

Maximum Gains

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Zach pulled into his driveway and turned the car off. He laid his head back against the seat and closed his eyes, listening to the sounds of the car as it cooled down. On his passenger seat was his briefcase, draped with a yellow neck tie that he had discarded with much gusto once he had gotten out of work.

What a week! He had been holding hands and butting heads with a soft drink company about how to best approach their new product. Zach's job was to figure out how to convince people to buy something they really didn't need. In other words, an advertising consultant. And from what his boss and colleagues said, he was a damn good one, too. The hardest cases, however, were the ones in which he had to help sell something that he wouldn't want to buy for himself. He supposed that would be true for everyone, but then again, Zach was the healthiest consultant at his firm.

Convincing people to buy junk food really wasn't that difficult. Anything loaded down with tons of sugar and fat and salt honestly sold itself. That's just how the modern consumer worked. But Zach was a devious Dachshund. He had convinced that soda company that cutting the sugar by 75% would help bring in a new demographic. Those who wanted something sweet, but not sickeningly sweet, and thus feeling like they were being healthy. It was a small victory, but if Zach could help cut back on the calories running wild through his country, he'd do whatever he could.

The Dachshund opened up his door, grabbed his tie and briefcase, and bumped the door close with his lean hip. The slim and shaggy dog practically sauntered to his front door, relishing having a three day weekend ahead of him. His thoughts were playing around with what he had planned, when he noticed a small package on his front step. Stooping down easily to pick it up, Zach scanned the label to see if he could puzzle out what it might be. He saw that it was from the online fitness supply store that he bought his powdered creatine from, but his last shipment had already come in a few weeks before, and he wasn't expecting anything else. Oh well, it was a mystery easily solved once inside. The Dachshund fumbled with his keys in one hand until he was able to single out the house key, then let himself inside.

Zach's home was furnished with a rustic motif in mind. Log furniture, earth tones, all that good stuff. It paired well with the impressive scenery viewable from his wide windows in the living room, that opened on an expanse of woods that spread out before him for miles around. And during this time of year, when the leaves turned from green to their autumn rainbow of colors, burning with reds and oranges and yellows, Zach couldn't think of any other place he would want to live.

Forgetting his curiosity about the package, the slim dog simply stared out at the fall colored woods, highlighted by the setting sun, and sighed happily. He set all his items down on the kitchen table, and untucked his business shirt. "Let's get comfortable, shall we?" He said to no one in particular. Zach disappeared into his bedroom for a moment, only to emerge in a well-worn t-shirt and his red flannel "fat-pants," which were really just a comfortable pair of pajama bottoms. The Dachshund padded over to the side table by his couch, and picked up the remote control. He powered on the television, and unconsciously wagged his tail as he was greeted with the cheesy special effects noises you'd find in a 1950's black and white sci-fi space drama. Particularly one called "Space Rangers!" Zach had tuned in at the climax of the third episode in the series, where Captain Dodger was single-handedly infiltrating the Slorgon's home base so that he could rescue his second in command, a

voluptuous and busty fox named Nora. Zach knew that the pair would have an on-again off-again relationship throughout the course of the series, with false weddings happening when one would get replaced by an evil clone, or the other would get transported to the evil dimension, or something else evil would make them confess their deep feelings for one another. It seemed to Zach that the writers of the show must have been terribly jaded if they felt a stable relationship was only attainable by means of a villain's nefarious scheme.

He chuckled as he made his way to the kitchen to put together his dinner. As he assembled his kale salad with various fresh veggies, he mouthed along with the dialogue from the show. Seeing as how it was a special weekend, Zach allowed himself to splurge and added a dinner roll to his side plate after he had finished constructing his leafy green dinner. Then, slumping down on the couch, he happily munched it all down as he watched through the end of the episode. An announcement came on over the credits, informing the viewer what Zach already knew, that they were just at the beginning of their special three day "Space Rangers" marathon. He woofed with delight as the next episode started right up.

The Dachshund patted his stomach in a manner that a normal critter would, but only after a large feast. He let out a small burp. "Whoo! I think I overdid it with that roll." He looked down at his obviously trim abdomen and patted it again. "Careful there, buddy, or else we'll have to buy new pants for work!" He chuckled as the fifth episode finished up, and the first set of commercials began. He tuned them out as he stared at the mysterious package sitting on the kitchen table. "Might as well see what they sent me today." He mumbled to himself.

