

Hitting fast forward a bit to get to this one. We'll also get to some other interesting parts before Jeremy gets back home.

Jeremy's next couple days traveling were uneventful. He reached the western edge of the continent just before noon on day six.

His mind had constantly drifted for the past few days. His thoughts had at times drifted into territory that made him want to try something he'd only recently considered trying. His PATOMES storage account had grown to nearly a half million units. As he searched for a campsite along the coast he settled on just how to conduct the test he had planned. He pulled into a site that looked promising.

Parking his bike almost to the far end of the small campsite he stood and stretched his legs as he scanned the site. It was empty except for him. Walking to the edge of the pavement he looked at the ocean. There was plenty of beach, he guessed the tide was either out or close to it. He stood watching for several minutes feeling the wind brush the smell of the ocean into his fur. Everything else had layers and added context to his stronger sense of smell. The ocean breeze was completely different.

Breathing deep he could smell the salty air, only this wasn't a scent, this smell was a single unified, Thing. There were no multiple hints as when he scented an individual. With people or even animals he could get a sense of what they'd recently eaten, who they'd had contact with their mood and even their state of health. With the ocean he was hit with a single powerful smell. The smell, this smell didn't remind him of other smells. This scent, this powerful smell was unique. Even with his weasel sense of smell he'd never known anything like it. As he stood savoring the smell of the ocean he came to understand the difference.

This was the smell of vibrancy. The subtle but deep and powerful smell of life. He'd spent most of a week traveling aimlessly to come here. His muscles had ached at times and his ass was sore to the point of tears. He'd had periods of intense boredom but had continued on just from a stubborn resolve to finish. He'd arrived with no other goal than to stand of the edge of the world and see the ocean. It was well worth it. He wasn't sure if it was the wind in his face or the feeling of standing at the edge of the world that was making his eyes water.

Smiling at his own sense of accomplishment Jeremy pulled off his jacket and stripped down to just his shorts. Even with the wind coming in from the ocean it was warm. He returned to his bike and started preparing for staying the night. He'd added to his collection of riding gear over the past days. He now also had a small rain fly to cover his sleeping bag.

After the incident at the hotel bar a couple nights before he'd decided to avoid any chance of a repeat. He now camped out in the open. In the southern countries it was proving to be warm enough to sleep with just the few accoutrements he'd picked up. It didn't take long to have his camping site ready for the night. The rest of his gear he repacked and settled back on his bike.

Just as he was about to head to the beach a large motorhome pulled in and as he watched parked in a spot in the middle of the campsite. He continued watching as a family of beavers emerged and started setting up their own site. Certain they'd leave his things alone he went down to the beach.

The campsites were set about a hundred yards back and twenty feet above the high tide line. The path was well trodden and just sandy enough to whet the sensory appetite for more. On the sand of the beach Jeremy slowed enjoying the feel of it between his toes. He had lived so close to the east coast and

yet had never been to the beach until now. At the transition to the wet sand he stopped, surprised at the sensation of the compacted and firm feeling under his feet.

Smiling at the almost spent wave rushing over his toes as much as the feel of his feet sinking into the sand Jeremy stood letting the water soak into his fur up to his ankle. The chill of the water made him think twice about going further. After a few minutes and several more waves over his feet he braved the deeper parts of the beach.

Knee deep he had to remember to keep his tail up out of the water as the waves came in. He turned at the shriek of excitement. There were two small beaver kits running full tilt down the beach toward the water. He watched as they dashed straight into the surf and kept going until they could plunge under the water. Looking back up the beach he saw the mother and father of the two kits walking down toward the surf. Smiling and waving in return Jeremy looked around for any sign of the two young beavers.

Shaking his head Jeremy turned and made his way out of the water. It was just too cold for him to make the plunge the two beaver kits had taken. He reasoned that weasels just didn't have the extra fat to insulate them from the cold that beavers could stand.

