

I'm feeling a little under the weather so going to post this week's chapter early. Also don't have much by way of comments either.

Jeremy took to the road outfitted in his new riding gear. He was glad he had been able to find a pair of riding mitts for his foot paws. With the wet snow, slush and water spraying out from his front tire his paws would have been soaked and freezing after the first mile. With his feet wrapped they had remained dry and after more than an hour were still warm enough to have full feeling in them. His whole body was warm and dry. The only exposed fur was his ears and on his face just to the side of his goggles. Even then the scarf he'd bought was doing well in wicking the water from his fur before it seeped under his jacket. He felt he could ride all day.

He soon had to gas up his bike, and when done was eager to get back to the road. His body had started overheating when he wasn't on the road exposed to the wind and cold. He continued south for half the day and was still fighting the aftereffects of the night's storm. The only time he broke the seal on his riding suit was to take a rest stop. He finally called a halt in the afternoon.

His legs were getting stiff from being in the same position for so long. He picked a roadside hotel at random, again. He was pleased in how far he'd gotten despite the terrible conditions. He settled in the small room and after going out for a meal, slept.

He got up the next day with the same goal in mind. He'd settled on traveling as far as he could for seven days or reaching the other side of the continent. He'd then consider his next goal, or action. As he rode his mind wandered. His third day on the road and Jeremy barely thought about Karresa Ferris, or his time in Chile. His family were also taking a backseat in his mind. His job too was of little concern. At a rest stop he thought back over his last few hours of activity.

His mind had gone from one subject to another, only lighting on each for a brief visit before taking flight again. He thought it was time to exert a little control once again. While it had been a relaxing experience of riding and letting his mind wander he still didn't feel like himself. In essence that had been the whole purpose of Alex's suggestion. He'd keep to his goal of going as far as he could in a week, but he needed to focus his mind on something.

Starting off on the road again he opened PATOMES. It was still cold enough that he was fully covered up. He could experiment while riding. Jeremy started programming his first full body change. He took his time, adjusting the mass upwards from the average and also adding the coyote olfactory abilities. On activating the change he felt his riding gear tighten in several areas, but more than a little over his tail. He was being compressed into the tail sock to the point of pain.

Activating the reset he returned back to his own body from that of an otter. He felt it was still a successful test. He'd also learned in a very practical way that otter's were proportioned differently in areas other than their tails. He considered trying several other specie but rejected many of them for the moment. He was restricted by the confines of his riding gear. There were so many with tails longer or thicker than his own.

Deciding to put further full body experiments off until a better time Jeremy explored the command pathways. He wasn't looking for anything in particular other than mapping out all of the available functions. Another refueling stop came up and he was still finding new tools and even more shortcuts within PATOMES. As he stood adding fuel to his bike he was beginning to suspect that PATOMES was capable of learning from his use.

The most common activities he'd been using had altered to the point where accessing them was almost as simple as having the thought. To confirm his idea to himself Jeremy ordered a shift of a hundred units from himself to storage while he capped his gas tank. He shifted it back as he hung the nozzle back on the side of the pump. He added another hundred as easily and quickly as swinging his leg over his bike.

He could remember having to travel through almost a dozen different choices in the command pathways. Those alternate paths were still available, it would take but a mental shift of his intent to open them. His orders to PATOMES too were followed almost as he had the thought. As he parked at the small diner next to the station Jeremy paused and stood looking down at his bike as he pulled the gloves from his paws. On a whim he stood and listened for PATOMES.

His heart beat faster at the idea. He waited, his mind open to the idea that PATOMES was an interactive tool that had learned from him as much as he'd used it. Jeremy waited, his head tilted just slightly as though he expected PATOMES to speak to him. He admitted that was exactly what he was doing. Scratching his cheek and smiling at the silliness of the thought he sent a non-vocalized question at PATOMES. 'Are you there?'

Jeremy laughed. Looking around he checked to see no one had noticed him standing motionless for so long. He now felt silly thinking PATOMES would even talk to him. Still, he thought that didn't mean his theory was inaccurate. Feeling adventurous he walked over to the concession trailer parked at the side of the station. Once he was served with his order he walked over to a row of stones large enough to sit on. He started testing his theory as he ate.

He watched as one person after another came to the gas station. He targeted them and either added or subtracted a tiny bit of mass. Just as with his training with Alex, he sought to be able to execute the commands as fast and easily as he could. The idea was that the more one performed certain tasks the easier it would become. The same as muscle reflex memory only Jeremy was testing that theory to see if it also applied to PATOMES. He understood the results wouldn't be instant or obvious, he was prepared to conduct small transfers all day long.

After he took to the road again Jeremy continued making tiny transfers. All of them were no more than fifty units, most were only ten. He occasionally paused to clear the accumulated profiles, that did become noticeably easier. By the time he was ready to call it a day he had spent hours idly transferring mass.

The weather had also turned warmer. He'd changed to lighter riding gear and even entertained the idea of camping instead of finding a hotel. Jeremy stopped at another chain restaurant for dinner and continued toying with people's mass. He didn't make any drastic changes, just kept practicing with PATOMES. When he left the diner he stood watching the sun drop toward the horizon. There were a few clouds but the weather still looked promising.

He'd already made it to the middle of the continent. He was in farmland now, The Nations. This was the one place on the continent where the population had managed to push back against the European powers expansion centuries ago. Now it didn't look all that different from the rest. The more recent Continental Wars had seen to that.

