

ASTRONAUT FOOD – PART 2

Chunhua Xiang awoke with a flashing red warning light pulsing in her peripheral vision. She reached for the side of her nutrient tank, slapped the release catch. The hood of the thing slid up and to the side, its diaphanous membrane slick with enzymes.

The warning light was a red klaxon they'd attached to one of the Craft's mysterious computers, wired into the life-support system, and she immediately knew what it was for. The light was going off because a "pilot" had died or abandoned her post. Chunhua struggled to lift herself out of the tank with atrophied muscles, pulling nutrient tubes from her throat, and immediately found something that made her grimace with revulsion.

She'd grown fat in hibernation. Well, not fat: "chubby" was a more accurate term. A plump pot-belly, striped with stretch-marks, bulged from her middle. Her slim, toned astronaut's body had softened, porked up. It was infuriating. Someone, somewhere had fucked up—and she would find who was responsible.

Heaving herself out of the stasis pod, painfully conscious of the way her newly frumpy ass wobbled and her belly bounced, she groped for a towel and jumpsuit. Something smelled off in the pod ring area: had one of the other travelers died? This would be a regrettable event, mostly because of the stench and cleanup needed, but also because it would reflect badly on the People's Republic. They expected there to be casualties, of course: you didn't fly an alien ship across the galaxy without some difficulty, and it was entirely possible they all might die on this mission. But every life lost would make her country look less competent, less able to use the gift they'd been given for the good of China.

She was annoyed by how ill-fitting the jumpsuit was: her small, pale bulb of a gut rubbed uncomfortably against the front of it, and she was surprised to find it a bit snug around her breasts, too. "Well, at least I got something out of the screw-up," she muttered in Mandarin, cupping her chest. Ooh, they felt nice, too. Likely over-sensitive from bathing in proteins for so long. A suppressed, subconscious desire to pinch them took her, and she crushed it automatically, as she'd crushed all sexual urges from a very young age—she was a servant of the Party, and there was no time for pleasure on such a schedule. Right now, she needed to find out what had happened in here.

The air was hazy; she squinted, and saw tiny particles floating over the brightest screens and controls of the Craft. Contamination! She rushed to one of the compartments they'd installed, and withdrew an oxygen mask. She had already put it on before she realized something was wrong: the tube running from the mask to the oxy tank had been cut.

Sabotage.

Fear curled in her newly swollen middle. Who could be behind this? The Americans? They would certainly be delighted to fabricate a story about a Chinese takeover of the Craft, but somehow she doubted it would be this simple. No, it had to be the Russians. Only their crew members were stupid enough to think a woman trained from birth to fly this machine would be defeated by a sliced oxy tube.

She patched it up using electric tape and a few careful adjustments of the tank to make sure the pressure wouldn't burst her makeshift seal. Finally fresh oxygen flowed into her lungs and she shook her head, trying to clear it.

An American had taken the first shift. She remembered that much from the drills. Eliza somebody, a big-bottomed brown-skinned woman whose cheery attitude had been offensive. Their business here was serious, more serious than most of the other passengers knew. For it would be China who made first contact with the creators of the Craft; no other option was acceptable. To share the glory with other countries was unacceptable.

Had Eliza met some misfortune and died trying to operate the Craft? If so, she supposed it was one less problem for her to deal with. Lack of a pilot would explain her current pudginess: she'd been overdosed with nutrient fluids, over-fed in her sleep, her body betraying her by fattening up into a plump parody before she'd had the chance to awake. Even now, she felt uncomfortably full, liquid meals sloshing in her bloated gut. "Urrrrrp." Her soft belch echoed through the ship, wet and meaty, reeking of unwholesome bio-slurry. It was shameful, but nothing could be done about it.

Curious, she explored the Craft's ring section. A rhythmic banging sound was coming from another part of the ring, and she noticed as she walked that her feet lifted too far off the ground. The ring had slowed down. Gravity was not at the normal level. That stupid American! Lower gravity meant lower bone density—and a weaker crew! No wonder she felt so flabby and tired. She approached the banging sound, curiosity pulling her. Always suspicious, she pulled a fire ax from the wall, one of the few precautions they'd been permitted to take as far as weapons. No guns was an obvious rule, but you could do a lot with an axe; there had been multiple UN summits before it was determined the world leaders were being idiots. Astronauts needed tools to survive. And to complete her mission, she'd need to be ready for any possibility.