He noticed the shell of a dead sand dollar in the sand and picked it out. He sat in the dry sand up above the tide line watching the family of beavers play in the ocean for a few minutes. He turned the shell over in his paws letting the sand drain out of it a little at a time.

Jeremy turned his plan over in his head in light of how cold the water of the ocean felt. He wanted to see how using his full account on himself would affect his size. He also knew he would have to do so without being seen. With it being almost a full moon he had the idea of conducting his test while in the ocean, at night. No one would be able to see anything. Now he had reservations about being able to withstand the cold water. As a weasel.

He smiled as he set the sand dollar back on the beach sand and stood. He wandered up and down the beach gathering bits of driftwood for a campfire once the sun went down. He soon had a pile large enough to last for the few hours he expected to stay awake. The beaver family had come back to their campsite as well. With the sun dropping toward the horizon the weather had started to turn. There were no clouds but a fog bank had formed and was threatening to roll in before nightfall.

With his own fire going Jeremy saw the beavers had also started a fire for themselves. Munching on jerky and trail mix he settled in and opened PATOMES. He'd spent enough time to not only become familiar with many of the functions but had also made substantial adjustments. His favored bodies were set up and could be accessed with a single command. The mass shifting function could now be activated almost as quickly. Several of the more technical functions he'd also streamlined the commands for. He could now make adjustments of single organs without having to plod through multiple command routes.

Once his hunger was satisfied he put away the remainder of the mix and jerky. The two beaver kits were now running the beach waving long pieces of firewood made into improvised torches. With the fog coming in he often lost sight of them and only saw the light of the burning end of their torches. Jeremy resisted the temptation for all of five minutes. Taking a long piece of driftwood from his own fire he walked to the beach with the burning end held up above his head.

He stopped next to the young beaver's parents. "Hello." he said in greeting, smiling down at them.

"Hello, Sir." they replied almost in unison. They both looked up at him with a bit of uncertainty.

He shifted his hold on the torch and held out his paw. "Sorry I didn't introduce myself before. Jeremy Dawn."

The male touched pads first. "Devon Almond. This is my wife, Glenna."

The couple were somewhat reassured. He could detect their scents just enough under the overpowering smell of the ocean. They watched their kits running the beach. They both came running back to their parents. Their torches were all but out. He could see their disappointment.

Jeremy crouched and shoved the end of his torch in the sand angling it so that the young beavers could relight their own torches. Stepping back he watched as they both held the smoldering ends of their torches over the flames.

"What do you say, kids?"

A pair of thank you's followed but neither set of eyes moved from the slowly rekindling torches. He shared a look with the parents as he shrugged and they smiled an unnecessary apology. It took several minutes for the two torches to come back to life enough to sustain themselves. Once the two beavers were satisfied they were off once again racing each other down the beach.

Jeremy smiled at the chuckles of their parents. The fog coming in from the ocean was dampening his fur more than he'd expected. If he stayed any longer he'd get back to his camp soaked to his skin. He turned to go back to his campsite saying "Have a good night."

The beavers both bid him a good night. He got back to his camp and moved the wood of his fire around to stoke the flames with what was already in the fire ring. As the fire started dying Jeremy was dry and warmed enough to let it go out on its own. He crawled into his sleeping bag still hearing the two young beavers occasionally shout at each other as they ran the beach.

PATOMES woke him in the early hours of the morning. Jeremy had set the search function to wake him at two hours into the new day. Seeing Sam's distance and direction displayed in his vision he closed PATOMES and crawled out of his sleeping bag. The camp of the beaver family was dark and silent. The fog had also thickened and was absorbing most of the light from the full moon. It was perfect for his purposes.

Walking to the beach Jeremy activated his first change. In his favored otter body he examined himself in the dim light. He was still as tall as his weasel body and now a bit more muscular. He also had a thicker layer of fat on him. Walking into the waves he was glad he'd not adjusted this form too far from the otter norm. In making his adjustments he'd been tempted to reduce the amount of fat but had decided to stay close to the normal for otters. He now had to concede that otters, like the beaver family all had a slightly thicker layer of fat for a reason.

