

Everyday Mika passed by the tabletop shop, passing it by on his way to work. He wasn't sure when it had shown up, only that when he first noticed it, he made plans to visit. It certainly stood out from the other stores in the strip mall. Most stores appeared incredibly generic and bland. Stores that fade into the background. Then there was the game shop. It stuck out like a sore thumb. It was decorated to resemble a 'ye olde medieval shoppe'. Plans to check it out always seemed to fall through. Not this time though. He had set aside time today to peruse through it. Might be nice to have something new to play with his friends that were coming over this weekend. Luckily, the weather had remained pleasant so he could walk over. As he was walking up to the building, a strange pair of rats wearing lab coats walked out of the store with big grins on their faces. Mika couldn't help but stare at the odd pair. If he didn't know better, he would have sworn the rats were cartoons. Strange. Mika shrugged it off and walked inside.

The shop was very well-maintained. It had been decorated with a medieval theme. Artwork and props of dragons and knights were displayed throughout. Everything seemed incredibly organized, grouping merchandise based on the genre. Tables were neatly arranged and set up for people to play test select games before buying. Loads of figures and models were arranged on shelves. Treasure troves of dice were available for sifting through. It was obvious a lot of care went into the store. Mika wished he had stopped in much sooner. There was so much stuff to go through. The striped hyena slowly walked about, taking his time and enjoying glancing over everything. He Stopped every now and again to pick up anything that caught his eye. Going through a store such as this was a lot of fun. Even better was the store was nearly empty, only having one other customer besides himself, a kangaroo rat. Though from the looks of it, they were packing up their belongings. They lifted a couple of their personal things and began walking towards the door. Mika was around to turn his attention back towards

the figurine in his hand when something caught his attention. A strange box resided on the tables. It appeared to have been carelessly left behind.

"Hey, looks like you forgot one!" Mika pointed out, not wanting to see someone lose anything. The kangaroo rat glanced around, wondering what they might have missed. It took them a moment to realize Mika was talking about the mysterious case. It was stylized to resemble an old leather-bound treasure trunk.

"Oh, that's not mine, someone else must have left it here." He responded as they searched for a potential owner. No other customers seemed to be here. It was just the two of them. Curiosity was getting the better of the rodent as he approached the abandoned case, sitting down at the table where it resided. He gently picked up the box, finding it surprisingly heavier than anticipated. Curiosity also began nibbling away at Mika's attention. He too was being allured towards it. Something about it drew your attention towards it, filling your mind with wonder and curiosity of what may be inside. The most bizarre thing is the box didn't seem real, yet it was. You could almost make out a faint outline surrounding the box, as if someone had straight up yanked it out of a drawing or cartoon.

Mika pulled up a chair next to the rodent who was examining over the case. The words "TangleToon" were printed brightly across in bold lettering. The only other markings on the front were a logo for "Luminous LabRats". The box was devoid of any other information. The kangaroo rat took notice of the hyena joining him.

"Names Mogg by the way!" They cheerfully greeted, giving a small wave. He seemed rather friendly.

"I'm Mika, nice to meet you!" He replied in a similar fashion. Mika watched as the rodent kept examining the mysterious case. It was hard even for him to avert his eyes from it. Mogg twisted and turned it around in his hand, being rather curious. Neither had heard of TangleToon before. Tugging on the lid didn't help as it remained firmly shut. Despite turning it over a couple of times, he couldn't find any way to open it. No latch or lock was keeping it shut. While Mogg was puzzling over how to open the box, Mika noticed a small bright piece of paper that barely peeked out from the seam. It was barely noticeable, just a faint bit of color that stood out. Mika tugged at the small scrap of paper, pulling it out. It was a sticky note. It merely read "Play test me!". How odd. The second after he read the note, the case began to rumble. It practically leaped from Mogg's arms onto the table. Mika and Mogg watched with their eyes wide open, seeing the box rumbling around the table. It was like the very thing was alive with energy. As suddenly as it came alive, it became still again. Both their mouths were agape, neither was sure of what to think. Mika prodded at it with his finger, making sure whatever had happened was finished. With a sudden jerk, the container unlatched and opened itself up. Exotic ferns and other such plants spilled out from the case, though it was clear something else lay inside. They tossed the leaves and twigs out from the chest to reveal a board game was hiding underneath. The most bizarre thing was despite the rumbling and plant strewn about, the game itself looked to be in proper order. Cards were in neat stacks; pieces were in their appropriate places. It appeared as if everything had been already set up and ready to play.

