

Do The Animal Stomp

You came across the strange, runic circle in the midst of your off-the-beaten-path hike in the woods. You slowly approach the strange, arcane shape drawn onto a slab of gray stone embedded in the forest floor. You look upward, and see the tall trees that seemed to surround the area. The small clearing itself was roughly a circle with a diameter of several yards, while the circle itself was perfect and had a diameter of six feet.

You then notice that in the center of the circle, lying amid the symbols, runes, and swirled lines, was a scroll-like scrap of paper. Unable to curb your curiosity, and convinced that the paper might offer some explanation to what this was, you step into the circle and over to the torn scroll. You pick it up and you see that it had been mostly torn in half at some point. At the top of the scroll, there were two words handwritten in fine script: "Stomps" on the left side and "Animal" on the right side. The right side of the scroll was completely intact, and listed many types of animals, seemingly not in any particular order. The left side of the scroll, however, had been completely torn off.

You look around for a bit, seeing if you can spot any part of the scroll. After not finding anything, you look back down at the torn scroll, wondering what it meant by "Stomps" and what it had to do with all of these animals.

You then look back down at the runic circle you're standing in. You feel it must be some sort of random art project. What else could it be? However, the word "Stomps" still remains inexplicably stuck in your mind. You find yourself lifting your left foot a bit. You suppose the idea of stomping somehow got stuck in your mind from reading it in this conspicuous scroll, and perhaps whatever artist who made this thing intended for people to interact with it by stomping on it. Of course, the artist wasn't here now, so it probably wouldn't mean anything to follow his or her rule. But, you figure why the heck not, and you raise your right foot up higher and then bring it down in one single stomp. No real reason, of course. Just because, why not?

Immediately, the entire lower half of your body goes numb, and then your belt, pants, and footwear suddenly blip out of existence, the things in your pockets or hanging from your belt loops falling to the ground. Your backpack even flies off and lands at the base of one of the bigger trees. But before you can even react to this, thick gray fur suddenly grows over your thighs and legs. But before you can even react to this either, you suddenly see your feet shrink and your heels raise off of the ground. More fur grows over your feet as your toes shrink and your soles change shape. Your nails turn into claws, your pinky toe vanishes, and thick pads develop on the bottom of your feet and toes.

Both out of shock and out of lack of experience with walking digitigrade, your fall backwards and land painfully on your rear, the feeling of a newly formed appendage on your rear being flattened from your fall becoming very disconcerting and causing you to lift your rear up so your could instinctively raise your new tail.

You sit there for a moment, staring at your silver gray legs in utter disbelief. You sit there gaping, unable to form thoughts exactly, and you slowly raise your thankfully still human hand to place it on your right thigh. You feel the soft fur with your fingers, and you slowly move your hand down your leg up to the knee. You then raise your right foot slightly as you move your hand down to the bent part that used to be your heel. Then you finally go down to your right paw.

You wince a bit upon touching your paw, carefully squeezing each of your toes and stroking the pads on the underside of the paw. You sit staring in silence for another moment, then you crane your neck and look behind you to see a fluffy wolf tail.

That settled it. You know had the lower body of a wolf.

Now, you loved animals, and wolves were cool, but suddenly being half wolf in a very literal sense was far beyond weird. Sure, you still had your human brain, your mind, and your memories; but still, this was just simply crazy.

You then recall the old scroll, and wonder if maybe there was something else on it, perhaps on the back, that could help you. You realize that the scroll had somehow vanished from your hand, and you quickly look around for it. Fortunately, you find it rather quickly. You see it peeking out of the ground in the dirt a few steps away from the circle.

At first you wonder how and why the scroll had suddenly gotten buried, but you simply chalk it up to magic and roll yourself over to move towards it. However, as you begin to crawl, your new wolf legs, perhaps due to their digitigrade nature or some kind of magic induced instinctive muscle memory, end up pushing your body up onto them, and you are suddenly standing up on them.

You pause in surprise, looking down at your legs as you stood up tall. You take a chance and lift your left paw, tilting it to look at its pads. You then set it back down lightly and flew your toes a bit. You then jog off of the stone slab and over to the buried scroll.

You actually step right over the scroll, then drop down to all fours so that the scroll is between your legs. You then start digging into the ground with your wolf legs, your tail wagging as you did so. In seconds, you stood back up and saw the big hole you'd created, with the scroll lying there right for you. You feel genuinely proud of your handiwork, your tail wagging happily, but at the same time you wonder why you felt compelled to do this. You end up letting this issue go, and you snatch up the scroll and take another look at it.

The back of the scroll had nothing on it at all, so you study the list of animals on the front. Sure enough, "Wolf" was listed there, although it wasn't the first one on the list. You study the list intently, reading it over and over, and you conclude that "Human" was not on the list.

You sigh, and you turn back towards the circle. You pad back over to it, making your way to its center. Once you're there, you raise your right paw and bring it down hard on the stone.

