

Yes, I'm smirking through this week's title.

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Jeremy got back to the apartment past midnight. Sam's bedroom door was closed. With his internal clock still adjusting back to York time he stepped out to the deck.

It had been a tremendously frantic week. He'd found himself placed at the center of what was likely to become a historic find. The ripple effect of that find was also going to cause even more historic changes should Madagascar actually open their borders as they intended. The Bureau was about to become famous. His mind should have been racing. He should have been stressed to near breaking with everything that was happening.

Jeremy stood and watched the lights across the park completely at ease. Smiling, he had to admit that that Jenna and Sarah had a great deal to do with his current peace of mind. To be able to feel clear minded and capable of reviewing everything was a pleasant surprise. Everything he had coming up regarding the Bureau was already arranged and completely thought out. The Thirteenth floor and his place in it was also well in paw. His family life was stable.

Even thinking about his former brother no longer brought the sting it once had. Jeremy continued to smile to himself as he stared up at the night sky. The moon was gliding over the city casting its subtle glow over everything. The world seemed to stand still as his eyes slowly roved over the view. He truly felt at peace and ready for whatever was to come next.

Jeremy turned at a sound and saw Sam's sliding glass door opening.

"I thought you'd be out here."

Jeremy grinned back at his brother. "Hope I didn't wake you."

"No. I was up anyway. I knew you were back, just wanted to welcome you home."

"Oh? That's it?" Jeremy asked curious and a little surprised his brother would come out in the middle of the night. This was unusual for Sam.

His brother grinned back. "Okay. I'm curious about Madagascar."

Jeremy smiled back. He was one of the first non otter to have been allowed entry. "You haven't told anyone, have you?"

"No," Sam replied. "but it wasn't easy. Anyone would be curious." He added resuming his grin.

Jeremy stepped over to the lounge chairs and sat. As Sam took a chair next to him he started relating his impression of the lemurs. He went into a good deal of detail about his conclusion of their tail language. His brother seemed amused at the idea of lemurs using their tails as an alternative to facial expressions.

It was Sam who finally called it a night. As he said his good nights to his brother Sam lifted his tail and waved it about for a second. Jeremy chuckled at his parting gesture. Alone again Jeremy had to admit something was bothering him about the lemurs. Even after being included in the amazing find Jeremy felt they were still hiding something. He couldn't put his finger on any one thing, it was just the

lingering feeling he'd initially felt that the lemurs were being secretive hadn't changed after they'd revealed their find to him. Jeremy tried to put it out of his mind since there was no way to find out anything more now.

He stood and walked to the rail. Looking out at the city he again weighed the idea of taking flight as a hawk. He was going to be free for most of the day ahead. As tempting as that was he was also starting to feel the need for sleep. Turning he went to his room and prepared for sleep. Minutes later his mind lingered on the metal object buried in the deep below Kealuroondea. As hyperactive as his mind was just before sleep Jeremy expected to have one of his typical hyper-realistic dreams on waking.

He woke slowly the next morning. Laying in bed Jeremy could hear no sounds of his brother moving in the apartment. He had trouble remembering the last time he woke with nothing to do for most of the day. Sitting up and listening closer he was sure the apartment was his. After cleaning up and a bite to eat Jeremy decided how to spend the rest of the morning.

He had chosen to prowl Center Park this time. In his alternate identity as Dominic he wandered the crowded and active park. Despite having lived only a number of blocks away from it this was still one of the rare times he had allowed himself to actually linger and take in the sights. At eleven on a Sunday morning the park had plenty of activity. He turned his head at the sound of footsteps running up behind him and watched as a jogger passed him.

Dominic slowed hearing shouting. He walked in the direction of the noise and saw a trio of young foxes chasing each other. As he came closer he saw they were only out playing with a frisbee. Even as he walked by he noticed one of the foxes glance his way only to go back to his game. As he was close to passing out of sight of the foxes he paused and looked back at the idea that had come to him.

