

Here we go on a fairly long arc through the story. I've always wanted to do road trip stories for years now and I'm finally getting that chance. I had a lot of fun with these next bunch of chapters.

Jeremy woke the next morning to daylight. He had no idea of the hour. He simply broke camp and after making sure the embers of the night's fire were completely dead, left.

The highway was fairly empty. He headed west for about an hour before he came to the first boarder crossing. The official staffing the crossing passed him through with some fuss and seemed to enjoy searching for a reason to detain him. Having entered the St. Lawrence Lakes Province of the continent Jeremy noticed instantly the difference in the upkeep. There was little pretense of highlighting the historical nature of each roadside attraction here.

The history of the area came back to mind. The academy courses detailed how control of the lakes had been fought over desperately by all sides. The lakes were strategic goldmines in being able to control vast stretches of the middle of the continent. Incredible resources were thrown into taking and attempting to keep possession of each square mile around the lakes. The area Jeremy was traveling through had been the focus of every national power during the continental wars. The scars still showed in some places.

The mentality of the government from back then was also still in evidence. From the guards at the boarder crossing to the absolute lack of any signpost was a stark comparison of the much more open nations around the province. It seemed they were still almost secretive to the point of paranoia even this long after the conflict.

He pulled off after another hour and stopped at a small chain eatery. There were only three diners in the restaurant. His entrance received a few looks but only that of casual interest in the newcomer seen anywhere.

He ordered a small meal and couldn't finish it. Six months of near starvation rations had taken its toll. He guessed his stomach must now be the size of a peach. He just couldn't take in any more volume than that. He was staring out the window when the rabbit waitress came up and saw his still unfinished meal.

"Honey, the food here isn't that bad." She observed with a disarming smile.

Jeremy turned to her. "Oh, no it's good. I just haven't really had much of an appetite lately," he explained, not wanting to get into any more detail.

She leaned back against the counter behind herself. With so few people in the restaurant she clearly had the time to chat. "You're mighty tall for a weasel." She observed, her tone almost a question.

Jeremy leaned back in his seat glancing around at the other diners. No one was paying their conversation any attention. "Yes, Robin," he answered, his own tone meant as confirmation.

The rabbit smiled slightly and pushed off the counter. "Well, you need to get some meat on those bones. I'll box this up for you, if you'd like."

"Yes, please." Jeremy replied with a smile.

Robin lifted his unfinished meal from in front of him and took it to the back. While she was gone Jeremy looked out the windows again. The weather had turned and it looked like it was about to snow.

She came back in only a minute with a small cardboard box wrapped in plastic. Jeremy marveled once again at just one of the many conveniences he had missed. Jeremy paid, thanked the rabbit and left the diner.

After carefully putting the box in his backpack he headed west. He started feeling the cold almost right away and turned south as soon as he could. A little under a half an hour after turning south Jeremy saw the first snowflakes. He'd never ridden in snow before and increased his speed to get as far as he could while the roadway was still clear. He reached the Province's southern boarder and was allowed to continue without incident. Leaving proved far easier than entering.

After entering Virginia Territorial District there was a stretch of almost fifteen miles where it didn't snow but at the end of that it started coming down in thick wet heavy clumps. He was forced to slow down but pressed on trying to get as far as possible before he was forced to call a halt. He just hoped he could get through to another clear stretch. The roads were better maintained than up north allowing him to push on even with the deteriorating weather.

After ten miles of going well under the speed of the other vehicles and the feel of spreading wetness around his neck and traveling up his arms Jeremy pulled off. He'd made it to a small town that boasted a cluster of shops that catered to travelers. The real attraction for him at that point was a large sign with the instantly recognizable motorcycle logo. He parked at the front of the hotel and was able to get a room with no trouble. He spent most of two hours shopping for some new riding gear.

Finally in his hotel room he peeled off his now soaked clothes and showered. It still felt new and refreshing to just stand under the shower head. He couldn't get enough of the feel of streaming hot water soaking into and draining out of his fur. Stepping out of the shower he gazed at his own reflection appraising himself. As he dried himself Jeremy was struck again that he'd slimmed down more than he'd thought while in Chile.

