

In Space No One Can Hear You Eat

Tobias straightened his tie. Today was the big day! The cheetah could barely contain his excitement as he approached the National Space Foundation Research and Development Center. His new job promised to be nonstop excitement. The pay was quite decent too.

It had all started with an email he received a week before. The National Space Foundation needed applicants to test new equipment and procedures to prepare astronauts for long term space travel. Tobias had always been enamored with the idea of working in space, but unfortunately his grades and circumstances never combined into the right way to make being an astronaut possible. But this seemed like the next best thing!

The ad called for applicants who were in excellent physical condition, and willing to be isolated on the Foundation campus for several months at a time. Tobias matched these prerequisites quite well. He didn't have much of a social life so it's not like he had any obligations to take care of, and that left him plenty of time to devote to physical fitness. The cheetah was hale and hearty, the peak of conditioning and his statuesque features looked handsomely carved and constructed. Jumping at the offer seemed like a no brainer.

Tobias strode through the reception area, gaping in awe at the rockets, capsules and extraterrestrial vehicles on display. He felt very small in the presence of living history, knowing that this was the very place that people learned to travel beyond the Earth itself.

“Hello there! I'm Dr. Reynolds, Chief of Interplanetary Biological Development Research. You're Tobias, right?” A handsome gray wolf in a labcoat interrupted the cheetah's gawking.

“Oh! Yes, that's me. Dr. Reynolds? Nice to meet you.”

“Follow me, please. I bet you can't wait to get acquainted with your new digs.” The wolf clapped a strong paw on the cheetah's back and starting leading him down the hallway.

“So I'm really going to be staying here for the next five months?”

“That is what the ad said, yes.” The doctor responded with a grin.

“Sorry, I'm just really excited, y'know. I've always loved space but I never had the brains to do the kind of stuff that you do.”

Dr. Reynolds nodded, his eyes shining with empathy. “Well there's more than one way to help the world learn about space. Your role here is of the utmost importance. It's going to tell us what we need to know about sending astronauts to Mars and, who knows, maybe even outside the solar system someday.”

Tobias's eyes glistened with wonder at the thought of such a thing. The two of them continued down the hallway until they reached a massive, brightly lit metallic room. In the center stood a giant hermetically sealed prefabricated building. His home for the next five months.

“And this is where you'll be staying for the next five months. You'll be sealed in isolation and the deep space simulation will be as lifelike as we can make it, save for my occasional visit to check on your vitals and run some quick tests.”

Tobias listened carefully, but could still barely contain his excitement.

“Last chance to breathe uncirculated air. Anything you need to take care of before we begin?”

The cheetah shook his head solemnly. “I'm ready.”

“Alright, I just need to get a few tests and measurements on you done before you head inside to establish a baseline. Take off your clothes, please.”

“Err... all of them?”

“Yes please. You'll only be bringing officially project mandated clothing and equipment with you into the test environment.”

Tobias blushed a bit, forgetting for the moment that Reynolds was a doctor after all and that he

shouldn't be embarrassed. He stripped off his clothing and dropped it into a bin. The cheetah stood there nude, his muscular, refined body looking stunning even in the unflattering fluorescent light. Tobias thought he caught Dr. Reynolds's eyes lingering a bit on him, but it must have just been his imagination.

The doctor prodded at the cheetah with various diagnostic tools, measuring seemingly arbitrary things. He put his paws on the cheetah's abs and chest, apparently feeling and noting the shape of each individual muscle fiber. Next, he directed Tobias to step on a futuristic looking scale. The cheetah nodded and planted his feet on it, and it quickly spat out his weight. 181.2386 pounds. Height five feet nine inches on the dot.

“Very impressive, Tobias.”

“Is that good?”

“It's exceptional! Just be prepared to lose a bit of mass over the next few months. That's what tends to happen over long journeys like what we're simulating here.”

The cheetah grinned sheepishly. The doctor handed him a metallic jumpsuit for him to wear and ushered him into the chamber. The doctor signaled him to continue onward through a series of vacuum sealed doors until he was finally all alone in the testing environment.

Dr. Reynolds's voice crackled through a radio in the wall.

“Please acclimate yourself to the testing area. We'll be able to monitor your activities from here, but from now on you're going to be in environmental isolation. We may have some tasks for you to do from time to time, but for the most part, just enjoy yourself. The test will be most accurate if you simply act as if you were a passenger on a very lengthy and solitary trip. We will contact you periodically to check on your progress.”

Tobias stretched out and decided to get to “work.” The testing environment seemed a lot less roomy than it looked on the outside. He took a look around to see what he had to work with. There was the intercom system for contacting the doctor. He didn't need that right now. A terminal connected to

the Earth internet. It would be fine for now, but they explained to him that as the experiment progressed, the terminal would introduce longer and longer lag times to simulate the incredible distance that the data would need to travel in a real space environment.

The terminal also had a logging function. One of the cheetah's tasks was to make daily video logs of how he was feeling that day and report anything unusual or scientifically significant.

Through a sealed capsule connection, there was a “kitchen” stocked with a multi-purpose microwave/oven/stove combo to save on space, and a giant stock of densely packed nutrient bars. They reminded the cheetah of a pile of bricks. He wasn't looking forward to eating them.

