

Electric Berry

By: Indi

The mess hall was empty when Trec entered, just as they'd hoped. The purple Scivoli carried a bulky case in one hoof, holding it close to their rotund, unicorn-shaped form as if the contents were a cherished possession. Their gooey body was contained by a shell made mostly of transparent rubber. Their gauntlet-like hooves were metal, as was the top half of their head and back of their neck. A flowing, artificial silver mane was attached. With such a shell they looked like they'd been interrupted putting on armor.

For a Scivoli it was a fairly standard look, though.

Trec carefully placed the case down on a table, flipping a few heavy latches before finally opening the lid. Sitting snug within and surrounded by foam was a large, strange fruit. It resembled an oversized, bright blue berry. But strangest of all was that the fruit was constantly emitting small sparks.

Given the rather blunt name "spark berries", the fruit was native to a recently surveyed planet. Very little was known about them aside from the fact they naturally produced electricity. Even individual slices could jolt you apparently. Their odd nature made them inedible for most species—except for Scivoli.

Trec in particular was capable of psionically manipulating electricity, so the spark berry was even less of a danger to them. Besides, they rather adored the taste of electricity. Scivoli as a whole didn't taste in the same way other species did, relying more on sensation than flavor. For some that meant texture or shape. For Trec it meant the feel of an electric current arcing through their gooey body.

So of course when Trec had heard rumors of a fruit that produced electricity they'd rushed to acquire a sample of it.

As Trec picked the berry up the sparks danced across their metal hoof. They brought it over to the mess hall's food synthesizer and initiated a full and detailed scan. If everything went well the synthesizer would be able to produce spark berries whenever Trec wanted. Of course there were a thousand things that could go wrong. The sample might be too complex for their synthesizer to handle. The appearance might be perfect but the taste non-existent. The berry might roast itself the instant it was generated.

Before they figured that out, though, they had to actually try out the real spark berry in their possession. Opening their mouth wide, Trec dropped the berry in and swallowed.

It tingled the whole way down, sparks teasing their throat. It was a lovely sensation that made Trec shiver with delight. As it sat in their stomach it continued to jolt them steadily. They wiggled and wobbled, enjoying every second of it. Thus far the spark berry had been everything they'd hoped for.

After a couple minutes the berry's charge hadn't decreased at all. It'd actually *increased*. The sparks were getting larger, and Trec realized their middle was starting to swell with every jolt. Exposure to excessive amounts of electricity always caused Trec to inflate, though, so rather than be nervous they were simply amused. Still, it was impressive a single berry could accomplish the feat.

As the Scivoli expanded their rubber shell stretched and creaked to contain their increased bulk. It was designed to be even more durable than their gooey body, so Trec knew it wouldn't rip or tear any time soon. Yet another reason they preferred it over the completely metal shells many chose to wear.

They toyed with their steadily rounding middle, squeezing and shaking it. A fun distraction at first; until they noticed their goo had taken on a blue hue reminiscent of the spark berry. Electricity alone wouldn't have caused that. And it wasn't charged air that was filling them up, but a liquid of some sort, surging with energy and sloshing about with the spark berry in the middle.

Bolts of electricity were dancing in their belly, the largest ones accompanied by abrupt swelling. Trec felt themselves getting heavier and heavier. They widened their stance, their middle having

ballooned so much even their sides were bloated. The euphoric sensation of the electricity had intensified, causing them to blush and wonder if they really wanted to stop whatever was happening. They didn't just feel like they'd eaten a battery—they felt like they'd *become* one.

The time for fun was over. Trec had to get the swelling under control before they ended up as a blimp.

Concentrating, Trec directed the electricity filling their body up towards their metal horn. It cackled as it gained a charge. Trec released the electricity in short bursts, shooting sparks and bolts wherever they felt they could cause the least amount of damage. No matter how much energy they released, they didn't deflate in the slightest, or even slow their expansion.

The spark berry was just producing too much.

By then Trec's entire body was beginning to swell. Their arms and legs puffed up, the Scivoli steadily taking on a spherical form. Moving was awkward. The weight of the mystery liquid made even waddling a tremendous endeavor, and their hooves were spread so far apart. After shuffling a mere foot forward they gave up. The doorway out wasn't wide enough for them anymore anyway.

