

# Polar Travel Changes

By: Firingwall

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Artorius looked all around him. White. White. Everywhere white. White and obscuring.

The huge man huffed, rubbing his arms. *Still don't quite get how I ended up like this.*

He was stuck, stuck in a large blizzard. Visibility was low to nonexistent. He was far away from his ship. His power suit barely had any energy left in it. Artorius was in a tight spot.

He frowned, his mind starting to drift. How exactly did he get in this spot again? He remembered landing, walking a bit, then those people showed up and-

He shook his head. *Ugh, I can think about this later. Gotta focus on the now. Need to find shelter before I freeze over. Then I can plan things from there.*

For now, Artorius would walk, heading in some direction. Better than staying put anyways. Thankfully, the trek wasn't too difficult for him. With his large physique, moving through the high snow was easy, and the cold did not bother him much to begin with.

Still, being outside in blizzard conditions was something that would still hurt after a while. It was best if he just kept mov-

And he tripped, falling face first into the snow. Not a great sign for this trek admittedly.

He grumbled, rubbing his face. What did he just hit? It felt softer than a rock at least.

Looking back, he could just make out a large, leathery brown sack nearly disappearing underneath the blowing snowfall. He pulled out the large bag with ease and took a quick look at it. There seemed to be a name stitched into it, but despite his best attempts, all he could make out was "Property of...".

*Wonder who was lugging this thing all the way out here?* Artorius frowned. *Why would they drop it? Maybe they... no, let's not get grim here.*

The large man sighed. This bag belonged to someone, and he wasn't the kind of person to just leave it behind in the cold. *Okay, find shelter somewhere and maybe figure out who this belongs to so I can return it.*

Artorius took a deep breath and, gripping it tightly, swung the sack over his shoulders. He felt warm, cozy in that brief moment, but it faded in the cold storm. He began his trudge again, moving in some random direction other than backwards.

Curiously though, as he held the bag's top tight in his mitts, his hands felt warm. White fur began cropping up over the backs of them, slowly spreading out up his digits and onto his palms. Not all of them though as some skin turned black as coal and swelled, plumping up into big pads. Capping it all off, his fingernails moved to the tips of his fingers, forming stubby little claws.

Artorius didn't notice, his mind drifting in thought as his body went into autopilot. *Who dropped this? Was it important? Hmm... maybe I could figure something out if I looked inside... nah. Too cold and wet out. Best not to damage anything.*

He huffed, his steps turning heavier. Moving was becoming more difficult suddenly. How bad was this blizzard and how deep was this snow? Even with his size and strength, moving was starting to become a challenge.

He needed more grip and power... and he got it. His boots split open across the sides and front. From out of them stomped two very large, wide paws. They were thick and beefy with their own black pads and claws. He felt briefly cold once they came out, but a thick coating of white fur soon fixed that issue.

With that, movement became easier. His ursine feet stomped through the deep snow, smashing and clawing through piles with ease. His legs, and even his arms, gained some extra bulk and weight to them, helping with his pace and movement.

Artorius didn't quite understand it, but he didn't notice why with the cold blasting constantly upon him. He was just happy for the easier movement and better stride.

Though, with that said, his center of gravity started to shift, forcing him to correct for it. There was a low gurgle, and his stomach bloated. Not by much, but his well sculpted abs and pecs faded slightly. A softer, pudgier belly came forward, dipping over his pants' waistband.

He shook his head and continued trudging. *Uuugh, everything feels weird now. Snow's getting to me. Just gotta focus on going forward. Eventually, I gotta hit something.*

ACHOO! His nose blasted out a big sneeze. With it, the skin turned black. Not frostbite black, but black as ink. Texture turned bumpy as nostrils flared out, his sniffer turning thicker. His snoot shifted, transforming into a black bear nose.

His nose felt a little warmer as he brushed it, still unaware of anything different or odd. That helped... marginally but not enough, especially with his ears freezing. *Wish I had my hat or earmuffs...*

Such an issue was corrected as fur began to sprout. They started growing around the lobes and spread out, encompassing every inch. Then his ears shrank and shifted, the insides smoothing out and concaving while the shape turned circular. They slipped up the sides of his head to the top, forming cute bear ears.

