

Hours pass, and the fair is finally in full swing; the forest is full of life and fun, fairy lights twinkling delicately around the border of the grounds, as excited chatter and cheers fill the once quiet area.

Skireans squeal from way up above in the tree line they ride the mysterious rides that had seemingly materialised from nowhere, the most popular seemingly being the huge rollercoaster that went all around the grounds, culminating in a loop near the end. The line was full of Skireans, some excited, some nervous, some being dragged along by their friends.

Away from the rides, there were a multitude of games; ring toss, where people's faces were full of concentration as they threw coloured plastic rings over pegs to win a prize, a water gun game where people competed to see who could fill their balloon first, the scent of chlorinated water and damp fur filling the air as the participants giggled, and even a shooting gallery, where the more stoic and serious Skireans shot rubber bullets at targets in the hopes to win a prize and bragging rights. The fair truly had something for everyone, with everyone wrapped up in rides, games, socialising, or snacking on the multitude of delicious fair snacks available.

Skipper was in his element here, looking around excitedly as he decided what to do first. The rollercoaster would be fun, but he hated waiting...the games looked exciting, but what if he lost and didn't get a prize?! He had already indulged in enough hot donuts to last any other skirean several weeks, so he was too full to eat.

He thought to himself for a few moments, and remembered his bag of tricks. He had brought some chocolate crowns with him, maybe he could sneak a turn on a game by paying with the foil wrapped chocolate...then it wouldn't matter if he didn't win a prize!

He looked at the different games, deciding which one he'd try his luck at. His eye landed on a booth with a GIANT plush strawberry, and it had a big silly face! He loved it...he wanted it... he needed to have it!

He walked over and had a closer look at the booth. A basketball game ran by Halik. All Skipper would have to do was score five baskets, and the silly strawberry would be his!

'Waiting for a turn, Skipper?' Halik's friendly voice called out, their long fingers stretching out to offer a relaxed wave as they leaned on the booth counter.

'Halik? I didn't know you were going to be here!' Skipper chirps excitedly. 'Yes. I'm going to win that big ol' silly strawberry' he responds.

'Sure, it's just five crowns for three balls' Halik responds casually, though already slightly skeptical. They know how Skipper can be, and they're already on the look out for some kind of practical joke.

'Good Job I brought lots of crowns' he grins, putting the chocolate currency down on the counter. Though Halik immediately feels something off. They don't make the expected 'clink' of metal hitting wood. They make a dull thump.

Halik examines one of the crowns, turning it over in their hand, much to the dismay of Skipper.

'Skipper...'

'What?! I earned those! From...work'

'These aren't real, Skipper-'

'Well how do you know?!' He says defensively, quickly putting his hands over his eye in embarrassment as Halik peels back the foil, revealing the chocolate inside.

Halik chuckles. 'Good try, Skipper, but I can't let you play for these. Maybe someone will trade with you, though?' They say kindly, trying not to discourage skipper.

'Yeah...' Skipper thought to himself. 'Surely I could trade some of my tricks for some crowns...'

'Yeah! Thank you, Halik! I'm going to try to trade my tricks for crowns' he says with a toothy grin, disappearing back off into the crowd.

Skipper spends a lot of the night trying to trade his chocolate crowns, plenty of Skireans trading him a crown each for a small handful. When he finally runs out, he counts the crowns in his pouch; he has 5 crowns. He needs at least 5 more to get enough tries to win the strawberry!

A few hours later, skipper's bag was empty; he'd traded his fake cockroaches, all of his fake moustaches, his woopie cushions... and now his coin pouch was full!

He went back to Halik's booth, ready to try to win the silly strawberry. 'Three balls please, Halik! And my crowns are real this time' he said with a toothy grin, holding out a palm full of crowns.

Halik handed Skipper the basket balls over the counter, and Skipper stared at the basket, brow furrowing in concentration.

He took the shot...

And...

He missed.

He gasped, and with a newfound determination, he tried again.

He didn't score a single basket in his first set of balls...so he bought three more.

And another three...

And another...

And another...

And another...

A small crowd had gathered now, amused as Skipper had been playing this game for the past hour now, having taken over 40 shots. The crowd cheered encouragingly

'Come on skipper!' 'You can do it, skipper!' 'We believe in you!' 'You gotta get that strawberry!'

Before long, Skipper was down to his final ball, and he only needed to score one more basket...

No more balls...no more crowns... no more chances...

Sweat ran down his cheek as he panted, exhausted from all the physical activity, but more determined than ever. The small crowd silenced, watching with bated breath as they prepared to watch Skipper take his final shot.

Skipper lined up...

And....

He missed.

He had spent all of his crowns...spent all night trading for crowns, and he had lost.

His ears drooped, shoulders slumped. He wasn't getting the strawberry.

He sat down on the ground sadly as the crowd chattered amongst themselves, glancing at him and whispering to each other.

And then...

'I'll give you a crown, skipper!'

'And me!'

'Me too!'

Skipper looked up, surprised. 'Huh?...what...?'

'We all watched how hard you worked to win the strawberry, and we want you to get it!' A Skirean from the crowd shouted encouragingly, offering a single crown.

Before long, the crowd had pooled enough crowns for Skipper to try again. He thanked them all, his ears perking up once again in excitement.

Skipper lined up a shot, and took it.

It bounced off the ring...

Halik 'accidentally' nudged it in with a nonchalant swish of their tail.

The crowd erupted into cheers, crowding Skipper and congratulating him. He beams happily, hugging everyone around him and thanking them. This truly was the best night ever!

He held his hands out to Halik, who handed him the silly strawberry. It was ginormous, almost dwarfing him. He chuckled as he clutched the giant plush in his arms, the soft mochi fabric squishing under his touch. He was enamoured by its silly face and soft feel... he'd absolutely be using it to nap on when he got home. Not like he'd tell anyone that, obviously.

Skipper had had the best day, making lots of new friends and getting a prize to remember the day by. He couldn't wait to put the new plushie in his room and use it as a big cushion! And he was excited to spend so much more time with his new friends, too.

Tonight truly had been a night to remember.