Calling for help was an option, but Trec was too embarrassed to do so. They would undoubtedly get teased and poked and rolled around. Solving their problem would be an afterthought. Of course there was also a chance they'd inflate until they popped. Equally embarrassing—not to mention messy.

Wracked with indecision and increasingly lost in the soothing feeling of the current within them, Trec did nothing but swell. Their body rounded out until their metal hooves had sunk in almost completely, their head sitting atop, in danger of sinking as well. They were a near-perfect, transparent sphere. Within Trec the blue liquid swirled about, glowing from the electricity.

Just as suddenly as it had began, the swelling stopped.

Trec was left wobbling in place, essentially immobile. The metal portions of their shell dug slightly into their swollen body, causing them to groan at the faint increase in pressure. The constant tingling from the sparks inside their body made them feel like they were indulging in an endless buffet. As frustrating as Trec's ordeal was, they couldn't deny how good it felt.

Trec quickly lost track of time, and when the door to the mess hall finally opened again it felt like they'd been stuck there for a pleasurable eternity.

"Trec? What the heck happened!"

The voice was familiar, but it took another shout for Trec to pull themselves away from the soothing surge and actually focus on it. Standing before them was a confused and concerned looking lion. Tycho.

"Um...well...it's kind of complicated."

The Scivoli recounted their taste-test gone wrong yet also right. Going over the details with their friend only made them more flustered. Tycho certainly wasn't the worst person to find them—both had ended up spherical often enough in the past. They knew the lion wouldn't be able to resist telling others, though.

"Well that's why you don't eat strange food. You're lucky you didn't burst like a damn water balloon!" Tycho gave Trec's middle a chastising poke, watching as sparks were drawn to his finger. "Now then. At least tell me you've already tried venting that electricity."

A bolt shot from Trec's horn and into the wall. "Yeah, doesn't do a thing. It feels like I fill right back up with electricity the second I discharge any!"

"Really Trec the only thing I can think of is berrification. I know being turned into a giant berry usually doesn't involve turning into a battery, but we can't ignore all that juice in ya."

The possibility had crossed Trec's mind; they simply hadn't wanted it to be true. Berrification could be a complicated affliction to deal with, especially when a relatively unknown source was involved. It very well could be permanent—at least until a specialized cure was discovered.

"Then we need to get me juiced, fast!" Trec insisted, wobbling their hooves for emphasis. In reality it only made them look silly.

Tycho laughed and pressed his paws against Trec's bloated side, preparing to roll them. "I don't know, you'd probably make an excellent power generator right now!" The joke received a frown and a disgruntled whinny from Trec. "A really good generator, actually." His tone was far less joking, and Trec noticed.

"Real funny Tycho. Now get me rolling before I short something out!"

"I'm being serious. With a giant spark berry around we'd never have to worry about power outages. We'd be able to recharge weapons and batteries for free, and that energy you're producing might even be more potent than regular stuff." Tycho leaned against his spherical friend as he thought.

"Wait wait wait, I'm not supposed to be a battery! I'm supposed to be on the front lines!" Trec tried their best to shuffle away from Tycho, but they got nowhere fast.

Tycho grinned. "You could still be there—just as the power source for our radio equipment and tools."

"I can't be immobile!"

Tycho gave Trec a shove, rolling the Scivoli onto their back. "Seems like you're plenty mobile to me. You just need a little help."

"This had better be a joke Tycho!!" Trec huffed as they rocked back and forth, utterly helpless.

"Oh don't be so selfish Trec, you'll be playing an even more important role than ever!" Tycho chuckled as he spun Trec around to face the exit. "For your first mission why don't you charge all those spent batteries in the cargo bay?"

The cursing that followed wasn't a "yes", but Tycho treated it as such. He cheerfully began to roll Trec out of the mess hall and towards the cargo bay, the round Scivoli protesting and wobbling the entire way, sparks shooting from their horn wildly. Meanwhile, the original spark berry still floated within them, bobbing about innocently.