The banging sound was coming from an aperture in the ceiling. A broom handle was half-stuck in a hole in the top of the ring: the hole in the ring aligned with the outer portions of the Craft, the forbidden sections. She was, of course, destined to explore these and take control once the other crew members were "accidentally" killed. But it appeared the idiot American had done something so stupid that it defied comprehension: she had tried to breach the gap between the ring and the outer craft, alone, with no other crew members at her back. What insanity was this? No other crew had awakened, so it couldn't be part of a U.S. covert operation. No operative in their right mind would enter an alien ship without backup.

Curiosity, she thought, and shivered. This had all the marks of a misplaced exploration; perhaps the American had thought herself a modern-day Magellan, squeezing her big disgusting butt through the Craft's tunnels in attempt to be the first to know what lay in that direction. Or perhaps she'd sought to take control of the thing for herself. Utter foolishness: even their strongest scans hadn't been able to penetrate the Craft's larger sections. The alien creators, it seemed, had not wanted humanity tampering with their designs.

Well, there was nothing for it: she would have to awaken her comrades and find the American. But she wasn't meant to activate them until it was time to kill the other crew members, and if she failed to do that, the records on the Craft would show she'd pulled her Chinese friends from slumber early. Suspicion would fall on her. Frustrated, she pondered a way to solve the mystery. The next "pilot" to awaken would be Russian, and the Russians were not as idealistic as Americans. They would be happy to use any evidence of wrongdoing as a chance to exterminate the Chinese crew members. She would need an ace in the hole: some way to sabotage the rest of the non-Chinese crew without—

Frrrrrrrtpf.

She jumped at the sound, then squinted in fury. It had come from her own rear. Her body was revolting: so overstuffed with calories and nutrients, it was literally venting the pent-up gas from her long sleep as she stood planning her coup. It was... not exactly a dignified backdrop for her plans.

Frrrrumpptf.

She blushed furiously and tried to hold it in, but the farts wouldn't stop. The smell, rich and offensive like fertilizer, seemed to slap her in the face. "Disgusting..." Then she had an idea. She'd been overfed because the American hadn't been here to control the nutrient inputs.

What if the inputs were to "accidentally" increase, in the other pods?

Congratulating herself for her genius, she went to work immediately. A computer command would be traceable; instead of using the consoles, she simply worked to expand the dilation areas of the tubes, the stopgaps that kept the other crew members from being stuffed beyond belief by their own nutrient tanks. She made sure not to open them all the way—she didn't want any exploding crew members, at least not for now. But the Americans and Russians were in for a nasty, flabby surprise when they awoke. "Stupid capitalist pricks," she chuckled at one of the pod passengers, a freckled woman with large breasts and a serene face. "Let's see you represent your country when your belly hangs down to your knees..." She wasn't sure if the pods would fail-safe the sleepers out of slumber if they got too fat, but she was betting they wouldn't. In fact, the most likely outcome was that the pods wouldn't fail-safe until the sleepers began getting cardiac arrest from their own obesity.

After a pause, she moved from the American and Russian pods to her own nation's. It would look suspicious if they emerged skinny and the others came out bloated masses of flesh; even a single non-Chinese survivor might point the finger at the Party, and that was unacceptable. So she only dilated the feeding tubes a little on the Chinese pods. Her comrades would be plump and unpleasantly out of shape, perhaps with a little asthma, but nothing compared to the overflowing piggishness the others would display.

The work took many hours, and she went through several oxygen tanks. Chunhua didn't realize that the jury-rigs on her oxygen tubes hadn't worked; she didn't realize that the moment she'd breathed the contaminated air from the rest of the ship, her fate was sealed. Only when her belly growled with hunger did she snap out of her hyper-focused work coma and return to the consoles.