Artorius sighed, trudging along, still unaware of a single thing. *...maybe this is pointless? I'm just wandering without direction in a snowstorm. Maybe... I'm-*

That's when his ears twitched. He froze up, not from the cold. He closed his eyes and focused, his bear ears twitching again. There was something.

It was faint, but it was something. Mechanical? Yes, but not only that. He could hear some grunts, mumbles, murmurs, and then some words.

Civilization? A settlement perhaps? Either way, his eyes opened up with a new fire in them. He had a direction, a chance to escape his cold hellscape, if only for a little bit.

Mustering up as much energy as he could, he started to move in the sound's direction. He put more effort into it than before, hope rising within him. *Wonder who's out here? Gotta be friendly, right? Maybe they know who owns this bag too!*

He hurried and plowed through the snow, his large figure making easy work of any big piles of snow around. Though, as he ran, his pace slowed. He was growing even bigger than he already was, surpassing nine feet tall with ease and even doubling his width almost. Such girth was starting to make him sink deeper into the snow.

Yet, despite slowing down and all of the weight, difficulty was dropping. His limbs grew to make his evolving shape. Muscles and girth built and built, giving extremely buff arms and legs that helped his balance and stomping through snow chunks.

He walked and walked. *Getting closer. I can hear them better now... sounds like a tavern? Good, I can definitely warm up in-OOF!*

The ground slanted steep. He slid and fell down a sharp incline. Seconds later, he hit the ground with a big, wet smack. Snow splattered him everywhere, and an even sharper cold stung him, seeping into his clothes.

Artorius shivered and muttered. This is not what he needed at all. He brushed some of the snow from his face with his paw, slowly getting to his feet. *Man, what I wouldn't do for a little bit of warmth right now.*

He brushed more snow from his face and head, paws brushing through his short, golden locks. Said locks bleached until they were shimmering white as the snow around him. They slowly thickened and grew out, spreading down his back.

His head felt slightly warmer now, but that wasn't exactly what he wanted. That's when his fur bloomed, growing more and more. Crawling up from his hand and feet paws, his limbs and then torso were quickly cloaked in a soft layer of fuzz. It left him itchier, his clothing a little bit tighter...

But most importantly, it left him warm. Artorius sighed, shaking his head. *Feelin' warmer now... why? Maybe... maybe it's psychosomatic? I'm just imagining... ugh, gotta stop overthinking things in the middle of a blizzard. Just gotta move.*

The large man took a deep breath, breathing in as much as he could. His body slowly expanded, pushing him to nearly nine feet tall now. His frame was even wider before, his muscles thicker and tougher to boot.

He trudged and trudged, the faint noises growing ever louder in the snowfall. *I'm definitely closing in. I can feel it now. Maybe I can-*

**RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIP!** And just like that, it came out. His shirts and pants tore right off. Bulging muscle, soft fur, and impressive musclegut came bursting out for full display. Thank goodness his boxers remained on!

Artorius blushed. This he definitely noticed. *Holy crap! What happened to me?! I'm huge... moreso! This... this can't be... is this a curse?*

He gulped, expecting the worst. However, there was no "worst". Despite being down to just his boxers, he was fine. He didn't feel sick, feel his mind fading, or anything else. He was even warmer and more cozy than before with his extra heft and fine polar fur.

*This is crazy, but I think I can work with this.* He had been in worse situations before in his many travels and adventures. If a larger, more animalistic body was the worst thing to happen, this wouldn't even make his bottom ten.

Either way, his pondering was interrupted. Looking up, he squinted. Piercing through the snow haze, he could see a light. Faint, but it was a light.

Everything about his terrible situation faded away. Shelter and warmth (even if the latter wasn't too pressing anymore) were near. He began to run, pushing his lumbering, mega form with all his might through the snow-covered land.