The two were absolutely fascinated by the game. The smooth plastic player tokens had intricate carvings. It was incredibly stylized. Mika picked up one of the pieces, glancing it over. He twisted and turned the pear shape around in his hand. It had an unexpected weight to it for such a small piece. He guessed it had to weigh almost a pound from how it felt in his hand. It was unsurprising that the figurine depicted a rotund hippopotamus. Mika grinned. It was rather

cute! It had such a big, happy grin on its face, it was hard not to smile back. Meanwhile, Mogg was sifting through the foliage, looking for some sort of manual. Despite the search, there didn't seem to be one. No instruction booklet, no rule book, not a thing explaining how to play the game. Well, that was except the large lettering that was written on the sides of the box.

*"Pick your form which suits you best / then roll the dice and complete your quest!"*

*"The game cannot be stopped once it has begun / and the fun doesn't stop once it's done!"*

Mogg gave a chuckle at the so-called rules. Seems like whoever created it went the extra mile making it sound as cheesy as possible. Such a strange design, but it was incredibly appealing. The whole thing had an air of mystery to it. Different player roads twisted and turned all over the map. Some tiles had bright colors, seeming to indicate which of the three colored decks to draw from. Now that he was closely examining it, it appeared to be fairly self-explanatory. It was probably as simple as following the instructions on the cards and making your way towards the distinct tile in the center of the board. The desire to test it grew the longer one stared at it. Just as Mogg was opening his mouth, Mika beat him to the initiative.

"I've got time for a game if you're up to try this out" He said, eagerly gripping the hippo figure. They were bound determined to use it as his piece.

"Yeah! That sounds great!" Mogg smiled. Both were excited to try this out.

Mika picked up the dice, rolling them around in his hand. The pair appeared to have been carved from stones, yet strangely lacked the texture you would expect them to have. Even what clearly seemed like indents for the dots were flat and smooth to the touch. It was as if the

pins were painted on, along with the pebble texture. Mika shook them, listening to the satisfying noise they made. It sounded more like a fistful of clattering dice rather than the two he was actually rolling with. He tossed the pair as they energetically bounced across the board.

“Nine!” Mika picked up his player token and moved it the appropriate number of spaces, landing on top of a green tile. Green generally meant good in games. He drew a card from the deck. With a clearing of his throat, he read it aloud.

*“Way to move ahead / But be careful where you tread*

*Your footsteps now sound like thunder / and the ground quakes asunder*

*For walking a path so discreet / Has left you with a new pair of feet!”*

His expression went from excited to confusion. The instructions were incredibly unclear. He glanced around the board, wondering if he had somehow missed something.

“So, was that a good thing?” Mika scratched his head, rather baffled. He reread the card in his head a couple of times, trying to make heads or tails of it. Was it merely flavor text? Though as he held the card in his hand, his legs began to feel slightly odd. Mika tried kicking his legs, assuming they were falling asleep. With each swing of his legs, both grew thicker and heavier. The pads on his soles began to toughen, growing dense and tough. Fur began receding into a rough grey hide. Nails and toes hardened into dense, round pachyderm hooves. They were incredibly cartoonish compared to the rest of him. His legs had grown so thick and round, clashing heavily with the rest of his trim frame. The table vibrated every time their large clumsy hooves bumped against the ground as he moved them about. Despite such a substantial change to his legs, Mika remained unaware. He assumed the card's odd wording was simply for the tone.

It was now Mogg's turn. With a quick shake, rattle, and roll, he tossed the dice.

"A three? I've got some catching up to do!" Mogg joked as he moved his piece. They had specifically chosen it due to its unique shape and design. Something made it stand out from the others. It was a stoutly token much like Mika's, but this one was in the shape of a goofy grinning gator. The tail was bent at a ninety-degree angle towards the tip and its snout was pointed into a rounded tip. He placed his token on a red tile and pulled a card from the same colored deck.

*"You've been set back a couple of miles / head back two tiles,*

*In the jungle and swamp / is where you will romp*

*If your next turn's roll is less than four / your move shall we ignore."*

It seemed Mogg was not off to as good of a start. He was sent nearly back to the beginning.

