

Food for All  
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## Food for All

Walking up to the entrance Jude saw the sign that usually read “Washington State Homo Sapiens Farming Facility” had been spray painted over to say “Washington State Homo Farming Facility”. That was a talk with security.

Getting inside he was greeted by the morning receptionist, Janet. She had a large cup of coffee in front of her. Her eyes were red.

“Late night?”

“Yeah. Ended up in a drinking contest with some sorority bitch. Just because I’m in my thirties doesn’t mean I can’t hold my own.”

Janet threw a couple of pain killers in her mouth and chased them down with a gulp of coffee.

“Sounds like a good night.”

“May have fucked her boyfriend. Yeah. How about you?”

“Microwave dinner. Streamed some old movies.”

“Whatever gets you by.”

The phone rang. Janet answered. Jude continued on to his office. He stopped for a moment and looked back at Janet. Watching as she curled her hair up into a bun. She smiled and winked at him.

Jude entered his office and got his terminal up and running. He had to get ready for a meeting. It had been a bad quarter for them. Not terrible. They had a small supply problem. It had picked up now though. There was also the issue of the activists. Many of the other centers had been hit. That reminded Jude. He needed to talk to security.

Jude was finishing up some notes for the board meeting when there was knock on his door. Jude signaled to enter. The Security Director, Josie, stepped in. Jude motioned for her to sit. He minimized his terminal display.

“This about the sign?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll have a talk with the night shift when they come in tonight.”

“This isn’t the first time we’ve had vandalism. We’ve been lucky so far. Next time it could be activists. That’s the last thing we need.”

“I understand.”

After Josie left, Jude sat and stared. He stared at one of his desk drawers. Would today be the day?

Jude walked into the board room and the eyes of the investors turned on him.

“The year started rough. We lost some of our breeders and had to rely on clone batches or foster overflow. But we’re bouncing back. We’ve been able to replace the lost breeders. Even with the downturn in the first quarter we’ve remained one of the top suppliers.”

One of the board members spoke up.

“What’s this about a new antiviral treatment? Should we expect this to affect our output?”

“The Vol’rak identified a new virus. Just causes cold symptoms in us but can cause fatal issues for them. Injections start today.”

An older lady spoke.

“Nice of them. Be nice if they shared some of that knowledge when they weren’t the only ones at risk.”

Most of the board members chuckled.

“This is a preemptive measure and will have no effect on our output. The rest of the quarter is looking strong.”

“That’s what we like to hear. It’s no one’s favorite topic but we need to talk about what’s in demand. The flavors that will earn us the most.”

Jude felt sick as he returned to his office. It was always hard to talk about what kinds of humans were in demand. He only had one ginger breeder and had to find some way of getting more babies out of her. Did she have a ginger partner? He would have to make sure she did.

There was a knock on the door. Mark, one of the board members entered.

“Can I help you?”

“You didn’t hear this from me but there are whispers that Jak’rak will be visiting today.”

“Why?!”

Mark shrugged his shoulders.

“Their concerned about the recent waves of activists. Some of them have gotten into other centers. Fucked things up. Our own shareholders threw a fit. We were able to calm them a little bit. I’m assuming Jak’rak wants to do the same.”

“Thanks for the heads up.”

“You alright?”

“Yeah. Talking about that stuff. It still gets to me. Just cattle. Right?”

“Know what you mean. I usually knock back something strong before these things. Maybe take something extra. Everything is food. And the Vol’rak aren’t the only ones buying. Anyways just wanted to give you a heads up.”

“Thanks again.”

Mark left. If Jak’rak was going to be here Jude wanted to make sure everything was going to be in order.

Jude walked into the observation room. He watched the nurses comfort the woman who had her legs propped up in the stirrups. Doctor Michlen was hunched between her thighs. The woman cried out in pain as she pushed. Michlen motioned for

one of the nurses to give her something. After a moment the woman had the look of ecstasy on her face as she pushed the child out.

It looked healthy. Jude wondered if he would be able to taste the difference between a genetically healthy human and a genetically unhealthy one. They say you could. Vol'rak tongues could detect fifteen distinct flavors in their food. Some humans claimed they could taste the difference. Jude wouldn't know. He had become vegetarian.

Doctor Michlen held the baby up for Jude. Jude smiled and gave a thumbs up. One of the nurses looked like she was in pain. Doctor Michlen handed the baby to one of the other nurses and went over to the nurse that was panicking. She was lead into the observation room.

"I'm sorry. I- I- I-."

"It's alright dear. I'll leave you with Jude and you guys can have a nice chat."