You wait a moment, then another moment. Seconds tick by and nothing happens. You give it another stomp, and another wait, and still nothing. Growing nervous, you give it two quick stomps, and the lower half of your body went numb again. The gray fur on your legs turned black, and it became visibly silkier and shinier. Your paws become smaller, and your claws appear to shrink back into your toes. You can feel your tail get longer, and more relaxed.

You're amazed by how much more balance you felt on these paws, but then you're distracted by how cute your paws are now. You lift one of them up, and you fondle the paw a bit, rubbing the toe beans. With a bit of focus, you are able to control your retractable claws easily, extending them and retracting them several times. Then you look behind you to take a look at your long, skinny kitty's tail.

Again, the scroll had vanished, and you turn to see it lying on a rock not too far away near where the thick forest began. You make your way over to it, only for a soft splash and the feeling of wetness on your right paw causing you to jump backwards, the fur on your kitty legs standing on end. The very thought of getting wet disturbs you all of a sudden, and you look down to see that the rock the scroll was on in the middle of a large puddle, the kind that forms after a heavy rain.

You nervously shake your right paw frantically to get the water off of it. You are conflicted. You feel you should hang onto that scroll, but you DO NOT want to step in that water. You then see a line of small dry rocks and a narrow fallen tree limb sticking up out of the water between you and the scroll. Your tail swishes as you are filled with confidence and arrogant self importance, certain that this would be easy for you.

You hop up onto the first rock, landing on your left paw. Then you jump and land on the next tiny rock with your right paw. You hop from rock to rock, alternating paws until you reach the fallen tree limb. You take quick small steps close together, your hands at your sides and your tail sticking out straight behind you for balance. When you reach the end of that, you actually jump up high and flip in mid air, and land on one paw on the final rock before the scroll. You stand on one leg, with your other leg extended, kind of like the Dancer Yoga pose. You hold that pose as you bend over and snatch up the paper. You then backflip with impeccable flexibility, moving backwards the way you came and landing lightly on your feet back on the stone slab.

You're smiling as you check the list, and sure enough you find "Kitty" on the list, although it was nowhere near "Wolf" on the list. More curious than ever, fitting for someone who was now half kitty, you go back to the center of the circle and stomp once. Once again you were half wolf. You stomp twice, and again you're half kitty.

As bizarre as your situation was, you realize you couldn't leave here until you figured this out anyway. So, you quickly gather up all your possessions, phone, keys, and whatnot, and bring them to your backpack. You pack everything away, then you take out a pen. You write "1" next to "Wolf" and "2" next to "Kitty."

You then go back to the circle, and you stomp your kitty paw three times. The fur on your legs turns bright red, and you feel your thin tail suddenly become big and bushy. You gain a fifth toe, and all your toes get longer as your legs get shorter. The claws come all the way out, and the paws in their entirety get longer.

Your tail twitches, and you feel your breathing and heart rate speed up, and yet you feel as though this is perfectly normal. You're looking around a lot, taking in every detail you can. You accept it as just a part of being half squirrel.

Once again the scroll is gone, but this time you can't see it. However, you find that there is a new memory in your mind, as clear as day. It's the location of the scroll. Incidentally, you find that your memory itself has been sharpened. You recall everything you've ever known in perfect clarity, even the things you thought you've forgotten.

You start to walk, only to find that jumping along with your paws close together feels better. You jump your way over to an inconspicuous patch of dirt, then stand right on top of it. With your bushy tail curled slightly, you scratch your feet into the dirt, digging up soil with your claws. Then reach down and pull out the scroll, then start to jump back towards the circle. But then you stop part way, then quickly turn back to the hole. You then notice an acorn on the ground nearby. Naturally, you jump back over and nudge the comparatively tiny acorn into the hole with your giant squirrel foot. You kick the dirt you sifted back into the hole, rub the dirt back into the ground, then pat the ground flat with your right paw.

Satisfied, you jump back into the circle and write "3" next to "Squirrel." You then bend your knees, and jump up and down four times, landing hard each time. The fur on your legs changes from bright red to a chestnut brown, and the legs get a bit longer. Much to your surprise, each set of your toes fuse together, become solid and hard, and then split into two big digits in front and two smaller digits up in back. As your long bushy tail quickly shrinks dramatically, you take a good look at your cloven hooves, complete with a pair of dew claws each.

You walk away from the center of the circle, trying to get used to the feeling of having no toes at all. You supposed that you technically had 2, maybe 4 counting the dew claws. But it's not as though you could really wiggle them or feel through them. Although you kinda like the clicking and clacking sound they made on the stone slab. As you tapped your hooves you also stole a quick glance at your short tail.

Suddenly, you began to hear music. It was *Everywhere* by Fleetwood Mac. You turned and saw that it was coming from your smartphone, which was out of your backpack and lying right next to the scroll. However, that wasn't at the forefront of your mind at the moment. Upon hearing the music, you suddenly had the overwhelming desire to dance. And dance you did, moving your hips and tapping your hooves to the beat, and then throwing yourself into a full on moonwalk.