He'd seen Eric, and his now thicker muscles. His brother was also gaining the typical coating of fat that weightlifters often got as a result of the overly high protein diet they clung to. Jeremy suspected Eric was also still using dubious supplements. From what he'd seen of Eric and his slow and almost ponderous movements he felt safe in assuming he was only working on getting bulkier.

Looking at himself again with mostly dry fur he was pleased. When he was younger, he corrected actually just years ago, he wanted to have thick powerful looking muscles, just as Eric seemingly still did. The stresses and training of the past few years had taken his body in a different direction.

Standing in front of the bathroom mirror he took an appraising look at himself for the first time in more than half a year. The rabbit was right about how thin he'd gotten. Leaning closer to the mirror he could even make out the subtle muscle and bone structure through the short fur of his muzzle. The rest of him was just as lean. It looked like there was hardly any fat on him. Looking at himself he saw that even the longer fur on his body failed to hide just how thin but also muscular he was. His thin face suggested hardship but the rest of him belied that first impression. Despite the harsh way in which he'd gotten so lean he actually liked how he looked.

He paced through a few practice moves enjoying the limber feel of his body. He was fit, lean and strong but also as Alex had so often stressed fast in his reflexes. His size compared to other weasels was already far larger than normal, it was now obvious he was a dominant. Standing in only his fur he smirked at the sight of his oversized sheath confirming that impression. He was content with his body in its current shape and level of fitness, or perhaps just a few more pounds of muscle would do nicely. He'd work on gaining that muscle the right way though. Still, even though he would like to add a few pounds Jeremy felt he was in the best shape of his life.

He smiled at the thought. He was far less muscular than he had first intended when he'd started adding mass to himself with PATOMES. His smile faded at the thought. It had been five years since finding PATOMES. His first thoughts had been centered on growing huge and powerful beyond what any weasel had ever become. Staring at the reflection of his own eyes he admitted he had wanted to outdo each of his brothers. It seemed ironic that he had done just that even without using PATOMES. In his youth he thought much like what his brother Eric still did. Now after all that time he was more content with himself now than he'd ever thought he'd be with a frame far lighter than he'd wished for.

He took a moment to open PATOMES and saved his body to this own profile and labeled it with the date. He went out to the main room and spent a few minutes taking the tags and price labels off his purchases. He had the right clothing to ride in the snow now, but didn't feel the need to go back out and press through any further for the day. He pulled a chair over to the window and sat watching the snow fall outside. With the lights off he felt comfortable sitting in just his fur.

His attitudes really had changed. He'd never have sat at a full sized window in just his fur before his time in Chile. He put his paws up on the bottom edge of the window and let his mind wander. Six months he'd been gone, time spent in a different part of the world. What they'd gone through in that time he might as well have been on a different world, altogether. As he watched the snow his mind slowed, just enjoying the moment.

There came a time when Jeremy just sat watching the weather out the window. There was nothing on his mind. He simply stared at the flakes slowly drifting down to land on his bike. He didn't know when he'd sat, or when his mind had slowed to a stop. He only knew it was starting to get dark when he stirred, and he was hungry. Jeremy had his paw on the door knob before he realized several things. He still had half a meal in his backpack, and he hadn't dressed.

Smiling at himself he pulled the box from his pack and sniffed at the leftovers of his lunch. It smelled safe to him as it was. He sat in the chair and opened PATOMES. In a few seconds he had the olfactory acuity of a coyote once again. His meal was indeed still safe, with only the slightest beginnings of spoilage. Impressed again he put his nose in the box and checked over the entire meal. He could avoid the wilted vegetables that were giving off the smell but decided to go for something fresh.

Once he was dressed properly he went to the door and pulled it open. The smell of fresh snow hit him and his secret coyote sniffer with an almost physical force. He stood just outside his closed door breathing in the sharp odor of snow sensing it this deeply for the first time. The air had the typical dampness from the snow, and the clean fresh feel too. Jeremy took a moment to consider what his nose was trying to impart. He could only think of it as a gentle but brittle edge in the air, as if nature had taken the cutting essence of ice and polished it to a fine smoothness. A smoothness that still had the power to cut into his sinuses and force a sneeze.

He shook his head laughing at himself as he wiped his muzzle with a sleeve. He'd keep his coyote sense of smell for a bit. Smiling he crossed the parking lot to the small restaurant. The lobby was full of people waiting for seats. The snow and hour had filled the place to overflowing. Jeremy sat and enjoyed the time sorting through all the extra scents he'd never known were there just beyond his own acuity. In the twenty minutes he had to wait for a seat at the counter the deeper sense of smell had given him an odd sort of headache. It wasn't actually painful, it was more akin to when he'd tried tutoring Marcus for the first time.