"Need some food..." The MRE's she found were distasteful, but they served. She re-heated one, gobbled it down despite the chalky texture and flavorless paste, and then another. And another. She'd eaten six of them before she realized she was stuffed... but still hungry.

"Must be the metabolism change..." She prodded her gut, now stiff and firm with the results of her feasting. MRE scraps littered her jumpsuit, and were smeared around her mouth. She wiped them away with a loud belch. Somehow, being a bit of a pig didn't worry her at the moment. She also didn't worry—for some reason—that she'd taken her oxygen mask off to eat. It seemed perfectly natural.

What wasn't natural was the tightness of her uniform feeling... pleasant. As if some sort of switch had been flipped, the severe constriction of the cloth felt intimate, enjoyable. Almost... sexy? Confused, she pushed these thoughts away. Psychological changes were to be expected on such a long journey. She would meditate them away before bed.

But the heaviness of her stomach in her lap... the weight of it, the heft of it. It seemed to hypnotize her. She found herself rubbing it, kneading it, and soon a single word slipped from her lips, still stained with bland sauce and crumbs:

“Wǒ xiǎng yào... gèng duō.” *I want... MORE.*

She did. She did want more, and this desire scared her. She wasn't gluttonous by nature: no aspiring astronaut was, or they'd be failed out of the psych tests her country had rigorously applied to her. She'd once fasted for almost a week just to prove her ability to overcome deprivation. She'd nearly died in that part of training, but it hadn't mattered, because she'd shown her mettle. She'd proven herself.

Yet now she reached for another MRE, and another, their containers flash-cooking the food as it was opened. She gobbled it down, piping hot, and didn't care when it burned her tongue and throat, her almond eyes overflowing with painful tears. She wanted more. She needed more.

“Must be... infection...” It was the only answer. Something from the rest of the ship had tainted her, fueling this greed, this insane terrifying hunger. She forced down four more MREs before her body began to reject the food, vomit rising in her throat. It dribbled out the corner of her mouth before—to her utter disgust and panic—she swallowed it, seemingly helpless to resist the desire to do so.

“Shit. Shit, shit, shit!” Groaning and belching, farts squeaking from her lumpy ass as she staggered up, she fled for the med bay. Well, waddled: her stuffed state prevented a rapid jog, because that might make her puke, and for some reason she couldn't accept the possibility of leaking a single calorie from her body. She simply refused, on a fundamental level, to give up a single drop of the sloppily digesting food inside her. It was utterly unlike her—she'd purged her stomach to make weight for the Party's astronaut program. What was happening?

She took anti-histamines, sedatives, anything that would calm her shaking hands and slow her obsession with food. Yet she found herself stumbling, crawling back to the food stores, hauling out protein bars and bagged milk-substitute, gorging herself, astronaut food splattering over her body and sliding to the floor. Every lost drop seemed painful for her, and she grabbed at the crumbs and flecks, which moved slowly due to the bad gravity.

Finally she'd eaten almost all of the stored food designated for her. It seemed impossible: those supplies had been stocked for a full three years' shift, and she'd forced it all into her gut, which now split the seams of her uniform and hung in a grotesque bulb from her frame. Somewhere in her mind she knew this wasn't physically possible: her skin was stretched too far, growing too fast. Something had modified her genetics. Her biology had been hacked.

But the rest of the food was identity-locked; short of cutting off another pilot's finger, she had no way of getting to it. And she considered this. But at last she realized she could try somewhere else: the forbidden sections of the ship.

As the aerosol retro-virus in her blood converted every last calorie to fat, accelerating her lipid storage, she staggered towards the broom handle the American had left behind. Had something similar happened to her? Had she deliberately exposed the rest of them to whatever hung in the air around her? She belched and moaning, groping her hanging belly, which was roughly the size and shape of a yoga-ball but far heavier, more dense, sagging off her and threatening to rip itself loose by sheer weight. Somehow her painfully stretched skin hung onto it, and kept her intestines from bursting loose and spilled their stuffed lengths over the deck. She began to long for death as the gas attacks hit her harder.

