

Columbia State 8: The Problem With Trust:

By: IndigoRho

Jeremy sat at the bar, leisurely sipping his beer. On a Wednesday night like this with no games airing the place was sparse, and the fox was growing bored. His job had been forcing long hours and overtime on him for nearly three weeks now to recover from an abrupt round of firings, and when he finally had a reasonable day off there was nothing to do. Friends were too busy with their own jobs during the week, so he had hoped going to a bar would be enough to distract him. So much for that plan. Maybe he could wander over to the college campus just a few blocks away, hunt for a while. He remembered the large park there treating him well in the past. Jeremy swiftly finished the last of his drink, when the bartender suddenly placed a new glass in front of him.

Jeremy's eyes went from the glass to the bartender. "I didn't order a second drink," he said, annoyed.

The horse bartender looked a bit miffed in return. "I *know*. The red panda over there bought it for you," he answered, pointing.

Jeremy swiveled around in his bar stool. Sure enough, a chubby red panda was sitting at a table further back, alone. The benefactor had his chin resting in a paw, and gave him a slight wave when he realized he'd been noticed. Jeremy grinned. Maybe he wouldn't have to bother going to the park. Grabbing the new beer, Jeremy strolled over to the table, doing his best to not seem overeager. After all, no use scaring away such an easy prey. He sat down across from the panda, who appeared rather gleeful himself that his offering had been welcomed.

"Thanks for the refill. That was awfully kind of ya," Jeremy extended a paw. "Name's Jeremy."

"Liam," the red panda replied back. They shook.

Jeremy maintained a friendly smile. "If you don't mind me asking, why *did* you honor me with such a generous gift?"

"Well..." Liam blushed slightly. "The view from here was rather pleasant. Especially that cute little butt of yours."

Jeremy laughed. There was no doubt in his mind now he was ending the night with a full belly. "Thanks," he noticed a nearly full pitcher sitting on the table. "That's a bit much for one person."

"Oh, yeah," Liam said, as if he'd almost forgotten about it. "I was supposed to be meeting up with a couple friends here, but they had to cancel at the last minute. I'm a lightweight, I'd never be able to tackle that on my own."

"Well it's your lucky night. I can easily down a pitcher myself, wouldn't put a dent in me," Jeremy boasted.

Liam seemed doubtful. "I don't know about that, I mean drinking the pitcher on top of the two glasses you've already got?"

"Again, not a problem. Don't let my small size fool you, I can pack away the booze just as well as anyone twice, no three times my weight!"

"Hmph," Liam replied in amusement.

"You might not believe me, but I promise you, if there were four pitchers of beer on this table I could guzzle them all down, I'd even put money on it."

Liam had a sly grin on his face. "That's even more ridiculous, you're bluffing. If you could pull that off, I'd pay for the pitchers myself, and anything else you wanted tonight!"

Jeremy's night was finally getting interesting. He couldn't resist the guarantee of even more free beer, and mused on the mental image of Liam half-submersed in a belly full of booze later on.

"Challenge accepted."

Liam gained the attention of a passing waitress and asked her to put another pitcher on his tab, the darkest they had.

"Hahaha," Jeremy laughed, "nice try, but that's not gonna matter. I'm not too picky with my

beer.”

He raised his beer and began draining it, drinking more and more without stopping for breath, and was soon gently resting an empty glass back on the table. Understandably, Liam wasn't all that impressed. Without saying a word, Jeremy proceeded to lift the lone pitcher on their table. He poured the contents into his mouth, feeling the cold beer cascade down his throat and into his belly. As with the glass he never once took a break. Liam watched curiously as the pitcher's contents swiftly emptied, surprised none was dribbling onto the table. Jeremy finished his last gulp, revealing a pitcher devoid of anything but a few persistent suds. He let out a short belch, but appeared unfazed by the feat.

“Alright, I have to admit that's pretty impressive,” Liam said. “But...I think most people could manage a pitcher inevitably. I'm still not convinced.”

“Trust me Liam, I'm full of surprises,” Jeremy said. “You'll be eating your words soon enough.”
And then I'll be eating you.