Springing easily up from the couch, he fished out a pair of scissors from a drawer and attacked the tape keeping the box sealed. Inside he saw that there was a decent sized plastic jug, and he wondered if maybe they mixed up his order and sent him a duplicate container of powdered creatine. It wasn't until he pulled it out that he saw it was indeed a nutrition supplement, but one that he'd never heard of. The label read "JumboMax! A healthy way to a better body!" and then below it "Vanilla flavor!!"

Setting it down on the table again, he shrugged, guessing that it was a free sample, albeit a rather generous free sample. Then, a commercial caught his ear. He turned his attention to the television and watched as bright colored lights flashed on and off, mixed in with pictures and video of heavily muscled men and well-toned women doing all the regular stuff critters do in gyms, and then each downing a glass of some colored concoction, apparently in a state of bliss from how wonderful it tasted. Then the commercial revealed via a body-less deep voice what this miracle drink was; "JumboMax! Your one step solution to a fantastic body! JumboMax! Drink it down to get pumped up! JumboMax! A healthy replacement for all your meals! JumboMax! JumboMax!! JUMBOMAX!!!" Zach was pretty sure the voice couldn't go any lower, and wondered if the announcer might have suffered any internal bleeding after the last bit. Then there was a string of high-toned legalese required on all such commercials which was run off so quickly and so fast that Zach couldn't pick out any of it. Then the normal station announcer came back on, "This 'Space Rangers' marathon is brought to you with limited commercial interruptions by JumboMax!" Zach had to admit that it didn't sound as cool when the normal announcer said it. "And now, back to 'Space Rangers!'"

Laughing at the perfect timing of the commercial and his package, the Dachshund patted the canister on its lid, as if rewarding a small child that had gotten a simple math problem correct. "Thank you for the marathon, but I'm more of a chocolate fan." Then turning quickly, he found his groove on the couch, and settled down for the next few episodes.

Zach stretched, relishing being lazy after his long week, and prepared to tune out the next set of commercials until the deep voiced announcer boomed out of the television, accompanied by the bright,

colorful lights and images of the trim and muscular bodies. “JumboMax! Your cure for those late night cravings! JumboMax! Have it in place of dessert! JumboMax! In strawberry and chocolate!”

Zach smiled and said to the commercial. “Don't forget vanilla.”

As if in answer, the commercial showed it's trim models frowning and throwing glasses of cream colored drink into the trash, and then grabbing glasses of the chocolate mix. “Screw vanilla! Vanilla is for pansies! Have a glass of chocolate, Chocolate, CHOCOLATE JUMBOMAX!!!” And then the screen went dark.

The Dachshund frowned to himself, it seemed odd that a brand would disparage an aspect of it's own product. Then it occurred to Zach that perhaps that's why it was a free sample. The vanilla was so nasty that they would need to give it away since they probably couldn't sell the stuff. Give them more shelf space for the other mixes. Now he was definitely not interested in trying that nutrition supplement, but the commercial had put him in the mood for dessert. Zach struggled internally if he should, but quickly lost the battle as his mind seized on the knowledge that there was a whole chocolate bar sitting in his pantry, waiting for a lazy weekend such as this. “Yeah, I think I've earned it.” Zach told himself as he got up from the couch, walking past the plastic jug when something caught his eye. He stopped in his tracks and quickly picked up the canister and couldn't believe what he was seeing. The mix was now chocolate flavored.

For a few moments he just stood there, staring in disbelief at the carton. Wait, had it really been vanilla? Maybe he had just misread the label? Yeah, that had to be it. Drink mixes don't change flavors just to suit a consumer's needs. Although...

As Zach mused over the idea of what a wondrous product that would be and how easy it would be to sell, he had opened the JumboMax jar and was pouring a single scoop into his glass of skim milk. “Well, better this than a chocolate bar, right?” Then, in a salute to the advertising firm that had put together the JumboMax commercials, he raised his glass at the television and took a sip.

“Oh man, that's good!” He took another sip, then another, and saying to hell with it all, chugged down the rest of the glass. “Wow! Maybe I will have to replace my other stuff.” Satisfied, he placed the glass in the sink and went back to his marathon.

Halfway through the next episode, Zach stared down at his stomach in surprise as it gave a gurgle, letting him know it was hungry. “Are you kidding me? We've already stuffed ourselves silly!” He poked with a digit, only to have it gurgle it's protest.

“No.”

Gurgle.

“No!” Poke poke.

Gurgle gurgle...

“You have no power over me!”

Gurgle gurgle...glup.

It did make a strong argument, the Dachshund conceded. And, really, had the JumboMax actually counted as dessert? It was healthy, after all, and desserts were supposed to be indulgent, right? So it stood to reason that he'd never had dessert, and that the glass of chocolate JumboMax didn't count. He rushed over to the pantry, and there shining in the gloom, next to the box of kale chips, was the beautiful bar of imported German chocolate. If you were going to indulge, you might as well do it with the best, Zach told himself. He returned to the couch and enjoyed every bite from the candy bar as he watched his show.