"Okay, yeah. Red is bad I take it" he laughed at his own bad luck. Luckily, it was still early in the game, so it didn't matter so much. Mogg was not that competitive to being with. He was having a lot of fun trying this out. He finished with the last of his turn and passed the dice over to Mika. Despite how uneventful these turns had been, both were still feeling rather excited. Something about the board made it feel like there was more in store.

Mika quickly rolled, Seven. Not half bad. He looked ahead on the board and smiled. Another green space! Perfect! With a flourish of his hand, he placed his token in the space and drew his card, reading it aloud.

*"Let out in loud rejoice / with your loud, booming voice*

*You sure have a good snout / leading you about!"*

Mika paused, reading his card in his head again. Perhaps it was merely coincidence. It was unlikely it was aware of itself and the players. It was a bit too on the nose with the wording thus far. A coincidence or two was expected, but it had been incredibly accurate with every move they made.

"Strange how it seems to know how well we're doing. Oooooo, maybe the board game is cursed" Mika joked in a sarcastic manner as he wiggled his fingers. In what felt like comedic timing, Mika felt a throbbing in his muzzle. Before he could reach up and feel at it, his muzzle quickly expanded. It was as sudden as an airbag going off. The force of the sudden snout had caught him by surprise. He crossed his eyes staring at the large protrusion that had suddenly come into view. His once pointed hyena muzzle had instantly grown much bigger and heavier. Fur was replaced by a thick grey hide. His sharp canines rounded out into cylindrical teeth, sticking out the front of his new cartoonish snout. Though probably the most embarrassing change was His cheeks felt as if they had swollen up, growing a bit heavy and fatty with weight. Mika rubbed along his bulbous nose and mouth. He grasped at it; verifying it was incredibly real. He blinked several times as he stared at the end of his face. His expression wasn't of shock or horror, only surprise. Mogg couldn't help but stifle a snicker. The look of astonishment on the hyena with such a massive hippo snout was quite comical. It took Mika a couple of seconds to process all this before he let out a loud hearty laugh.

"Okay, this just got a whole lot more fun!" He laughed. His voice deepened slightly, more befitting of his new face. He rubbed his hands together excitedly. He could hardly wait for what might happen next.

Mika tossed the dice over to Mogg. While Mika wanted to keep going, he was also curious as to what might happen to the rodent. If the board was capable of transforming his own face, he was curious as to what it might do to them.

“Hey, you should roll snake eyes and see what happens!” he joked, having remembered the previous turn’s rules.

“You wish, you big hippo!” Mogg joked back. Who knew, that very well may happen. The only way to find out was to try his luck. He tossed the dice. Five! He barely scraped by having to skip his turn. He cheered as they moved forward on the board. This time it was his turn to land on a green tile. A rush of excitement filled him. The last one that had been drawn had made a rather drastic change, was something similar going to happen? Drew his card and read it aloud, excited to see what was in store.

*“Your journey starts quite dire, / Trudging through muck and mire*

*Though once you crawl out, / you find without a doubt*

*The reason your movement is slow / is due to the heavy tail in tow”*

Mogg gave a chuckle after reading his card. A heavy tail? He looked behind himself as he lifted his tufted rat tail. It certainly didn’t feel any heavier. It was the same as ever. He was about ready to turn around in his seat when a shiver crawled up his spine. Then, in an instant the changes overtook it. Mogg’s tail quickly expanded out like a balloon being filled with an air compressor. Fur turned to scales as the tassel on his tail quickly thinned away, like a dandelion puff being scattered in the wind. Two rows of scutes formed a line across his dense tail. It grew incredibly cumbersome, feeling as if all that weight had taken a moment to catch up. It quickly tipped over, letting out a hefty slam on the ground. The loud sound made him jump in his seat.

He was now lugging a massive alligator tail! Mogg tried to lift the unwieldy rudder, barely managing to hoist it a couple of inches before it slapped with a thud on the ground again.

Mika quickly took his turn, eager to see what was next. He barely shook the dice before giving them a roll. This time a six. His eyes were quick to scan the board, eager to find out where he was moving on the board. What luck! His third green tile in a row!