The waitress returned with a fresh pitcher and placed it on the table. Before she could run off again, Liam ordered two more of the same. She gave the pair an odd look, but accepted the request anyways. “We'll see,” Liam replied.

“If you're already asking for the last two pitchers, then you *have* to at least be considering I'm telling the truth.”

Liam shrugged. “I just think in the end, when you're proven wrong, they'll serve as a couple nice reminders of your hubris.”

“Sure, sure.”

Jeremy held up the new arrival with confidence, and once again began to chug. He started off strong, like before, but half-way through the pitcher his drinking slowed. A couple small streams of beer ran down his muzzle and onto the table when he couldn't keep up, forcing him to lower the pitcher slightly. The pressure in his stomach was growing, his body urging him he was full and needed to stop. He powered through the irritation, and eventually managed to finish off the remaining beer. Setting the pitcher down, he groaned. His breathing was heavy and he was beginning to sweat; It was obvious to Liam that he had struggled somewhat.

“Alright, two whole pitchers is honestly kind of amazing,” Liam said. “But you don't look like you'd be able to finish another glass, let alone two more pitchers.”

Jeremy continued smiling, wiping the beer away from his mouth with a paw. “Oh don't worry, I've got a trick up my sleeve.” He reached carefully into his jacket, pulling out a small hand pump.

Liam giggled. “I can't...why do you even have something like that with you?”

“It has it's uses. Really handy for easing a full stomach,” Jeremy answered. *Especially when it's full of prey.*

“Or cheating on bets?” Liam jokingly accused.

“You never said anything about banning inflation, perfectly legal.”

Jeremy bit down on the end of the small pump's tube and went to work. His cheeks puffed from the flow of air, inflating and deflating slowly as he swallowed. He could feel the pressure in his stomach lessening with each pump, its definition of 'full' being changed temporarily. Underneath the table his belly was rounding out, pushing away his shirt and exposing red fur. Liam appeared to be enjoying the display himself. The red panda watched the fox's belly expand more and more, eventually brushing up against the table. Jeremy scooted his chair back to make room. After another minute or so of pumping he finally stopped, content with the results. He hadn't inflated too much, just enough to make his stomach resemble a basketball, or maybe a rather small beachball. A couple quick slaps to the belly resulted in a pleasing, hollow sound.

“This should work well,” Jeremy said.

The waitress chose that moment to arrive with the final two pitchers, and the sight of Jeremy's exposed inflated belly just made her sigh. She wasn't sure what the pair were up to, but she really hoped this was their final order.

"Thanks again," Liam told the waitress. "We should be good for now."

The waitress wasted no time finding somewhere else to be. Jeremy grabbed the nearest pitcher, eagerly gulping it down. His stomach felt practically empty after being expanded with so much air, so handling the beer was a cinch. Within moments he was finished, and started on the fourth pitcher before Liam could get a word in. As before he showed no signs of struggling with the task. He disregarded the buzz he was beginning to feel, concerned only with his impending triumph. With one last gulp he sent the last of the beer to his swollen stomach and greedily let the remaining suds drop onto his outstretched tongue. Setting the empty pitcher down next to the others, Jeremy unleashed a loud, exaggerated belch, declaring victory.

Liam didn't appear too heartbroken over losing the bet. On the contrary, he looked rather pleased. "Alright, alright, I should never have doubted your ability to drink yourself under the table."

"Damn right!" Jeremy said, stifling a tiny belch.

"You did quite a number on your gut," Liam teased, pressing a paw against Jeremy's bloated belly, feeling the pressure.

Jeremy giggled from the touch. "Eh, it's temporary. I like to keep it in check, usually." *But I think it deserves a treat tonight.*

Liam played with the fox's belly a bit more, enjoying its sounds, feel, and general size.

"Oof, those pitchers *are* gonna catch up with me soon, though." Jeremy rubbed his head with a paw. "Maybe we should head somewhere a bit more...private."

Liam blushed, ceasing his teasing. "Well, I...I don't know..."