When the credits started to roll, the Dachshund's stomach informed him that the chocolate bar wasn't enough. Sighing, Zach got up from his favorite spot and grabbed the jug of JumboMax. “Okay, but this is the last one!” While mixing the drink, another commercial came on.

“Had a rough day at work? Stress burning those calories away? Better grab an extra glass of

JumboMax! Full of carbs and good stuff to keep you running strong! Don't waste away! JumboMax!"

Zach had already started drinking the glass, and was halfway through before he realized what he was doing. He licked his fuzzy lips as he screwed the lid back on the container. It had been a really busy week at work, and now that he thought about it, all that stress had been leaving him feeling thin. And he was pretty sure he had missed a few meals here and there. No wonder his body was starving! He finally had a moment to relax and it just wanted to rebuild what it had lost. He chugged the rest of the mix down, and headed over to the counter where the bag of dinner rolls waited. Examining them, Zach knew that he'd probably just toss most of them, and what a waste that would be. There was no harm in finishing off the bag, right? His ear perked as the next episode started, and he quickly returned to his seat, fishing a carb dense roll out of the bag and tearing off a bite.

The bag lasted him a few more episodes, but as he picked a few bread crumbs off his lap and fed them into his muzzle, the deep voiced returned.

"JumboMax! Part of a healthy diet! JumboMax! Have it with vegetables! Have it with fruit! Heck, have it with pizza! JUMBOMAX!!!"

Oh man, pizza sounded amazing at that moment. Zach fetched his work laptop from his briefcase and powered it up. Soon he was searching online for the closest pizza place, and found to his surprise that there were several to choose from. He'd never ordered pizza from home before, and as he started building his pizza he wondered why that was the case. Once his personal pizza was made digitally, he was about to click on the checkout button when he saw a special deal...sponsored by JumboMax! He could upgrade his pizza to an extra-large, and get an order of zany cheese bread and choco-dipped-sugar balls, all for only a few bucks more. "Wow! I'd be stupid not to buy it!" Zach remarked to himself, and upgraded his order.

Another episode came and went before the pizza arrived, but as the happy Dachshund set the pizza down directly on the coffee table in front of him, he snapped his fingers. "I need a drink!" Scampering over to the fridge, he searched for a good drink that would go well with pizza. He didn't have any soda to speak of in his home, and vegetable and fruit juice just didn't sound appealing at the moment, and water was too bland. So he grabbed the carton of skim milk and poured himself a glass. He glanced over at the JumboMax jug. Well, if he was going to have milk, he might as well make it healthier, right? As he dumped in three scoops, he did his best impression of the commercial's voice, "Have it with pizza!" Then took a deep swig.

Zach woke up with a small snort, and shook his head to get the muzziness out of his noggin. He yawned and stretched, then scratched his belly. It was a pleasant feeling. But, wait, his belly. Belly? He looked down at his black-furred hand, and lifted it up to examine what it was scratching. Yes, that was definitely a belly. He poked it with a digit. Then he rubbed his eyes and shook his head again and looked back down. Yup, still there. He might have freaked out, if it wasn't for the deep voice cutting into the "Space Ranger" marathon.

"Rise and shine, sleepy heads...and have a nutritious glass of JumboMax! Part of a hearty meal for the whole family!" At this, the models from the commercials were shown around the table, but Zach wasn't sure if they were the same models. They looked like the same people, except...you couldn't really see their muscles as obviously as you could last night. "JumboMax! Have it for breakfast! JumboMax!!"

He shook his head again. Maybe you couldn't have seen all their muscles. It did seem silly to him that a commercial that was advertising to critters who wanted to get in better shape would only show models that were already in perfect condition. You wanted to relate to animals. Animals like himself, who wanted to lose a few extra pounds. And JumboMax was obviously the way to do it. He got up from the couch with a slight grunt, and walked to the kitchen. Looking in the container, it was already half gone. Zach would definitely need more before too long, and milk as well. It occurred to

him that he really didn't have anything to make a proper breakfast with at home. But, he didn't want to go to the store and miss out on his marathon.

“Don't worry space rangers, we'll be taking a short break so that you can all refuel your rocket ships! Courtesy of JumboMax!”

Zach wasn't sure, he thought the channels regular announcer sounded a bit different, his voice a bit lower, but he didn't dwell on that for long. He grabbed a jacket, which didn't zip up as easily as it normally did, then his shoes and keys, and bounded out the door to the grocery store.

