

Ultra Condensed Rations

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The medbay aboard the freighter *Zephyr* was always cluttered, but over a period of a few days it'd become an outright mess. Datapads were strewn about in a haphazard fashion, vials of all sorts covered counters, and a blanket hung over the center exam table, which had been used as a bed some nights.

Amongst it all was a plump blue jay pouring over notes. Indi wasn't a doctor in any comfortable sense, but he adored experimenting. Rather spontaneously he'd become obsessed with creating brand new emergency rations for the ship. Something nutritious, filling, but—most of all—delicious. Delicious enough you'd forget it was a bar and not a freshly cooked or replicated meal.

Taste had proven to be the easiest issue to overcome, thanks to a little research. He'd even managed to layer flavors to simulate a full, varied meal. Since accomplishing that Indi had been working on condensing the nutritional value of the ration bars. His first complete bar had just replaced one meal. The second, a day's worth. Though that should've been more than enough, Indi's curiosity got the better of him, and he decided to push the rations to their limits.

The latest bar being synthesized would be the equivalent a week of meals. And not small ones, either. Indi wasn't exactly sure how the body would react to such a condensed feast, but he was excited to find out. Unfortunately the computer had been taking forever to finish the bar--far longer than any before, strangely enough.

The blue jay's eyes lit up as a soft *ding* signaled the bar's completion. He waited for it to cool and picked it up, grinning wide at the simplicity of it.

It resembled a small, plain candy bar. Of course even a quick bite off the corner would probably satisfy the eater for half a day.

"Alright computer, begin a thorough diagnostic of my vitals, and record everything until I say otherwise," Indi said. "Display as well."

Flickering appeared across the orange bodysuit Indi was wearing as holographic displays sprang to life. Readings included his caloric intake and weight, a modest two hundred and forty. The main screen of his computer showed even more.

"Well, bottoms up!"

Indi chomped down into the ration bar, scarfing it down swiftly.

Initially it lacked taste, but once the entire bar had been consumed he felt something settling in, like an aftertaste but in reverse. Eggs, bacon, and pancakes. There was even a strong hint of syrup and orange juice. The flavors were all distinct, lasting long enough to enjoy and shifting from one to the other flawlessly.

What little hunger Indi had been experiencing from delaying his dinner vanished. It was as if he'd actually just indulged in a hearty breakfast.

On Indi's middle the caloric readout reached a little under two thousand calories while his weight remained stable.

Then came lunch.

A grilled cheese sandwich, practically oozing and made with thick sourdough. The flavor of tomato soup flashed in between imagined bites, along with what must have been a mountain of fries.

The instantly-absorbed calories of the second meal caused Indi's weight to tick up a single pound, not that he felt the difference. Gaining some weight during the experiment was expected, and Indi certainly didn't mind being softer for a while.

Dinner was pizza, loaded with toppings and likely large enough to normally feed a couple people. Soda washed the flavor away, leading into chocolate ice-cream for dessert. Then the cycle of meals began anew.

Indi had a content look on his face as he rapidly delighted in day after day of full meals and in between snacks. He'd begun to plump up from the excess of calories, belly wobbling faintly. His bodysuit stretched with ease to handle the gains, not feeling the least bit tighter on Indi's body.

Caught up in the cascade of flavor, Indi failed to notice that he'd already gone through seven days of meals, and was well into his tenth. The gaps between meals and tastes were shrinking, the caloric intake display racing higher and higher. The oblivious blue jay's weight wasn't increasing nearly as fast, but it was still steady. Ten pounds. Fifteen. Thirty.

Only when Indi's swelling gut pressed up against the computer console did the blue jay realize something wasn't quite right. He let out a surprised chirp once he looked down and saw how much rounder his belly was, then blushed. The onslaught of flavor tried to distract him, but Indi managed to focus on his attention on the data given by the computer's active diagnostic.

Packing on the pounds by the second, Indi quickly poured through all the information he had regarding his out of control experiment, feeling his talons getting thicker and softer in between every click. His face had rounded out considerably, and so had his rump, the jiggles that'd once been limited to his middle spreading to his entire body.

Eventually Indi discovered the problem, and couldn't resist laughing at the silly oversight. Somehow instead of condensing only one week's worth of meals into the ration bar, he'd condensed a whole year's worth. His laughing quieted as he considered the sheer amount of calories that would include.

"Oh...oh dear." Indi chirped again, nervously, as he continued to blimp up.

The blue jay had soared past three hundred pounds and was nearing four hundred, his bodysuit still expanding right along with him. He hadn't even considered coming up with something to neutralize the effects of the condensed rations, and there was no way he'd be able to create a counteracting agent in time. All he could do was wait for the year of meals to end—and his weight to skyrocket.

Indi rapidly found the medbay to be more and more cramped as he swelled in every direction. Doughy sides pressed up against counters and the exam table. Whenever he tried to shimmy away from something he'd end up scattering vials and datapads with his belly or butt. The blue jay's waddle turned into more of a wobble as time went on, until he was too fat to move at all.

Inevitably the weight of Indi's gut became too much to handle, and he toppled over onto it, beached like a whale.

Seven hundred pounds. Eight hundred. Nine hundred.

Indi winced and blushed, feeling himself swell into a blubbery blob of a bird. Though he could no longer see the displays that'd been on his middle, the computer was kind enough to show off both his weight and caloric intake, the later of which was over a million.

The blue jay's face flushed deeper red as he watched his weight officially pass the half-ton mark, entering quadruple digits. By then the flavors were slowing down, and so were the calories.

After a wonderful peanut butter pie the numbers finally halted, Indi's weight stabilizing.

Every part of the blue jay was blubbery and soft. Indi's chins were numerous, his cheeks so large they pressed against his beak. Moving in any meaningful way was impossible, and all he could manage was a weak wobble.

Most would have considered the experiment a catastrophic failure, but a smile gradually came upon Indi's face. "From plump to blob in a single ration bar—this is fantastic! If I can find a way to turn it into a liquid I bet it could be used for intruder defense, or at least pranks! Now if only I could come up with something that makes you lose weight just as fast. Oh well."

With his thoughts racing with the possibilities of his accidental creation, the massive blue jay was content to fill up the medbay for the time being. Slimming down could wait till later. Perhaps a *lot* later considering his enormous girth...