Jeremy gently grabbed a hold of Liam's paw, returning it to his belly. "My apartment's close by, we can continue the fun there."

Liam grinned. "Ok. That...that sounds like fun."

Jeremy belched a few more times, releasing just enough gas to make moving easier while not feeling too full. The pair rose from their chairs and headed towards the entrance. A few patrons gave Jeremy's bloated belly a second glance as they passed, which gave him some amusement. The chilly October night air hit them fast as they exited, and Jeremy bemoaned his inability to zip up his jacket while he was still inflated. He would just have to deal with the cold for a little bit. Even if he deflated, there was more than enough beer in his stomach to get in the way. Better to simply be cold than cold *and* aching. Liam followed Jeremy's lead as they walked further and further away the bar, heading in what appeared to be the general direction of the campus. Traffic was light and pedestrians were becoming few and far between. Jeremy noticed Liam's look of concern as they turned onto a small side street, so he attempted to distract him with small talk.

"So, Liam, are you a student at the university?" He pretended to care.

"Yeah, just starting the fifth and, hopefully, final year," Liam replied.

Jeremy nodded. "That's cool."

"Did you go there?" Liam asked in return.

"Huh? No, never went to college, period," Jeremy said. "Didn't really think it was for me, and I was able to nab a decent job anyway, so it all worked out."

Liam was looking around periodically as they continued down the street, alone. "That's nice, I'm still not sure what I'll be doing once I'm done."

"Ha, it's not that great," Jeremy grumbled. "It pays well, but they throw mandatory overtime at me constantly. Makes it real difficult to properly enjoy some of my hobbies."

Liam stopped, shivering loudly. "Man, it hasn't been this cold in a long while. How close are we to your place?"

Jeremy smiled back at him. "Really close. But if you want to get warm fast," he lightly nudged Liam against a nearby wall, leaning over him, "I think I've got an idea."

Not waiting for a response, Jeremy moved in for a kiss, silencing him. Suddenly, though, he felt his muzzle sliding forwards...right into Liam's open mouth. Before he even had a chance to react, Liam

quickly grabbed onto the back of Jeremy's head and shoved hard. Jeremy lost his balance, top heavy from all the beer he'd consumed, and practically fell right into Liam. He tried to regain his footing, but failed miserably, feet slipping on the pavement, paws unable to find a solid grip on anything for very long. Liam wasted little time, swallowing the rest of Jeremy's head with ease and working on his shoulders. He restrained the fox's frantic arms and pinned them to his side.

Jeremy couldn't believe what was happening. *He* was supposed to be eating Liam, not the other way around! Liam was just a shy, timid looking prey, maybe with a thing for inflation. How was he overpowering him! He should have been half-way down his throat already, about to enter the belly full of beer he had funded and admired so greatly. This wasn't right, how had everything gone so wrong! He was staring into the dark tunnel of the esophagus, feeling his chest engulfed, when the swallowing seemed to stop. His belly. Maybe it was too large for Liam to swallow, maybe he'd be forced to throw him back up! Jeremy's hopes were shattered immediately as his feet began to lift off the ground. Liam worked his mouth over the inflated belly of his victim with relative ease, slowing down only briefly to tease it with his tongue some.

By the time Jeremy's head entered Liam's stomach he could barely see straight. The four pitchers were hitting him hard now, hindering his coordination and making genuine resistance a fleeting dream. More and more of him slid in as he curled up in his warm, wet prison. Liam only halted his progress once more—to remove Jeremy's shoes—before gulping the last of him down. He leaned back against the wall as his meal shifted into a more comfortable position, at least as comfortable as one could get in a stomach. His jacket had been forcibly zipped open and his belly hopelessly exposed to the elements, but he didn't mind. Dinner was worth it. Deciding he'd wasted enough time as it was, Liam began waddling away at a respectable pace.

"I cannot believe just how lucky I was tonight!" Liam gleefully said aloud, mostly to himself. "I mean, I honestly thought I was going to have to spend a couple hours getting you drunk, and then lure you into the bathroom to have my fill."

Liam's belly shouted something inaudible back at him. He ignored it.