When he got home, Zach struggled with the numerous bags as he pushed his way through the front door. He'd planned just to grab a small carton of eggs and some bread for toast, but as he went along the aisles, he found more and more items that called out to him, or more specifically, to his stomach. He was even lucky enough to find JumboMax at the store, though there were only three cartons remaining on the shelf, and Zach quickly scooped them into his already full shopping kart.

Setting all the bags on his kitchen counter, he started unpacking and finding space for everything. He moved things around the the freezer so that he could fit in the 4 extra large pizzas, then there was all the sausage and bacon and several packages of eggs and cheese and...well, lots of stuff. He turned on the television while unpacking and was rewarded with the next episode.

“Ferfeck fiming!” He muttered through the bag of bagels he had hanging from his mouth, since his arms were full of cookies and crackers that needed to go to the pantry, along with a replacement chocolate bar or ten.

The now not-so-slim Dachshund got to making his big breakfast while watching the show, stopping here and there whenever a part got really exciting. Eventually he gathered up the numerous platefuls of his hearty breakfast, and moved them over to the coffee table. Happily chowing down as he enjoyed his marathon and drank more and more of his JumboMax nutrition drink.

Zach's weekend was a blur of old black and white sci-fi television, lots of food, and lots and lots of his new favorite nutrition drink. When he did fall asleep, his dreams were filled with the deep voice from the commercials, describing how the Dachshund was a prime example of a JumboMax drinker. How the pounds would eventually melt off if he would just have another donut or another brownie or another slice of pie. And after he'd wake up, Zach would find himself feeling ravenous, and he'd go in search of whatever the deep voice had been talking about in the dream.

He wasn't entirely sure when it had happened, but at some point Zach discovered that his “fat pants” had shrunk, and he was left with only his spandex bike shorts being able to stretch enough to fit around his larger waist. Not that he minded, the models on the commercials resembled him at every stage throughout the weekend, and the tubby Dachshund reasoned to himself that a commercial about a nutrition shake would only put health people on television, so he in turn must be at the ideal weight, and he'd celebrate with another glass of JumboMax!

It was probably around mid-day on Monday, somewhere in the sixth and final season of “Space Rangers,” when Zach had gone to open a new carton of the nutrition shake powder and discovered, to his dismay, that one of the cartons of JumboMax he had picked up was vanilla flavored, and he had already drank the other two jars from the store. He could always go to the store to see if they had restocked, but then that would mean missing some of his show, and the series was approaching it's epic finale. It was in the dark moment that he had a brilliant idea. Pulling out the large carton of chocolate ice cream, he used that as the base and made himself a true shake with the vanilla powder. Slurping it through a large straw directly out of the blender container, Zach settled back down on the couch with a huff, and vowed to not move from that spot until the marathon was over. He had a full box of donuts on hand to keep his energy up, and just in case, a few bags of potato chips set down on the floor. Besides, he didn't want to get up anymore for the fact that it just seemed like a lot of extra work, and for some reason it did feel harder to push himself up from the couch cushions. He might need a new couch, he

mused to himself.

The alarm on his phone gave him a start, and the poor fat Dachshund had to try three times to heave himself up from the comfortable couch, eventually succeeding, before he was able to waddle over to silence the alarm.

“Ugh, I don't feel so hot.” The dog scratched his rotund shaggy black-furred belly as he made his way back into the kitchen. Not caring anymore that it was vanilla flavored, he scooped several spoonfuls into the glass of whole milk, and drunk it down lightning fast. A small burp after, and then he made his way slowly to his bedroom to get dressed for work.

Yet, it wouldn't be that simple. Each of his pairs of pants had all gotten smaller on him, as well as his shirts and underwear. All of them were for anorexic beanpoles that really needed a good meal, and the thought of being so thin only made Zach hungry for some biscuits and gravy. He'd have to make that later today.

“Oh well, I think I've earned a personal day to do some shopping for new clothes.”

Making his way back to the living room, he struggled to bend over his ample belly, but finally succeeded in grabbing his cell. A moment later he was on the phone with his boss.

“Hey Bill, I'm not gonna be in today, I'm having a bit of a wardrobe malfunction.” He laughed to himself, causing his fat to jiggle and sway. “Don't worry, I'll be in bright and early tomorrow.” He hung up the phone and decided he'd better find his spandex top that matched his bike shorts. While he'd be buying a lot of new clothes, he doubted that the store would let him in without a shirt.

But before he headed out, Zach turned back to the kitchen, and murmured to himself, “Maybe just one more glass of JumboMax. For the road.”