

Hooves-free Eating

By: IndigoRho

Rho stretched as he lazily made his way down a corridor of the hauler *Pegasus*, the doughy orange-striped zebra heading towards the ship's small conference room—more of an office since the ship rarely had more than two or three crew members at a time. *Pegasus* specialized in transporting freight to fringe systems, trips that could take weeks or even months without any stops. Some found the work boring, but he'd rather grown to enjoy it, seeing it as relaxing.

The relatively sedentary nature of the trips had also grown his waistline quite a bit as well; not that he minded. His round belly was snugly contained by his company-issued beige flight suit, and the orange turtleneck he wore underneath it wasn't much looser. Both were a size larger than his original set, and he was certain he'd need to put in a request for a new one by the end of his next run. The thought made him grin—then blush.

The conference room door slid open as Rho approached, revealing his lone coworker already sitting down. Smokey was a light brown horse, with white on the tip of his muzzle and a blonde mane. Like Rho he was on the pudgy side, his own flight suit and yellow turtleneck clinging to his middle. The two equines often poked fun at each others gains during runs, though neither seemed adverse to being larger. The silent mutual acceptance of their weight had certainly made the long journeys more enjoyable.

“We haven't even left dock yet and you're already late?” Smokey chuckled. “Weren't trying to sneak in a second breakfast without me, were ya?”

Rho shook his head and smiled. “Trust me, if that were the reason I'd still be in the kitchen trying out the new waffle rations. Heard the new recipe's even better now. And I doubt it'll take us that long to open whatever weird gift corporate sent our way this time.”

Both looked towards a large box resting on the table, marked with the company logo. According to the memo they'd received it contained a new, experimental piece of equipment for them to test out. They were ensured it would improve efficiency, though both had heard such claims in the past often. Usually whatever the company had them test would be woefully ineffective compared to their existing stuff, and quickly forgotten after the run outside of the occasional joke.

“So, what are the odds it's another little companion bot designed to improve morale?” Rho asked as he started opening the box.

“I'm thinking a new diagnostics device,” Smokey suggested. “Maybe they finally fixed the bug with the last one that kept reporting our engine temp as being hotter than a sun.”

When Rho inevitably pulled out the first item, though, they were both left speechless. At first Rho thought it was an odd bucket with tubes attached to each side, but the longer he looked at it the more it resembled some kind of mask instead, one that could cover most of an equine's muzzle.

“Wait, is that a feedbag?” Smokey asked, with a mix of amusement and curiosity.

Rho hadn't noticed the resemblance before, but now it was all he could think of. He placed the device on the table and dug out a small manual pinned beneath a second feedbag. “The *Faster Efficient Eating Device*, or,” the zebra snorted, almost unable to continue. “F.E.E.D.”

“Really?” Smokey didn't know if his friend was joking or not.

“Oh yeah,” Rho said, skimming through the rest of the device's description in the manual. “Allows for hooves-free eating so that pilots can engage in short, approved meal breaks while remaining at their station or working on vital tasks. Utilizes a state of the art matter replicator to produce whatever food or drink the wearer requires—I guess that's the back piece those tubes connect to—yet is just as light as standard oxygen masks for *exemplary* comfort.”

Both Rho and Smokey were suddenly *very* interested in the devices. Smokey picked up the first one and gave it more thorough look over, getting a feel for how it operated. Soon the examination turned into putting it on, the strap and feeding mask proving to actually be comfortable. He blushed a

little on instinct.

Rho was still going through the instructions. “Looks like you can program a few preset meals into it in order to request them at the push of a button. Number one should already be set to 'water', while number two is 'burger'. Huh, wonder if it really compares.”

“Only one way to find out,” Smokey said, his grin hidden by the feedbag.

Smokey connected the tubes and put on the feeding device, hoof hovering over the option buttons with anticipation. As soon as he pressed the second button the device whirled to life. His eyes went wide as a few cubes flew into his mouth, the horse chewing them without a second thought. Despite their odd form they did in fact remind him of a cheeseburger, albeit one that'd been cut up into smaller pieces. The taste was on par with high quality rations, and Smokey was disappointed when the first burger's worth of cubes were eaten and the device quieted down.