He was processing so much more information his brain was beginning to overwork. Still, he didn't think it would be harmful and he wanted to keep his sense of smell this sharp as long as he could. He also knew what he wanted to order before the waitress offered a menu. He could sift through every dish that had been made over the past several hours and had selected the salmon even before he'd gotten his seat.

The hyena smiled at him. "Good choice. Anything else?"

"That'll be good, thanks Nadine." Jeremy answered reading her name from the pinned tag on her blouse returning her smile.

With a nod that didn't diminish her smile she turned to place his order. He sat waiting and watched the activity. He continued exploring his new sense of smell, still amazed. He could just about catch the mood of people close to him. Most were simply tinged with impatience, but a few were rank with upset. Jeremy could tell which ones they were by the way their body language matched their scent.

Jeremy spent his meal getting used to the multitude of scents he had to sort through. The hyena stopped in front of his seat several times to see how his meal was. He could sense her interest in him as she stood in front of him. On impulse he let her know he was staying at the hotel and even his room number. He watched as she smiled wider than ever and walked over to a new customer being seated. He wondered if the recent treatment from female waitresses were due to people beginning to recognize him as a dominant more often.

By the time he managed to stuff the last of his meal down he felt he was getting the hang of cataloging all the subtly different smells and aromas floating about the diner. As he stood his stomach felt so full he wondered if he'd have to waddle back to the hotel. He knew he'd have to force his stomach to accept larger meals or he'd never be able to add any more muscle to his frame. He left the smiling hyena a generous tip

Back in his room he laid on the bed waiting for the lethargy brought on by his meal to put him to sleep. His slight not-quite-headache caused by his deeper sense of smell started to abate somewhat with fewer things to pick up in his room.

The next morning Jeremy woke early. His limbs felt the need to get back into the routine from Chile. Even as cold as it was Jeremy took to the outdoors and started his morning physical training. The five inches of snow caused a drag on his feet that only helped his workout.

Back at the hotel and after finishing his morning routine he went back to the restaurant across the parking lot. It was still dark and even the light early morning traffic was not enough to bring more than five people into the place. He was surprised to see the hyena still working. She explained she'd had to pull a double shift due to the weather. He finished his breakfast and lingered. Jeremy sat chatting with her and also watching for the snowplows. He could smell her continued interest as much as his own.

He left half an hour before her shift ended. Walking across the parking lot he saw that the highway was still being plowed, it would be a while before he was comfortable riding in such conditions. He used a hotel towel to clean the accumulated snow off his bike. He was standing outside and watching a pair of plows head south clearing the highway when he noticed the hyena leaving the restaurant and entering the parking lot.

Jeremy smiled at the female as she made her way in his direction. He could feel the beginnings of a response and even caught a hint of his increasing scent. The hyena paused at a car and waved as she unlocked it. Jeremy watched as she sat in her vehicle waiting for it to warm up enough to de-fog the windshield.

He idly wiped at his bike watching her car even though he now knew she'd only been flirting with him. He wondered at his reaction to the female. Was it driven by his more powerful sense of smell or was it the lack of any companionship. He turned from the sight of her car warming up and wrung the melted snow out of the towel. He really had felt a need building as he'd been chatting with her. Even now he still felt his need sustaining an embarrassing size.

Jeremy went inside and satisfied his need as best he could.

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The past two weeks I've given a little insight into how I built Jeremy's world. I'm going to continue that this week with something that hasn't even been hinted at. To me once I'd established the idea of species helping each other ascend to intelligence I had to decide on how they'd come to think of the divine power issue.

The first few to gain intelligence would very likely dabble in the idea until they themselves succeeded in helping other species reach ascension. At that point, what would it say about any god when they just managed to bring another species up to their level. On the other end of that each of the new species would also see those before them not as gods but simply earlier.

As a whole, the vast majority of the population would have a very materialist view of the world. There would still be some who hold on to what to most seem odd viewpoints about higher powers. I kept that tiny minority around to have fun using the occasion expletive. Don't like it? Sue me, gods damn it.