

### The Contest: Round 3

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“THIS CONCLUDES THE SECOND ROUND OF THE TOURNAMENT!”

Echo looked up and gasped. “Wow, the second round is over already?” he asked. He shook his head. “Okay, guys, we gotta strategize!”

The rest of the team leaned in.

“I’ve been thinking; splitting up into three teams leaves us too weak if one of us—I know, I know, *me*—gets incapacitated. So instead, we’re gonna change things up a little bit: Rocko and I are going to split up. Rocko, I want you to join Halo and Kimo’s team, and I’ll join Coco and Cleo. That way if one of us gets knocked out of commission, there are still two fighters left to take on the enemy.”

“TEAMS 1 AND 5, YOUR COMPETITION WILL BEGIN IN 5 MINUTES! TEAMS 4 AND 13, YOU ARE ON DECK!”

“Geez, it’s all happening so fast! Let’s get dried off and ready to go!”

The team quickly left the comfort of the warm, medicated waters. Though they were far better off than they had been before they got in, the toll of the previous two rounds had not been fully paid. They dried off and assembled at their entrance to the arena.

“Now, guys, this is *really* important,” Echo said warningly, “Team 1 has had *two* disqualifications in two rounds; I don’t know what they’re doing, but I think their strategy is to deliberately get other teams disqualified.”

“I’ve noticed that, too,” Kimo agreed.

“Remember: it’s only a game!” Echo urged. “*Don’t* let them get to you, no matter what!”

“Right!” Coco agreed. “We’ve made it this far, and I’m not about to let some lousy team cheat us that way!”

“Let’s end their winning spree,” Rocko growled.

“And like, totally pulverize them and make them go crying to their mommies!” Cleo grinned. “What?” she asked in response to the incredulous look she got from the rest of the team. “I’m only kidding!”

“That *is* what we will do, though,” Halo said. “But without disqualifying ourselves.”

“Right!” the team agreed.

“JUDGES, ARE YOU READY?”

“Okay, guys, this is it: let’s get out there and make it to the finals!” Echo said.

“TEAMS, ARE YOU READY?”

“Halo, Kimo, Rocko, go near. The rest of us will go far.”

Echo flashed a thumbs-up.

“BEGIN!”

The team quickly dispersed, and Halo quickly called out, “Away near!”

“Confirm!” Echo yelled as he and his group ran around the right side of the arena.

*Wait, where’s the other team?*

“Engage!” Echo yelled. *Might as well take the one out.* “Eyes?” he called. *Has nobody seen anybody else, yet?* He looked up on top of the rocks, but there was nobody there, nor was there anybody in front of them. He looked to his left and saw Halo and Rocko engage a ferret, but he couldn’t see anyone else.

Kimo made it onto his rock and immediately yelled, “Two away, two away far rock!”

“Confirm!” Echo yelled, relieved. *Finally!* “Dibs!” he yelled as he caught sight of a black-and-white stripe.

“Confirm!” Coco called.

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"Confirm!" Cleo said, racing ahead of him.

*Oh, shit!*

The skunk turned and pointed her tail at them.

"Cleo, abort!" Echo yelled, but it was too late.

The skunk sprayed all three of them, and they all gasped and held their throats, gagging with the foul reek that burned their eyes.

"Retreat!" Echo called hoarsely as all three did a 180 and began running out of the cloud of burning stench toward fresh air as a rat lunged on top of Echo and began pounding him with his fists.

Meanwhile, Halo and Rocko charged toward the ferret, who stood there rather stupidly. As soon as Halo hit him in the chest, he fell to the ground and lay still.

"Huh?" Halo said aloud.

"Psst!" a voice called.

Halo and Rocko both looked up.

Rocko charged towards the source of the sound, a sheep who had been hiding on the inner side of the away-near column. As he sprinted forward, he couldn't help thinking to himself that a sheep was a terrible choice of species to include in one of these tournaments. But as soon as he got within range of the sheep, the sheep said, "Hey."

Rocko stopped in his tracks.

Halo meanwhile looked up and charged towards the source of the sound, a weasel hiding on the back side of the away-near column. She sprinted towards the weasel.

"Hey," the sheep said again, his voice low and menacing. He inhaled deeply. "Guess what?"

Rocko frowned. *This is weird.* "What?" he asked, glancing over his shoulders.

The sheep inhaled deeply again. "I can smell that tiger's pussy. Can't you? Out here, all in the open like that? She must be some kind of hussy, huh?"

Rocko's jaw snapped shut, and fire raged in his eyes.

"Oh, no..." Kimo said, seeing the sudden change in Rocko's body language.

"Halo, INTERVENTION!" he cried.

But Halo was out of earshot, and this weasel was just too annoying! She punched at him, only for his twisty body to dodge and writhe out of her grasp.

"Mmm, yeah," the sheep said. "I bet *everybody* gets a taste of that, hmm? Everybody but you, maybe?"

Rocko growled and advanced on the sheep, his fists clenched hard, his chest beginning to heave.

"CLEO! INTERVENTION! NOW!" Kimo screamed. "Shit..."

He leapt down from his pillar and began sprinting as hard as he could towards Rocko.

"Maybe I'll have a taste of her later," the sheep said, his lips curled nastily. "Or maybe I'll let her have a taste of mutton." He moved his hand down his belly and spread his curly wool to show off his little, dripping prick. "Yeah, I bet she'd like that," he said, looking Rocko smugly in the eye.