It took only a few seconds to target all three. Walking away he labeled them in PATOMES as Fox Friendlies one through three. With a smile he scheduled the addition over the course of the next hour of just a bit of muscle mass to each one. He scheduled further additions for the trio every week for the next few months. It would not be automatic, the program would simply open PATOMES to remind him of the scheduling. He would have to acknowledge the command for the transfer to take place.

Dominic thought he should have continued playing with PATOMES sooner. Even though he'd thought he'd learned all there was to know of PATOMES he was still discovering more of its capabilities, mostly because of moments like the one he had just experienced. Jeremy's trainer Alex often said there was no better teacher than experience, he had just been proven right once again.

Dominic smiled as he came to another part of the park. The small lake had dozens of people around it. He followed the pathway to the shore and stood simply watching for a while. There were several parents watching as their kids played with toy boats. Obviously radio controlled the various boats turned and sped about in all directions on the surface of the lake. He wondered how with all the different model boats on the water there were no collisions.

"Pardon us." He heard from behind. Dominic looked back and stepped out of the way apologizing for himself. A tall tiger male was escorting a younger version of himself to the shore. The young tiger held a model sail boat in his paws and a large smile on his face. The large male also smiled at Dominic as his son took his place at the shoreline. "Sorry, he just finished his sailboat this week and is so eager to see it on the water."

Dominic looked up at the large cat. "He must have a lot of patience to build something that intricate." he replied.

The male nodded with his smile still on his face. His smile widened to show teeth but it was clearly nonthreatening. "He's a good kid. I'm proud of him." They watched as the young tiger launched his sailboat and started piloting it with a handheld controller.

Dominic glanced at the large male. The feline was more than three times his current size as a rat, and yet he felt not the slightest bit of intimidation. He decided he needed to know who this tiger was. "I apologize, I'm Tony Newsome, pleased to meet you." Dominic said as he held out his paw.

The tiger male returned the greeting answering "Jake Ootts, pleased to meet you. Do you live in the area?" He asked as their paws parted.

"No, close by though. Oddly enough I've lived here for years but this is the first time I've actually visited this park."

"Well, at least you finally made it here. It's a wonderful place, there's always something for the kids. You have family?" the tiger asked, his eyes were on his son.

Dominic said "No. Haven't had the time, yet." realizing as he answered he was speaking his own truth. He suddenly worried if he continued the conversation he'd slip up and reveal something about his real identity. "Well, I have to be going. Have a nice day, sir."

"You as well, Mister Newsome." the male answered. The tiger continued watching his son as Dominic turned and walked away.

Dominic no longer felt like hunting for predators. He felt in too good of a mood. His chatting with the tiger father had lifted his spirits to the point that he wanted to return back to himself. He now wondered if he could somehow get to know Ootts as Jeremy Dawn. He paused and turned around to watch the tiger a moment longer. Having targeted and saved both father and son in PATOMES he was sure he could at the very least track the male down and find a way to introduce himself as Jeremy Dawn.

Smiling he headed for home to get ready for his appointment at the floor. Leaving the park Jeremy crossed the street with several others. As a rat he was among the shortest in the crowd that was crossing with him. A little more than halfway across he was hit in the head by something hard enough to knock him off his feet.

Shaking his head from the impact and looking up he saw a kangaroo look back at him with a sneer on his face. The male was not the only one looking back at him but he was the only one without concern on his face. Before he picked himself up off the asphalt he targeted the 'roo with PATOMES and labeled him as Kangaroo Predator Two. Dominic's sightline to the kangaroo was cut off by people helping him up from the ground an instant later.

Back on his feet he assured everyone he was fine. Due to the lights about to change he moved to follow the kangaroo but was held up at the sidewalk by several people. He understood they meant well and were only delaying him to ensure he hadn't suffered any injuries. He was forced to take the time to explain he'd accidentally been knocked over by someone and was fine. It was half a minute before the last passerby moved off after wishing him well.

The kangaroo was now out of sight but he had PATOMES to rely on. Leaving the corner and beginning his pursuit of the kangaroo Dominic quickened his pace. Possessing the body of a rat he had a disadvantage to the 'roo in speed but he guessed his attacker wasn't making any effort to evade him now. After a block he quickened into a jog closing the distance to the kangaroo.