Feeling the cold of the water far less than he had as a weasel Jeremy understood why that was. He dipped under the onrushing wave wetting his fur. Shaking his head as he broke the surface he smiled at the ease of swimming as an otter. The thick muscular tail of otters did most of the work. Slipping back under he felt like he could almost glide through the water. Swimming out to deeper water he readied the next change, eager to see just how far PATOMES could change his body.

He was enjoying the feel and ease of swimming as an otter as he activated the change while still under the surface. The first seconds were more than a bit alarming. As his body expanded the volume of air in his lungs became comparatively smaller. It was soon far less than necessary. Surging to the surface he gasped some much needed air into his lungs and took several more deep breaths. Several seconds had gone by in the distraction of his need for air.

Now able to focus on the changes to his body Jeremy would have wondered if he'd changed at all if not for his need for air. Thrashing his tail through the water he was able to tread water as his growth

continued. After the five minutes he'd programed he smiled at how normal his larger body felt. Relaxing back into the water he focused on PATOMES and asked for the calculation of his new size.

Jeremy's otter body had grown to twenty three feet long, nose to the tip of his thick tail. He had added mass in the same proportion his body had already exhibited. His muscle mass was still slightly larger when compared to his normal weasel dominant body. Except for the differences between otters and weasels Jeremy felt no difference.

Jeremy floated on his back considering his next increase. As he slowly propelled himself through the water with only his tail he programed the next addition. He activated the command and with the reset ready to abort the experiment Jeremy focused on the experience. He again didn't feel anything different. He'd programed the addition over a ten minute period. It was proving to be too long a time period even with the addition of such a large amount of mass to feel anything. He thought even waterborne the size he was going to become it still required a great deal of caution.

As the first seconds ticked by he watched the progress in the open display in his sight. PATOMES was counting the addition and also the creeping growth of his body. Even passing thirty feet long he physically felt nothing he could associate with the growth. The change became more one of perspective.

After two minutes of growth Jeremy did notice that he felt the pressure of the water pushing back against him differently. It was an odd realization that he somehow knew he now exhibited much more surface area. He was also getting that not-quite-headache feeling again. He reasoned that there was much more of him for his brain to control as the minutes passed.

Halfway through the growth he felt his tail brush along something solid under him. Feeling with his tail Jeremy found he was now large enough to fill up most of the depth where he was swimming. Mostly acting on instinct he reached down and levered himself to a sitting position. He only realized after the fact that he could have severely damaged himself. On the mental edge of activating the reset he held his position assessing how his oversized body was handling the stress.

His now massive body should have been collapsing in on himself. He was far too large to support his own weight. In all of history the only thing that had ever roamed on land that had been even close to his size went extinct long ago. Shifting his weight he brought an arm up experimentally and stared at it through the fog. The cascade of water falling from his fur only seemed to thicken the fog around him. Moving his arm he marveled at the fact that he felt no different despite the vast increase in his mass.

Probing PATOMES Jeremy kept the display of his advancing size in his sight even as he queried how his body could remain stable at such a massive scale. He didn't expect a response, PATOMES had never interacted with him other than follow his commands. While not really a response PATOMES opened another display in his vision. Instead of the running count of his growth this display was a simple formula, one that he had no idea of its meaning. He recognized a few of the symbols in the string of code from his time at the academy but other than that it was a cipher.

He almost automatically committed the formula to memory. Returning his attention to the other PATOMES generated image in his vision he saw that the growth had completed. Still cautious Jeremy prepared to stand. The response of the formula in PATOMES made him think he'd discovered another of its safeguards. He still kept the reset ready just in case as he got to his feet.

* * * *

Yep, another cliffhanger. I had asked last week if anyone wanted me to accelerate the posts for the rest of the month. Now you lot are going to have to wait a whole week for the continuation. You had your chance. And yes, I am smirking.