Thinking back he couldn't remember seeing any signs for campgrounds over the past couple hours. There were rest stops still, but he didn't want to try sleeping at such a spot with constant traffic coming and going. He traveled a few more miles west and stopped at the first hotel.

Jeremy was getting the idea that most hotels across the continent were designed and furnished by a single person. They would very likely be long dead if the age of most of the furniture in his current room

was any indication. He moved a chair to the window and watched the sunset until the sky was almost devoid of light. The show held only a little of his attention.

PATOMES was taking most of his interest. He had out of curiosity tried to make an adjustment to the way he was required to program the mass transfers. Much to his surprise the routines shifted under his direction. He set about altering the commands and pathways to better accommodate what he felt would be faster. By the time he had had enough of the sunset Jeremy had created several quick commands and placed them at the top of the menu list. He stopped even though more ideas kept coming to him. He had another not-quite-headache feeling coming on.

Just as he had settled in for sleep the sound started. He'd not realized the hotel had anything like a concert room on the floor under him. He tried ignoring the thumping beat reverberating up through the floor but it was too catchy. More than once he had to stop from nodding his head with the rhythm. More out of interest than a sense of giving up Jeremy got up and dressed. On the ground floor he followed the sound to the lobby of the hotel.

He hadn't noticed the double doors at the side of the lobby when he'd checked in. They were now open and streaming music into the ground floor of the hotel. There was a short lynx in a black shirt and leather vest sitting on a stool at the doorway that just nodded to him as he entered. The bar was more than four times the size of the lobby, and fairly crowded. He stood a few paces in and surveyed the room. It was a live band that was playing, and they were relatively good. There were mostly tables and chairs spread about the floor, the only exceptions were stools at the bar.

Jeremy spotted an out of the way table with only two chairs left attending it and picked one to sit in. An opossum came around to ask what he'd have to drink. Intending to sit and enjoy the music he ordered the simplest beer they had. Before his drink came a panther gestured at the other chair at his table and took it after his returned gesture. He sat and worked through half the bottle in a half hour.

The band called themselves Don't Drink The Water, and played several covers of familiar songs and a few they'd written themselves. Jeremy thought they were good, especially for some out of the way small scale hotel bar. The opossum came around and set another beer at his table and at his look explained there was a two drink minimum. He smiled and payed for the drink and tipped the 'possum again.

Time went by and the band only added energy to the bar. Jeremy had almost finished the second beer when he noticed a few wolves at the bar begin jostling each other. They were broken up by the lynx and a cougar in due course. Jeremy watched the four wolves cautiously. They went to separate sides of the bar and stared at each other from a distance. To his eyes they looked like circling opponents that weren't done with each other.

The opossum swung by again asking if Jeremy wanted another bottle. Jeremy agreed to another and after the female set it in front of him made his way to the restroom as a result of the previous two bottles. He'd taken almost two hours to finish the two beers so didn't even feel the slightest buzz.

Coming out of the restroom he was confronted by one of the wolves. "Haven't seen you here before." The female said looking him over. Jeremy noticed her eyes pausing overlong on his crotch before finally coming up to meet his. The music had continued to increase in tempo and now even had a bawdy raucous tone to it. Her grin hinted that she was perhaps more susceptible to the music than most.

"Just passing through." He didn't need a coyote's sense of smell to detect a good deal of alcohol on the female's breath. He could however sense her slight arousal with his heightened senses. He glanced around but didn't see any of her previous companions. He projected his disinterest to discourage the obviously drunk female.

She looked up at him, swaying slightly and smiling. "Have any plans for the night?"

"No. Not really." Jeremy said trying to step around the wolf.

She reached out tugging at his shirt saying "Aw, don't go, I still haven't given you my best line yet."

He smiled at her forwardness, and turned to face her again. "Okay, just out of curiosity."

"I've had practice taking even the largest male inside me. Whadda say, want to try making me scream, I'm game."

"What?" Jeremy said, shocked at the brazen wolf. "That's your best line?"

"You'd be surprised how often it works." she replied grinning.

Jeremy felt a paw on his shoulder and as he turned to face the owner was treated to the alcohol laden breath of another wolf. "This male bothering you Priss?"

"He hasn't said no, so not yet." she replied, her tone that of dismissal.

Jeremy saw the other two wolves behind the one that had his paw on his shoulder. All three were staring at him with clear aggression. Everyone near them were slowly making a clear area behind the three males. He could see the wolf on the right slowly begin grinning at him. It was not a friendly grin. Jeremy couldn't believe the three wolves were actually trying to prey on him in a public place. They had to know he was a dominant, he was half a head taller than each of them.

"Look," Jeremy said shifting his body so that the wolf's paw slid from his shoulder "I didn't intend any offense," he continued projecting a sense of calm "so we should all relax."

The closest male started grinning and dropped to an aggressive crouch. The two behind obviously took the cue and also changed their stance.

"Come on, quit spoiling my fun Sager." The female said as she stepped past Jeremy.

Jeremy watched in momentary confusion as the female stepped up to the male and pushed at him. She pushed at Sager again forcing the male away from Jeremy with all her strength. The male on the left turned and in a step was grappling with a waiting coyote. The wolf on the side stepped around Sager and Priss as they jostled with each other. The wolf leapt forward aiming to close on Jeremy.

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Yay for cliffhangers. What?