He slowed as PATOMES informed him that the kangaroo had stopped about two blocks ahead. Back to a walking pace he closed the distance between himself and his prey. He paused outside a small vegan

food store where PATOMES had directed him. He couldn't track his attacker any closer, it still wasn't that precise but his quarry would be within a few yards. At the direction of a hunch he entered the food store.

Dominic stopped just inside the door and scanned the interior. The raccoon at the register situated at the front glanced at him a second before returning to the customer she was helping. He walked to the right glancing down the aisles. The kangaroo he was looking for was in the second to last aisle on that side of the store. He had a little carry basket in one paw and was browsing the selection of canned goods.

He continued and walked down the last aisle. He scanned the selection quickly and took a glass jar off the shelf and glanced at the label. The jar was about three inches tall and as wide. It had a screw on lid and the label covered half of the glass jar. He'd never known sesame seeds were in enough demand to be sold in such a large container. Dominic glanced up and down the groceries aisle at an idea of what to do with his attacker. It was perfect.

Taking another jar he turned and went to the checkout. He requested a bag, much to the apparent disgruntlement of the raccoon. Dominic walked out of the store knowing the kangaroo was still shopping. Guessing he had stopped to do his shopping on the way home Jeremy turned in the direction the kangaroo had been going. He waited at the corner for his attacker to exit the store.

About ten minutes later the kangaroo came out and as expected turned in Dominic's direction. As the male neared the corner Dominic noticed he was veering in the direction that would place him at the curb. Guessing the male was going to cross the street he waited and stepped up behind the 'roo as he waited for the light. Fortunately he was familiar with the area, he'd hunted the neighborhood several times. Following the kangaroo Dominic picked the moment to strike.

Just before they came up to a convenient alley Dominic quickened his pace to come up alongside the larger male. Just as they began crossing the alley opening he pushed at the male before stopping and accused "I remember you, asshole."

Dominic had stopped with his back to the middle of the alley opening. With PATOMES ready he waited for the kangaroo's reaction. The male stopped and looked down at the rat that had the effrontery to even touch him and then call him out with a rude name. The expression on his face made it clear to everyone who passed they should stay out of the confrontation. He stepped closer to the rat and angrily asked "Are you fucking brain damaged or just too stupid to know your place?"

Dominic backed as the male approached "You don't have the right to knock people over in the street and walk away." The kangaroo continued approaching as the rat retreated into the alley.

"Yeah? Who's going to stop me? You?" The kangaroo asserted not yet realizing he was now down to a mere two times the size of the rat.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I am." Dominic answered. He continued backing into the alley smiling as the kangaroo followed him deeper.

"And just how do you expect to accomplish that?" The angry male asked with a matching smirk on his face.

Dominic stopped and raised the shopping bag he held. "With this."

The kangaroo stopped and looked at the bag. Dominic could see the look of confusion on his face as he started looking around. He must have finally noticed his rapid loss of height. He looked back at the small rat only to see he was now only a head taller than his intended victim. Dominic watched the kangaroo while he reached in the bag.

He pulled out one of the jars and held it up so the male could see it clearly. As confused as he had been his face was able to convey even more puzzlement at the sight of the jar of sesame seeds. Dominic set the shopping bag down. The kangaroo was the same height of the rat as Dominic unscrewed the lid and dumped the seeds out on the ground between them. The kangaroo had to shift his own shopping bag to hold with both paws, his strength was diminishing as quickly as his height.

Dominic stepped closer to the the now smaller kangaroo and looked down at him. "Just to clarify and make sure I have the right male, it was you who hit me in that crosswalk, right?" He asked as he stepped around the male. He now blocked the sightline of anyone that was passing the opening of the alley. He didn't want to be interrupted at the moment of his capture.

"What, that? That was nothing, it was just an accident." The male answered. His tone had changed to one of innocent apology.

