, I saw Louis and the two furs we'd been battling against looking at me. The two opponents appeared unsure what was happening, and one of them shuffled a foot paw against the carpet in uncertainty. Louis, however, looked concerned and laid a paw on my shoulder.

"Hey, you okay?"

I nodded my head, a sad smile forming on my face. "Yeah. Sorry about that, and about all those games."

This appeared to confuse him, and he shook his head. "Dude, it's a game. Sure, I'll get frustrated, but you have nothing to be sorry about. We just haven't gotten into the rhythm yet." He shrugged and gave me a smirk. "Honestly, despite us losing, I've been having fun playing with you. You seem cool."

It was calming to hear these simple words, and when he reached a paw out for me to grab, I felt my worries about what he thought of me disappear. At that moment, I saw someone who wanted to make sure I was okay and who was having fun playing a video game with me. So I grabbed his paw, took another couple of deep breaths to calm myself, and grabbed the joystick, ready to continue playing.

I didn't know whether it was the encouragement from Louis or my head not being clouded with panic, but the two of us seemed to work better in the next few games. We figured out different systems where we would help the other in fights and the advice he gave me started to stick, allowing me to improve my overall performance. We didn't win all of them, but we did enjoy a few wins against our opponents, which we were happy to have.

Soon enough, I saw that some of his other friends from The WhatEVERs were waiting to play and decided it was time for me to stop. I turned to him and gave a small wave.

"Well, I think some of your friends want to play, so I'll let them have their turns. Thanks for letting me play with you." I gave him the best smile I could. "I had a lot of fun."

Louis turned towards me and shook my hoof, his paw enveloping it and almost pulling me to the ground with the force of it. "No problem! Hey, enjoyed playing with you man. Hope to play with you again in the future." He then turned towards his friends behind me, and they proceeded to greet each other with pats on the backs and cheerful banter.

Shaking my head but smiling, I made my way through the arcade, looking for Peter to see what he was playing. I couldn't help but think over my encounter with Louis. It was funny to think that despite what I'd worried would happen, he hadn't given any indication that he'd hated me or that I was anything other than someone he was playing a game with. I didn't know if the two of us would end up becoming close friends, but I did know I didn't have to worry anymore about what he thought of me, and that thought calmed me as the sounds of the arcade enveloped me while I walked through the place.