Doctor Michlen returned to the delivery room. Jude put his arm around the nurse and led her out of the observation room.

"Let's get some coffee?"

The woman's hands shook as Jude slid a cup of coffee towards her. She wrapped her fingers around the cup. Jude looked at her badge.

"Stacey, what are you feeling?"

"I thought I could do it."

Jude walked over to the counter and grabbed a box of tissue.

"Why here?"

Stacey took some of the tissue and started to dab her eyes.

"I know it has to be done. I just wanted to be a part of their lives, make them the best they could be before. Before..."

Stacey grabbed more tissue and sobbed. Jude understood. Helping give birth to something. Being a part of its life as it grew older. Something that you knew was destined to be slaughtered. It's hard. Can't let yourself get too close. It was impossible for some people.

"It's not for everybody. Every day we work with people who will end up on someone's plate. We try to give them a good life before then. We try to be kind. But it does take a toll on a lot of people. It's driven some of my colleagues to suicide."

Jude looked at Stacey. She looked back at him through her tear filled eyes.

"Let's go to HR. We'll help you find something else."

Stacey nodded.

The kids were just waking up from their nap when Jude walked into the play dome. He stood above them on a walk way. The cots they slept on receded into the floor as they got up. Jude watched as the Overseers rounded them up and started getting them ready to go outside. Some genius was down there. The next great humanitarian. Some kid that would grow up and write the next great novel. They would never know. Those kids would never get a chance. Smart enough to enjoy their lives but not too smart. Claire, one of the Shift Overseers joined him.

"Don't see you up here often."

"Might have a visitor."

"Everything look in order."

"Yeah. I talked to Food Services. They'll be making something special for the kids tonight."

"Because of the visitor?"

"No. I'm just in a mood."

"You should get out."

Claire, like most of the Overseers was a lot younger than he was. They filled their nights with fun and passion. Was it youth or escapism?

“Probably should. I’ve run out of movies to watch.”

Jude walked up the stairs to look down on the end of life process, the slaughter. Jak’rak stood there. He, at least Jude thought of him as a he, was a towering figure with elongated features. Jude always avoided looking them in the eyes. Something unsettling about the narrow slits that they saw out of. It spoke with a rasp.

“How are you?”

Jude looked down into the room below them. He watched as people were led into the room. The nurses helped them into their seats and mounted the VR units onto their heads.

“It’s been a long day.”

Its mouth was wide. Their features were never in proportion. Their faces didn’t have a lot of muscles so they didn’t display emotions the same way humans did.

“We’ve been very pleased with your center. We just want to make sure everything continues to run smoothly.”

“You want to make sure we aren’t overrun by activists.”

“We want to make sure there is no interruption in the supply chain.”

“There won’t be.”

“Good.”

Both watched as the nurses began to administer the chemical concoction to their patients. Their complete existence had been crafted for maximum pleasure and happiness. They knew little of the outside world. They knew nothing of the cruelty. The starvation. The wars. They lived their last moments as they floated in a dream. To become a delicacy on someone else’s plate.

“Have you ever been off Earth?”



“No.”

“Maybe we could book you a vacation somewhere. It is a good experience. Changes your perspective. Shows you your species isn’t as unique as it thinks it is.”

“I know.”

Jude let his guard down. His emotions. His despair came through.

“But you don’t feel it. Every species that manages to make it out into the stars has to come to terms with this.”

“It doesn’t help.”

“One day your perception will shift. Your species seems to be shifting. Remember humans pay as much for your stock as we do.”

Jak’rak walked down the stairs.

“Always a pleasure.”

Jude stood alone as he watch the bodies being carried out to be butchered.

Jude passed Janet on his way back to his office. She was getting ready to leave.

“You look like shit.”

Jude tried to feign a smile.

“Long day.”

“Another microwave and movie night?”

“Yeah.”

“You should come out with me tonight. Get a few drinks. Maybe something more.”

“Maybe.”

Janet came out from behind the reception counter and winked at Jude.

“Trust me. I can guarantee a good time.”

Jude watched her walk out and then continued onto his office. He locked the door and took out a set of keys from his pocket. He unlocked his desk drawer and

picked up a revolver. How many days had he thought about pressing it against his temple? He didn't grow up in this kind of world. The new generation wasn't batting an eye. People are not food. Or are they? That was always the point. Something was always food for something else. Nothing was off limits.

Jude nestled the revolver back into the drawer. What did Janet say? Whatever gets you by. The image of her butt swaying from side to side as she walked out floated up in his mind. Whatever gets you by. He was going to have a good night. And he wasn't going to think too much about his damn food.