"Really?" Dominic asked. "Now you don't sound so aggressive. Seconds ago it sounded like you were ready to take me apart."

The kangaroo was down to the waistline of the rat and had to crane his head to look up to Dominic's face. He smirked down at the marsupial as he constantly turned the open jar over in his paws. It was a distinctly rat move that Dominic copied intentionally. "What was your name anyway? I don't like to have to listen for the missing persons reports on the news to find that out."

"Please, I didn't mean any harm. Beside's I, I don't deserve this." his shopping bag touched the ground taking the weight from the struggling kangaroo.

"You know, someone just recently taught me a valuable lesson about Karma. Want to know what that lesson was?"

The kangaroo stood behind his shopping bag looking around the alley, either for an escape or rescue. Neither would be forthcoming as he was only knee height to the rat. He looked back to his looming captor and shook his head.

Dominic crouched over the male. "It tends to bite you in the ass." He said as he reached down and picked up the kangaroo by the tail that the male had assaulted him with. He watched as the male shrank even smaller until he was only two inches long, including his thick tail. Once his prey had stopped dwindling in size he dropped him into the empty jar.

Dominic brought the lid up to his mouth. He'd occasionally seen rats perform what he was about to attempt. With his incisors lined up in the middle of the jar Dominic bit into the lid. Surprised at how easy it was he pulled the jar from his teeth and looked at the air holes he'd provided. It took just a moment to seal the kangaroo in the jar. Smiling he put the jar back in the bag with the other and walked out of the alley. He left the 'roo's clothes and shopping bag behind to be found and possibly tip off the authorities a certain rat that was still prowling the city. He walked out of the alley without noticing anyone paying him any extra attention.

While he appreciated not being stopped with a shrunken 'roo in his bag he also had to wonder that no one had noticed a rat being bullied by a much larger kangaroo. Making his way back to the park Dominic headed for his favorite bench. He carefully walked into the small clearing seeing no one in the out of the way glade. Even though he was alone he slowed to a stop at the feel of something being different. It took a few seconds to notice the change.

There was a scent of turned up earth in the air as well as a hint of freshly poured concrete. It was slight but present. Standing at the entrance of the clearing he waited and scanned the surroundings intently. In looking around Dominic saw that the trees to the right had been trimmed lower. Dominic

smirked at the obvious camera mounted on a new pole. It was set deep in the brush just to the right of the path so that only the top three feet were visible above the trees. Walking into the clearing he brazenly made his way to the bench.

He set the bag on the wooden planks and opened it up. He pulled both jars out and set them aside. Flattening the plastic across the bench Dominic opened the sealed jar and dumped the contents on the plastic. With a finger he cleared a small circle of seeds out and picked up the other jar. Unscrewing the lid he looked down at the kangaroo for a moment.

"The cops just might reach you in time. If they do, let them know Dominic said hello."

He upended the jar forcing the kangaroo to spill out onto the plastic. Before the tiny male could get to his feet Dominic set the up side down jar over him, trapping him within. Standing over the bench he could only see movement inside the jar. The bottom was molded with little rounded bumps blurring the sight of the kangaroo. The kangaroo wouldn't be able to see the birds clearly as they came for the seeds until too late.

Dominic turned and walked from the clearing without looking at the cameras.

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Okay, I was going to continue the geography tour but after thinking about it there's really not much special in Jeremy world about the area in question. They'd just be more small states of little impact on the story. Instead, it's likely a good time to focus on the background of Madagascar.

As everyone should know the rather large island is off the east coast of Africa. With lemurs one of the dominant species of the island it was others that picked them to rise toward ascension. All but lost to history is the short periods that other species were allowed on the island. Over the last few centuries lemurs all but remigrated back to Madagascar. No reason is even offered for this other than a rising accusation of xenophobia. At the current point in history their rare sense of exclusion is rarely even questioned.

Madagascar was one of the few places in the world that stayed out of the Continental Wars. At the time it was thought that they were too backward technologically to be considered a threat. Fortunately for the lemurs events and military strategies left Madagascar alone.