"But then you guzzled down those pitchers like it were nothing, and suggested going somewhere quiet all on your own!" Liam laughed hard enough to shake his gut in the process. "By the way, Jeremy, you were so *obviously* a predator. I mean, maybe it was the beer, but you just weren't subtle at all."

He hadn't made an effort to belch out any of the air still in his stomach, content to let Jeremy stew for a while.

Liam frowned. "I really wish we had been closer to my place. I doubt you'll be moving by the time I get there. Getting some internal shots with the vore cam would have been fun, and I don't think I've swallowed an inflated prey before."

He could feel Jeremy pounding against the walls of his stomach, feeling around for an exit.

"Eh, not every meal's perfect. Hmm, seeing as you've got some time left, maybe you'd like an explanation as to why I chose you?" The coincidental movement that followed was as good as a yes. "Good, good. Truth is, you resembled my old boyfriend Julian, at least a bit. We dated throughout high school, and I followed him to college without a second thought. Neither of us had hunted before. We never would have if we hadn't become friends with a tiger named Caleb. He was the one who got Julian into vore. I was worried, but Julian seemed to be enjoying it so I didn't try to stop him. Then, while we were on a date in the park, Julian ate me."

Jeremy had found the esophagus' entrance and was trying to force his paw through to no avail. Liam shook his belly from side to side, ending the effort.

"I should've died, digested alive by the one I'd spent years expecting to live the rest of my life with. But Julian got sick. Something in my shampoo upset his stomach greatly, and he stumbled into the campus clinic nearby. The staff there gassed him, sent someone down to pull me out just as I was about to fade. Their counselor tried to help me, tried to make me feel like my entire life hadn't just

fallen apart around me. I ran out into the parking lot, crying, only to come across Julian's phone, which he'd managed to lose while being helped in. I scoured it for answers, trying to figure out why he would have tried to digest me. And then he received a text from Caleb, asking 'if their problem had been dealt with'."

Jeremy's struggles were weakening considerably. The alcohol, heat, and stale air had overwhelmed him.

"I looked through their older texts, discovered they'd been seeing each other behind my back, that they had planned on eating me so they'd no longer have to hide their relationship. I was still in the parking lot when Julian finally left the clinic, frantically searching for his phone. Eating him was easier than I thought. He hadn't fully recovered from the sleeping gas, was barely able to put up a fight. I'd never eaten anyone before, but there was something so...right...about eating Julian. Caleb was away on a trip that weekend. I sent texts from Julian's phone, pretended to be him, arranged for Caleb to visit the apartment the minute he got back into town. He was even easier to eat."

Liam's belly was settling down. Jeremy could do little more now than shift occasionally, almost out of air.

"To tell you the truth, I really thought eating them would give me solace. I mean, it kind of did. They forced me to realize that I couldn't just ignore vore and predators, couldn't just pretend it'd never effect me. They showed me that preds have the real power in our world. It's eat or be eaten, and Jeremy, you ended up on the wrong end of it this time." Liam patted his belly.

There was no movement in response, even accidental. His stomach would be still for a while, at least until digestion kicked into gear. Jeremy had been a decent meal. He hadn't been too much of a hassle, provided some passable entertainment on a boring night, and would help nudge Liam towards his normal weight. It really was too bad he wouldn't be able to record any footage, though. He had taken a break from hunting to slim down—admittedly a little too much this time around—and knew his followers were eager for new videos to be uploaded. Liam never revealed himself in them, that was just asking for stalkers, but loved using a small swallow-able camera to record his prey's struggles. Oh well, maybe next time.

Liam finally belched out the remaining stale air in his stomach, shrinking it around the unconscious form of Jeremy. He would spend the next couple days digesting his easy meal, and then plan the next one, carefully. Maybe he'd get Aaron involved. Now wasn't the time to worry about that, though, with midnight soon approaching. Another day had passed. Another day still living, another day spent proving his dominance, another day unchallenged. He knew it would all end, eventually, that he'd find himself struggling within the dark confines of another predator's stomach one day, too. Until then, he'd continue on his current path in life, confident it was right one. And the inevitable.