With a scream of fury, Rocko grabbed the sheep by the wool, ripped his arm off, and threw the sheep to the ground. The sheep's jaw dropped in shock, and he let out a bleat of terror as Rocko towered over him.

"HOW DARE YOU SPEAK OF HALO THAT WAY?!" Rocko roared, holding the sheep's arm high in the air, about to use it to beat the living daylights out of him.

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A body-slam to his side sent Rocko sprawling. He gasped and looked over to see Halo standing over him and offering her arm to help him up.

"You're sweet," she said blandly. "Let's go."

"Just in time," Kimo gasped, joining them. "Where are the others?"

As soon as Echo's eyes cleared, he shook his head and whirled on the rat that was busily but ineffectually pounding on him. Grabbing the rat by the scruff of the neck, he flung him into one of the rocks, and the rat fell to the ground, out cold.

"Spread out!" Echo called, "And get that skunk! She can't spray all of us!"

The team quickly fanned out, Halo and Rocko taking the near side, Echo charging down the middle, and Cleo and Coco taking up the far side. The skunk's eyes widened as she saw them all advancing. Her head darted from Halo to Echo to Coco to Rocko to Cleo, and she started to turn.

Then she fell over.

Echo cocked his head. "Huh?"

Kimo chuckled from atop his boulder. "Two for two," he said, tossing a rock in the air and catching it.

"Haha, way to go, Kimo!" Echo called.

Everybody milled around expectantly.

"Wait, shouldn't the round have been called?" Coco asked.

The players looked at each other, and then at Echo, who raised his eyebrows, opened his mouth, and shrugged helplessly. He looked over at one of the field judges, who pointed to his wrist.

"There's still somebody in here!" Echo growled, his hackles rising. "Who'd we miss?"

"Echo! Home!" Kimo suddenly cried.

The team whirled to see the weasel pressed against the wall next to the team's own entrance.

"Get him!" Echo barked, and the team raced towards him.

The weasel's eyes went wide, and his hands shivered, his fingertips touching each other; with an entire team coming after him, he had only one thing he could do.

"Yield!" he cried, dropping to the ground into a shivering ball with his hands covering his eyes. "I yield!"

Echo held up his fist, and everybody came to a stop.

"TEAM 5 IS THE WINNER OF THIS ROUND AND WILL PROCEED TO THE FINAL ROUND!"

"Wow," Cleo scoffed, shaking her head as the team walked past the weasel. "Just...wow."

The team filed into the chamber and immediately got into the tub.

"Wow, you guys *reek*!" Kimo complained.

"We got hit by that skunk," Coco griped, ducking completely under the water and scrubbing herself furiously to try to get all the stink off of her.

"Great job, though, guys!" Echo said. "We're so close! Just one more fight, and we win it!"

"Yeah! The World Championship!" Cleo said giddily as she ducked underwater and swam from one end of the tub to the other.

"Good call on their strategy, Echo," Rocko said, pursing his lips in embarrassment. "And thank you, Halo, for rescuing me from myself."

"What happened?" Echo asked. "I was a little distracted with all the skunk reek."

"Yeah, I heard a sheep bleat!" Cleo said surfacing. "Seriously, who brings a *sheep* to a contest like this?"

### The Contest: Round 3

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Rocko's jaw clamped shut, and his fists clenched.

"Ooh, hey, easy, Rocko," Echo said, moving over next to him.

Rocko shook his head, snapping out of it. "Dude, you stink," he gasped, his eyes watering.

"Oh, uh, sorry!" Echo said, chuckling and dunking underwater.

"Geez, we're gonna need a change of water," Coco said as the previously-blue water turned gray.

"Yup, everybody but us out!" Echo barked. "Kimo, would you request fresh water, please?"

"Certainly," Kimo replied.

"But seriously, Rocko, what happened?" Coco asked as she scrubbed as much of the skunk stink out of her fur and into the water as she could.

"He...said something..." Rocko said evasively, his eyes darting to Halo and back.

"What did he say?" Halo asked in her typical monotone.

"I—" Rocko shook his head. "I can't say it."

"No," Halo persisted, her voice not changing tone at all, "I want to know. What did he say about me?"

"He—" Rocko swallowed, "He said that he could smell your...you know."

Halo raised an eyebrow. "My what? Say it."

Rocko huffed. "He said he could smell your pussy," he said, grimacing, as if the words *tasted* bad to say.

"Oh," Halo replied.

"And he said you must be a hussy, that everybody got to taste you except me. He said he was going to taste you and let you taste mutton! He waved his genitals at me!" Rocko panted, very agitated as the words just kind of spilled out of his mouth, as if the seal keeping it all in had been broken.

"It's nice of you to defend me," Halo said, "But he's wrong. Nobody gets to taste me. Except you."

With a fluid motion, she pulled his head down to her crotch and held him there. The rest of the team laughed and cheered.

"Way to go, Halo!" Cleo called.

"It's about time," Kimo said, grinning and shaking his head.

Rocko gasped and glanced up, breathing in her subtle but enticing scent.

"What do you think?" Halo asked as she let him up.

Rocko swallowed. "I think I wish we were in a private room," he said, stepping up to embrace her and glancing sheepishly at their teammates.

Halo and Rocko kissed passionately, both inhaling sharply in surprise at the intensity.

"Come on, guys," Echo said quietly, nodding his head toward the partition that separated the bath from the rest of the chamber, "Let's give them some space to themselves."

They retreated to the main chamber and milled around, waiting on the fresh water to be brought. Fortunately, the majority of the skunk stench was left in the tub.