Rho looked at his friend expectantly. “So?”

The horse gave a thumbs up. “If the other built-in recipes are as good as that burger I might never take this thing off!” Smokey had meant it as a joke, but certainly wasn't trying to remove the F.E.E.D. yet.

“Well if it's got your seal of approval then I've gotta test it out too!”

Rho put on the second device, already eying the preset for button number five: omelet. Soon condensed, delicious chunks were flying into his mouth, the zebra eagerly chowing down on them. While the portion was hearty, Rho still felt the same disappointment Smokey had once the feeding ended.

“Omelet's really good, too!” Rho exclaimed.

Smokey had already moved on to testing a sandwich. Then two, and three. The novelty of testing out the devices proved ample distraction from their slowly swelling middles, and both quickly lost track of exactly how much they were consuming. The strained zippers of their flight suits inched downwards, seams creaking ever-so faintly. Each button push was supposed to represent a full course at the very least, and the moments where they *weren't* pressing them were increasingly rare.

“Have you tried the potatoes? They've been infused with gravy and it's absolutely amazing!”

“Not yet, I've been too busy with the chocolate ice-cream cake.”

“There's ice-cream cake!?”

Soon their zippers had come completely undone, taut bellies shyly peeking out from beneath stretched turtlenecks. Endless praise for the automated feast had kept them blissfully unaware of their gluttony until then, but the sensation of cool air on their exposed middles was harder to ignore. Smokey was the first to look down, neighing in surprise as he saw a dome of light-brown rather than beige. Rho's eyes widened when he realized why his friend had made noise—even more so when he saw the effects of the gorging on himself.

“Oh...oh wow,” Rho said as he poked his belly. “Don't think I've eaten this much since the grand opening of the all-you-can-eat buffet on Minos Station.”

“If the company's goal was to efficiently fatten their pilots then they've certainly succeeded!” Smokey laughed. “And I think I only sampled about half of the presets, too.”

Rho nodded. “Same.”

The two looked at each other, and while their feedbags hid their muzzles their grins were plain as day.

“We can't say we're properly testing these out if we're not sampling everything, right?” Smokey asked.

“It'd be lazy not to, really,” Rho added.

Buttons were pressed, and once again the food flowed. Soda was guzzled and desserts gluttoned on. Nothing was tested in moderation, the two hungry equines overjoyed by the effortless eating. They were consuming even faster now, their bellies continuing to swell until they were fully exposed—and beyond.

As Smokey leaned back he accidentally bumped his device's control panel against the table, every button pressed simultaneously. The F.E.E.D. vibrated as it struggled to comply with the apparent order, sending wave after wave of food cubes into the horse's awaiting maw. Smokey was delighted at first, but soon had to start chewing non-stop just to keep up with the feeding. An attempt to blindly turn the device off only managed to hit more of the preset buttons, prolonging the deluge.

The horse's belly grew at an astonishing pace, quickly becoming an unwieldy dome too big for him to reach over. He wobbled and flailed, but most he chewed...and chewed, and chewed, and chewed. By the time the device finally ceased feeding Smokey his chair was beginning to creak, the stuffed horse groaning.

Rho had watched the accident with amusement. He slid off his own chair—round gut bouncing—and sluggishly waddled over to his friend. “Were you going for a record?”

“Was just—*urrrp*—seeing what it'd feel like to actually order one of everything,” Smokey answered. The sensation of being so full was both delightful and tiring all at once. “You should try it out.”

Rho took a step back as Smokey lazily tried to press the buttons on his F.E.E.D., laughing. “Hey now, if we're both immobilized then there won't be anyone to fly the first shirt!”

“True, true,” Smokey admitted, though he still made one last swipe at the buttons. “Course if you're volunteering then I'm free to snack all I want.”

To Rho's surprise Smokey started eating again, obviously testing out different combos—though on purpose this time. He felt a tinge of jealousy, along with an odd worry that Smokey would soon be fatter than him. The thought was quickly shrugged off.

“Just try not to get wider than the doorway!” Rho teased before waddling away towards the bridge.

“No promises!”

As Rho left his hoof casually went down to the controls. A burger or two would be nice during the trip to the bridge...