A record. She needed to warn them—warn her countrymen. She slapped at a nearby console. “Computer... HURRRRPpff start log... BRRRULCH. Air is... tainted. Use oxygen masks. Sabotage, the Craft has been...” She grunted and a huge fart erupted from her, filling the ring area with its yeasty stink. She leaned on the console, saliva and pulped MRE rations dribbling from her lips. “Can't fight... urge to eat. HIC! Ugggh. Body has... expanded... impossibly. BRUH-huuRpp.” She was dizzy, disoriented, yet

somehow... aroused? How was that possible? That toxin or disease must have rewired her neurons—an insanely complex task to perform inside a few hours, and one that told her they'd vastly underestimated the Craft's dangers.

"Going into... main sections hurrpffh," she groaned into the microphones. "Try to... cut off the tainted air... find the American. BRUHULP." She puked into her throat again, and swallowed it, the stomach bile burning her esophagus. But she needed the food inside her. She couldn't explain it, but she needed it. "Have to jam the aperture open. Father..." She felt childish leaving such emotions exposed on a public log, but she felt ready to burst. Another mouthful, a single bite, might kill her if she found more food up there. "Father. Hic! I'm sorry I... failed you, and the Party." She signed off just before another vile fart roared from her backside, making her cough and gag with its stink.

Using the fire axe, she jammed the hole in the ceiling open—just as the American must have done. The spinning of the ring stopped, and she floated into the air, weightless. It was just as well: she doubted she could have kept standing, with all this disgusting weight in her midsection. She reached out and groped for the opening.

It was tricky, but she managed to get into the tube. The fleshy opening seemed to pull her inside, her belly dragging on the warm, wet walls. She felt as if she were being devoured by some terrible beast. Only her own pained whimpering and the gross, ever-present sounds of her flatulence and greasy burps told her she remained alive.

Eventually the passageway opened up into an enormous space. Brushing her shoulder-length hair out of her eyes as it floated free, she saw enormous walls covered in some sort of bone-like material, and high above, huge bulbs or tanks of some kind pulsed and sloshed with an unseen liquid. The place was nightmarish, womb-like; she'd known the creators of the Craft used bio-tech, but this was on a scale and level of advancement they'd never expected. She was curious and excited despite her panic and pain.

There! In the light of strange fleshy illumination-strands growing from the walls, she saw the American's face, meshed with the wall. She kicked off and floated her bloated, farting body up towards the round, brown face.

As she got closer she shivered with disgust. The American had gotten fat; not surprising, considering whatever lurked in the air up here, but she was beyond simply obese. Her coffee-and-cream skin was distorted with flesh; only her head poked out of the red meat and strange bone-tubes of the walls, but it was clear the body embedded in the wall must be at least several hundred pounds. Her cheeks had grown into jowls that flapped free in the zero-G environment; her eyes were hazy and distant. Strange hypodermic needles of bone on strands of flesh occasionally prodded her neck, injecting her with something. With every injection she gasped, moaned and thrashed with what looked like rapture. "Oh! Oh, *fuck* yes!" The strands of her hair were meshed with the wall, keeping her face upright so that the Craft's frightening apparatus could more easily reach the flabby brown folds of her chin and neck.

"Gonzalez! URRRPppf, status report!" She landed on a ridge of massive vertebrae and waved at the woman, trying to get her attention.

Eliza turned towards the newcomer, blinking at her through a haze of drugs. Inside the walls, tendrils slithered around her massive legs and toyed with her loins; every touch was laced with endorphins that were absorbed through the skin of her labia and clitoris, thrilling her so deeply she could hardly focus long enough to form words.

"Chinese... chick! How's it... URRRRuumph, hanging?" The load of feeding-slurry in her belly, much like the stuff from the pods but far more potent and delivered in gallons and not droplets, sloshed and gurgled inside her. It felt so warm... so peaceful. "I remember... you... URRpftt." She giggled, drunk on dopamine and biologically produced morphine substitutes. "You got fat!"