*“You move ahead by leaps and bounds, / How about adding some extra pounds?”*

*For all that haste / has gone straight to your waist*

*Hefty gut and wide gait / A hippo frame is now your fate.”*

As he read the card, his face went flush. This only worsened as his belly began to grumble. His shirt began to tighten. A bloating feeling filled his gut. It gurgled and groaned. A small bit of pudge started to peek out from under his shirt. The sounds of his stomach halted, and pressure ceased. It seemed the changes had already stopped as soon as they began. Mika patted at his small bulk as he stared down at it. This wasn't so bad. It was only a couple extra pounds. The fur was receding a bit, but nothing too bad. Just as he was getting used to the small bit of a pudge, the pressure suddenly hit him like a truck. Pound after pound was quickly being added on. Mika's face went red as he saw how flabby he was becoming. Fur quickly continued to recede down into the thickened hippo hide that was spreading over his body. He tried tugging down at his shirt, but it did little good. His shirt kept riding upwards as his belly stuck out more with each passing moment. From bulky to fat, more weight quickly piled on. His paunch started to press against the table as it spilled outward.

“Seems you’re going to need a new set of clothes after this is all over.” Mogg commented in a joking manner. What started out as a fitting t-shirt, was now pulled taut with his entire rounded gut spilling out of it. When the changes subsided, Mika was left appearing quite fat with his pumpkin shaped belly. He could feel his chair straining against his weight. The legs bowed out and creaked and groaned, but somehow it refused to break.

While Mika was embarrassed with the massive change, deep down he was having a blast. Both were incredibly eager to play more. The game was simple down to it’s very core. What really made it interesting was the transformative nature of it. It kept the players on the edge of their seats. What surprise would happen next? The sudden changes were the best part, being quite a rush to go through. The two quickly took their turn, passing the dice back and forth. The variety of tiles kept things interesting. Red generally required a specific dice roll or you’d get some sort of small setback. Yellow was the most bizarre. It was associated with "treasure cards". Despite these being few and far between, these seemed to mostly cause some minor shift to an object around them. They both got a good chuckle when Mika drew a wardrobe treasure which affected his shirt. The shirt remained cartoonish too small but had turned black and had the words "hungry hungry hippo" printed in a very large font across it. Green was the most desirable tile. The two would hold their breath every dice roll, anticipating being the next to land on green.

After a couple of rounds, Mogg was finally starting to close the gap. He tapped his heavy gator tail on the ground as he grabbed the dice.

"Finally catching up to you!" He grinned. He rolled. A perfect twelve. What made it more perfect was landing on a green tile. Yes! He excitedly drew the card.

*"In this game you're now immersed/ you've just moved to be in first*

*For an explorer so bold / A new face do you behold!*

*Large snapping jaws is what you see / So plainly in front of thee"*

As he finished reading it, his entire muzzle felt strange. His buck teeth began to recede. His jaw twitched as it felt a pressure building up inside it. With a sudden jolt, his muzzle pressed inward before erupting outward into a giant gator snout with a loud snap. His eyes crossed, staring in awe at the sudden snout. His glasses had miraculously remained in place, despite the sudden force. The elongated muzzle protruded a couple feet in front of his face. It was flat near the top and appeared rather cartoonish with how the snout rounded out at the end. Tiny fangs stuck out comically from the sides of his mouth. It felt so strange having his face protrude so far from his face. The weight of it was going to take some time getting used to.

The game was nearing the end. Only a couple more turns left. Both players were looking more like cartoons than the hyena and rodent they were previously. Neither had much left of them to change. Mika appeared to be quite a large cartoon hippo. He had grown quite heavy and filled out much wider. His shirt was stretched to the seams and were a couple of sizes much too small. Despite such drastic changes, his distinctive hair and thick eyebrows remained to still give him his Mika look. Mogg was more reptile than rodent. Only his torso still seemed to be unchanged. Mika flapped his hippo ears as he scanned the board. Mogg had taken a lead and could very well win if he rolled high enough next turn. He took the dice in hand and really shook them up, blowing on them for good luck before letting them go. Eleven! Great! He was now

easily in reach of the goal. Though more fortuitously, it was also a green space! Mika rubbed his thick fingers together, delighted to see what was in store for him.