Your hooves scraped over the stone and slid through the dirt as you moved backwards. Then you swiftly spun around and moonwalked right over to your backpack, phone, and the scroll. You reached down, hit stop on the phone screen, and snatched up the scroll.

Upon reaching the center of the circle, you found that "Faun" was not on the list, but "Goat" was. So, you wrote "Faun" next to it along with "4." You then stopped your hoof five times, and your fur became pure white, not to mention rather short and smooth. Your cloven hooves fused into solid black hooves, your legs got longer still, and your haunches got rather thicker and more muscular. You felt your tail get longer and thicker and pretty luxurious, and you turned to see that it was straight with a golden yellow color.

While it felt weird feeling nothing through your hooves at all, you felt rather strong as you stood on your horse legs. You even happened to spot the scroll in record time. It was flapping in a breeze, up in one of the trees surrounding the clearing.

You galloped over to the tree, and found that it was way too high for you to reach, and horses obviously couldn't climb. You tapped your hoof in thought, then the answer came to you. You turned around so your back was facing the tree, then gave it a good solid kick. You felt some vibrations from the blow, but no pain whatsoever, an advantage hooves had over feet.

The blow knocked the scroll loose, and it fell right into your hand. This one didn't really seem to do it for you, so you quickly wrote "5" next to "Horse" and went back into the circle. 6 hoof stomps later, and your legs folded right in half as the fur turned a sandy color. You were caught completely off guard as a heavy, thick, long tail sprouted out, and the surface area of your feet increased dramatically. Your hooves split into three long toes each, and each toe had a long claw at the end.

You fought to catch your breath as you examined your kangaroo lower half. You lowered your tail slightly to maintain your balance on your extra flat feet, then you did a few experimental hop forward. You began to bounce around the circle, picking up speed as you enjoyed this near perfectly elastic form of locomotion. Your momentum seemed to build and build without you needing to break a sweat.

You glance upward and you saw the scroll hanging up in another tree, even higher this time. This didn't concern you, as on the next go around, you put all your strength into your feet and bounded upwards, easily reaching the topmost branches and snagging the scroll.

After writing a "6" next to "Kangaroo," you looked at your long feet and felt they were a bit awkward for excessive consecutive stomping. So, you simply stomped once, and your legs bent upward sharply to accommodate the digitigrade stance of a wolf. Then you stomped seven times, and watched as your legs bent in half yet again and shrank. Your fur became a lighter shade of gray, and you once again had three toes close together on each foot. You lifted one of them, and saw that the underside of the paw was white. You looked behind you, and a fluffy little cottontail waved to you.

You bounced from paw to paw for a few seconds, until you noticed that the scroll was still in your hands this time. You're surprised, but nevertheless put a "Lucky 7" next to "Bunny." But then you sighed, as you would much rather just find out how to get back to normal so you could experiment with this magic circle at your leisure. You took another look down at your lucky rabbit's feet, and you wondered if maybe pushing your luck was the answer.

Feeling as if you had nothing to lose here, you lifted up your right foot, keeping its heel on the center of the circle, and began thumping it fast and hard. On and on you thumped your foot, amazed at how it moved like a spring loaded machine. You kept on thumping, nervously anticipating the results, until finally-

BOOOM!

You were thrown back several feet and landed on your fluffy little tail. You sat up and saw with horror that the magic circle itself had exploded. The stone slab was destroyed completely.

You get up slowly, in a daze at first. Then yet out a cry of anguish and stomp the bare ground hard.

You stare into space as you feel your lower body go numb, and then regain feeling.

You slowly look down and see the gray haunches, legs, and paws of a wolf.

Amazed, you stomp twice, and you become half a black kitty.

You laugh in amazement at this, realizing that the magic was now a part of you. It was all yours now, and you had endless possibilities. It no longer mattered if you could go back to normal or not. Now that you had full control over it, you had nothing to dread. Not to mention all the time in the world to try out every possible transformation. Perhaps you might find out what number of stomps corresponds to "Human" one day. But even if you didn't, that was fine. Clearly you were a superhero, and human society loves superheroes. Provided you contact the right people, you should be fine. You'd pull off a few rescues around the city and everyone would love you in no time.

So, you picked the scroll up off the ground, gathered up all your belongings, put your backpack on, tapped your paw seven times, and bounded off on rabbit feet through the forest. Jumping off of rocks and logs, ricocheting off of trees, and clearing holes and ravines in a single bound as you forged your own path through the forest. You pause in front of an old tree growing next to a ravine, and you quickly stomp five times. Your horse hooves appear, and spin around and buck the tree, easily uprooting it and creating a bridge. Two stomps later, and you're off on soft and quiet kitty paws, silently and swiftly moving through the forest, ready to show the world what **The Mighty Therianthrope** could do.