“Speak for yourself.” Chunhua was disgusted. The Craft had done something to this woman, but she also felt that the woman had done this to herself; she’d been stupid enough to come up here, after all. At least they now knew the purpose of the Craft: it was no diplomatic vessel. It was a prison, a prison of pleasure and poisons. She would not be taken in so easily as this American pig. “Can you get free? I can *hurrrp*, get you out of there if you help me stop all of this.” She nodded at the horrific bio-machines around them.

A shadow passed over Eliza’s swollen features. “No way to... stop it. HURRRP. This is our destiny, honey...” She bit her flabby lip as deep inside the wall, a flower of fleshy fronds tickled her dripping womanhood. “F-f-fuck! It’s a pleasure cruise, *gordita!* All you can eat, all you can *burrrp* fuck, all you can *cuh...* Cuh... C-come!” Her eyes rolled back as the expertly engineered masturbation tendrils brought her to climax, her overburdened heart pumping inside the flabby mess that her once-fit body had become. “Just let it happen... Just let the Craft t-take you,” she gasped. “It’s so easy...”

“Never.” Revolted, she nevertheless made an effort to save the American; she might need the girl as evidence, after all. She reached in the chin folds of the fat woman’s neck, struggling to gain a fingerhold. It was in vain; the folds and flaps were too sweaty, and she was too distracted, an illogical rush of blood to her groin making her pant and gasp with ridiculous, misplaced arousal. The Craft’s microscopic agents were pulling her strings, now. She even though Gonzalez looked... a little *sexy*, all puffed up and helpless like that. It would be so easy to just reach in and kiss her. And slip off her pants and straddle that fat, stupid American slut, force her to lick and lick and—

“NO!” She pushed away from the wall, and as she did, a flash of bioluminescence inside the meaty cliffs illuminated Eliza’s body. Chunhua’s estimates of “a few hundred pounds” were vastly, horribly wrong. The bulk of the woman’s shape stretched nearly fifty feet from side to side; visible through the vaguely transparent Craft walls, she was enormous, bizarre. Fed and fucked into a blob as tall as a rocket booster and nearly as wide as the wings of a space shuttle.

“God, no, no!” She tried to swim through the air, but Eliza’s giggling announced a new horror: wriggling, wet tubes descended from the ceiling, slick with lubricant, seeking out a warm mouth to invade. They were attached to the vast “tanks” of liquid, and as one of them reached for her, she realized she was now part of the “cargo.”

Screaming and thrashing in zero-G, she batted away the six-inch-thick ropes of flesh and tubing, but it was no use. Exhausted and overfed, atrophied from months in a pod, she was a lost cause. Four tendrils curled around her limbs; one began methodically stripping away her clothes with a tooth-like extension, and another toyed with her lips, patiently waiting for her to drop her guard as it plugged her nose with twin cilia. As soon as she opened her mouth to breath, it would have her, another fatted calf for the ship’s larder.

She wouldn’t let it happen. She could hold her breath for longer than any of the other Chinese pilots; she’d been the strongest swimmer. But when a warm, slimy length of tubing coated in micro-barbs loaded with pleasure-inducing chemicals brushed the hair around her crotch, she gasped in surprise and horror... and a little bit of delight.

That gasp was her undoing. The feeding tube jammed its way past her teeth; the cilia exited her nose and a thick, tasty glop began pumping down the length of the thing and into her throat. Filling her belly. Filling her up, like force-fed livestock.

Her panic peaked as the lower tendril tickled the mound of her crotch—and then washed away as hormones in the feeding slurry flooded her system, reproductive urges kicking into overdrive, hunger ravaging her at the same time. Driving her insane with lust and greed. Now she knew why Eliza was so gleeful: giving in was *fun*. As grotesque as all this was, the Craft played her senses like a symphony, dosing her with ethanol and amphetamines and barbiturates in steady pulses, sending her into a limp,

gluttonous coma of swallowing and squirming. She thrust her hips out against her will, her body begging for more even as her mind broke under the strain of conflicting pleasures.

No no no no no NO—

A final, wet fart broke out from her hindside, and it seemed like a flag of surrender. Her brain was buried in delicious chemicals, and she sank into a beaten, battered acceptance, becoming nothing but a bag of meat and desires.

Eliza had been right.

This *was* easy.