*“With one turn from winning the game / it’s up to anyone to take that claim!”*

*Keep moving with great ambition / you can still win this expedition*

*For when you wield such a colossal rear / You’ll need to kick it into high gear”*

Mika’s behind practically ballooned out the second after he finished reading. It had easily doubled in size and appeared more fitting for the rest of the heavy weight he carried. His chair strained trying to contain the large mass until it finally gave up, folding in on itself. Mika landed with a loud thud on his rear. The store shook and rattled; merchandise toppled off the shelf from the cartoonish quake. Mika stood up from the floor with a sheepish grin as he viewed the wreckage of where he had once sat. Luckily, his posterior was well cushioned, the chair however, was in absolute ruin. While his butt had increased in size, it seemed his tail had done the opposite. His once bushy hyena tail had been drastically diminished. Fur had completely dissipated from it as it shrunk, leaving it more of a wiggly little nub now. Mika scanned around the room, looking for something else to sit on. Nothing really seemed sturdy enough. Making do with what was around, he gathered two stools to sit upon. One for each side of his hindquarters. It was a very temporary solution, but one that would last long enough for what he needed.

It was down to this last roll. Mogg was within reach of the goal. Only a couple more spaces, and he would win. It all came down to luck. Anything lower than six he was going to win. Although, a part of him didn't want this to end. He wanted to keep playing. Winning wasn't important anyway, not in this game. He shook the dice, secretly hoping for a low number. He let

loose the bones and awaited with suspense. They moved in almost slow motion to draw out the result. Finally, they came to a halt. Two! Perfect!

"Oh darn! So close!" Mogg tried his best to fake disappointment, though it was rather obvious he was quite pleased with the result.

*"With the end so close within reach, the rules you must not breach*

*For some changes still yet remain, so winning you must refrain*

*You've been stuck in a rut / Now adorned with a big scaley gut"*

A tingle shot through Mogg's spine as scutes lined down his back connecting to his meaty tail. His torso began stretching in miniature bursts like it was being extended like a levered car jack. Inch by inch it grew, putting more distance between his head and feet. Lines began forming across his gut as it was covered with smooth, soft, yellow scales. Their shirt began resembling more like a crop top thanks to the lengthening torso. Mogg's balance wobbled a bit, unused to the new center of gravity with such a lanky frame. Just as it seemed like the changes had halted. His reptilian belly flopped out like they had been held sucked inward far too long. He appeared much more pear shaped thanks to this recent load of pudge.

"Not looking so thin yourself now, are you?" Mika jokingly teased. Mogg's face blushed as he gawked at the sphere shape his stomach had formed. Tugging down at his shirt did very little besides strain the fabric.

This was it, the last turn. As long as Mika didn't repeat Mogg's turn, he was assured to win. He rattled the dice around in his thick fingers before letting go. They danced over the board. The roll did not matter, for even with one die was more than enough to get him to the

end. The moment he placed his token at the goal, a final card was revealed. Mika cleared his throat and read it aloud.

*"Is it by luck or sheer pluck / The contest has been won, but not yet done*

*You're in for a surprise, / you've earned quite the prize!*

*In the helping of making the game did you assist, / thus as thanks, these forms shall persist!"*

The two turned towards each other, a big grin on both of their faces. Their new forms were so vastly different and bulky, something about it was rather refreshing. Both wanted to experiment with their unfamiliar cartoonish selves, it was like test-driving a car fresh off the lot, except for it was your own body. Mogg was getting accustomed to the bulk of his tail, getting to be more dexterous with its movements. Mika was appreciating the grandness of his additional size. It was a bit of a guilty pleasure. He gripped at his gut and gave it a pat, His belly bouncing slightly from it. Neither knew how long one would remain this way, but that wasn't the concern. After all, these forms were indeed a prize, and the two wanted to enjoy them for as long as they would last.

Mika and Mogg shook hands together before packing up. The two had an absolute blast trying out this strange game. Both couldn't stop smiling and admiring their new cartoonish proportions. Neither had gotten used to their increased weight. They bumbled and stumbled about. Their bulky bodies were quite clumsy. Attempting to pick up knocked over shelves only added more to the mess. Though they took it in good spirits, laughing at their own antics. Seeing as how they were both doing more harm than good by trying to pick up their mess, they decided it was best to leave things alone before more damage was caused. Mika was first to get

to the door. He stopped as he realized the exit was much too narrow. With a deep breath, he pulled in his gut as best he could. Try as he might, he couldn't quite get his round belly to fit through the exit. Mogg was next to try. He was a bit smaller and not as round, but his attempt was met with a similar failure. His big scaly behind pressed tightly against the frame. The two now had had a much harder game to play: How to fit out through the door.