He ran and ran, a dark outline of a building slowly coming into view. He smiled, his teeth sharp and fang-like now. His skull finally shifted as his fur slowly rose up his neck. His cheeks spread out, his head flattening into a more dome-ish shape on top. His jaws cracked, pushing forward ever so slightly.

Eventually, he reached his destination. The building stood tall, a tavern or restaurant of sorts, before him, the faint sounds of people coming from within. He could make out the outlines of other buildings in the distance, so it seemed like he stumbled upon a town at least.

He walked up the steps and onto the building's patio, loud creaks and groans following each of his steps. He had grown one final time, now a large bear man that stood at least ten feet tall. Looking at himself one more time before reaching for the doorknob, he hoped no one freaked out by a large bear entering.

He reached for the doorknob and grabbed hold. Creeeeeeek. He crushed it inward with surprising ease.

He let go and looked at his paw. That easy to do? He was going to have to really hold back from now on if he didn't want to break anything else in the future.

He sighed. *Gotta be careful. That might freak out people more than me being... this.* His face pushed forward fully, completing his ursine muzzle.

*One more time...* He took hold of the doorknob, MUCH more gently this time, and turned it. The sound of people, life, and merriment filled his ears, followed by warmth flooding his face. Salvation at last!

He bent down and slipped into the room, closing the door. The place was more than a restaurant or saloon, but a full on trading port. There were people of all races and species as far as the eye could see, eating, trading, selling, talking, and more. A few people eyed the newcomer, but no one was alarmed or suspicious.

*That's a relief,* he sighed again. Upon his left pec, a tattoo appeared. It was bright blue, somehow visible over his furry pec. It was the symbol of the triskelion, though the ends were just slightly wavier than usual.

*Okay, now that I'm here, better start gathering info and-*

“OH! Mommy, look! It's him!”

“Is that him?”

“He looks different than what I expected, but he does have that bag.”

A lot of people, particularly children and their families, were looking at him and talking loudly. *Curious. Am I expected? Hmm, the bag is at least. Maybe they know who the owner is?*

He was about to ask them directly when one of the workers at the post approached. The older gentleman looked relieved, though a bit curious as he sized up Artorius. “Oh thank heavens! I was worried you weren't gonna be showing. Though, I must admit, I did not expect you to be so furry and... large as you are.”

*That makes two of us, I suppose.* The polar bear man cleared his throat. “What do you mean?”

“You are our special “visitor” for tonight; our very special holiday guest of honor?” The man smiled, nodding to the bag still over the bear's shoulder. “You have that bag after all.”

“Oh this? Yes! You see, I found it out there and-” He pulled the bag off and held it up to the man, but he was taken aback by the sight. The material was a lavish, velvet red that glimmered under the lights. It looked positively new, no trace of snow or dampness at all.

*What the... wait.* Finally answering his question from what felt like long ago, he opened up the bag and looked inside. There were toys of all kinds from dolls to puzzles to games to books. There were even supplies, medicine, and trinkets too. There was so much in there, far more than what it felt like to carry or what the sack could even hold.

This was crazy, but then again, he did just turn into a polar bear, so anything went at this point. It was best to be honest here. He looked at the man. “Look, I'm not the person you're looking for. I found this bag out in the snow on my trek here. It's not right if-”

“He's got toys! He is Santa Bear!”

“Yaaaaaay!”

Suddenly, a bunch of kids swarmed around him, nearly startling him. They all looked up at him with bright, eager eyes. A little girl with red hair spoke up, “Do you have our presents? We’ve been good kids this year!”

“Do you have our mommies and daddies’ presents too? They’ve been good too, and they’ve been trying real hard in all of this yucky cold!” A boy added.

Artorius was a bit taken aback by all of this. All of this hope and wonder. All of this joy and excitement. None of this may have been possible if he didn’t trip over that bag or even get lost in the first place.

He smiled. He felt warm, warmer than before. He may not have been the person everyone was thinking of. However, he could certainly fill the role of the gift giver for all the nice people and kids this year. What kind of hero would he be if he didn’t?

*THE END*