Much to his chagrin, there was no gym equipment in sight. All he had was a simple folding cot that flipped over into a treadmill. There wasn't even enough floor space to do a pushup without contorting into a weird position. He would have to make do with the treadmill to keep his energy up.

A few hours passed. Tobias spent most of his time browsing the internet like he normally did before this job started. A growling stomach told the cheetah that he was hungry. He looked at the clock and saw that it was 22:00. Time for a late dinner. He grimaced when he thought about those nutrient bars, but knew that eating those for the next five months was just a sacrifice he would have to make.

Tobias stepped into the tiny, cramped kitchen and unwrapped one of the bars from the stockpile. The packaging was quite generic and it was simply labeled “Meatloaf.” The cheetah shrugged his shoulders and took a bite. His eyes went wide as his mouth exploded with flavor. This was far beyond any meatloaf he had ever experienced before. It was the perfect amount of savory sweetness and defied all logic being as good as it was. The cheetah blissfully took a second and a third bite, eager to taste more of this wonderful nutrient bar. When he went for bite number four, he accidentally chomped his finger. He had already finished the tiny bar, but it wasn't as filling as he had hoped.

He was still a little peckish so he decided to try another one. This next bar was “Pizza.” Tobias had low expectations for it, but somehow the tiny bar contained multitudes of flavor. It reminded him of sinking his teeth into the pepperoni at his favorite local pizza joint.

Once again, he was overcome with the joy of the flavor and chomped the whole thing down in just a couple bites. He wasn't quite full yet so he thought a third bar might hit the spot. He went ahead and grabbed another meatloaf bar and chomped it down in record time. At least the food was good, he couldn't see himself getting bored of these very easily. Shame about the tiny, fun-size packages though. Only a few hours in and he already missed having a proper meal setup with normal portion sizes.

The cheetah sat down at the computer terminal again and browsed a few of his websites before sauntering off to his cot for the night. Despite the spartan styling, it was expertly designed and comfortable and Tobias had no trouble falling right to sleep.

Dr. Reynolds was preparing to leave the facility for the night when he noticed a strange waveform on the bedroom microphone. He pressed a switch to turn on the audio and video feed of the sleeping cheetah and listened intently. The strange sound spiked again. A problem with the oxygen recyclers? No, he checked the instruments and everything was normal. He pointed the directional mic at the cheetah himself and there was the sound again. It was too loud for the mic and peaked. Reynolds turned down the gain a bit and listened again, expecting to find it was just a bit of snoring. Not uncommon, but a little unusual for someone in great physical shape like Tobias.

Grrrrruurgle...

A loud rumble emanated from the cheetah's middle.

Dr. Reynolds raised an eyebrow at the strange sound. That came from the cheetah? His stomach? Strange. It might be normal for him, but it could be worth checking out soon. It was definitely not an emergency though, so Reynolds closed down his workstation and went home for the night.

“Day 009.” Tobias spoke into the computer terminal, recording his daily vlog. “Not a whole lot to do here other than browse the net and take a run on the treadmill. Not complaining, mind you, just

stating some facts. Alright, that's all I can think of. Signing off.”

Dr. Reynolds watched the log intently. He thought the cheetah's facial features had softened just a tad, but chalked it up to his imagination. The doctor's voice crackled into the intercom. “Thank you for your report, Tobias.”

Tobias nodded and gave a thumbs up. He didn't know where the cameras were, but figured the doctor could see him from wherever he was.

“Oh, I wanted to ask, have you experienced any symptoms of any kind of illness?”

“Illness? No, I've been feeling alright. Just a little cramped, but fine other than that. Why?”

“I was concerned you might be experiencing some gastric distress. Some people report having issues with the space rations we've prepared.”

“Oh. Nah, I've been right as rain. They're really good if you ask me!”

“That's wonderful. And you're following the instructions with them?”

Tobias nodded. “Yeah. They're delicious.”

“Excellent. Those are my pride and joy. Designed them myself, you know! It takes a lot of money, fuel and engineering magic to get even the smallest objects up into space, so we need to make everything as light and efficient as possible. Doubly so for an extrasolar journey. And that includes the food. We need to pack as much nutritional value as we can into the lightest form factor possible.”

“Makes sense.”

“Well congratulations on making it five percent of the way through the program! Keep up the good work!” The radio clicked and went silent.

Tobias noticed that it was just about dinner time and helped himself to another three of the nutrient bars. He had to admit they were really great, albeit not especially filling.

The cheetah got his daily documents in order and laid down for bed.

Guuuurgle...

He pat his belly in slight annoyance. “Quiet, you. You'll get real food in another... 170 days or

so.” Tobias sighed. “Geeze, I’m really in this for the long haul, aren’t I?”

Tobias clicked the record button. “Day 17. Still a little boring, but this is what I signed up for. I’m glad the internet exists. I don’t know how anyone stayed sane without it.” The cheetah looked around blankly for a moment before remembering something. “Oh yeah, check this out.” Tobias grabbed the small terminal camera and pointed it at his midsection and unzipped the front of his jumpsuit.

He poked and prodded at his fuzzy midriff, which looked like it had undergone a bit of softening. His starkly chiseled six pack had mellowed into a faintly visible four pack. The cheetah grimaced.

“Fatso here is gonna have to hit that treadmill extra hard, I guess. I’ve been taking it too easy. Didn’t think getting fat was a workplace hazard. Heh.” The cheetah drummed on his still very much in good shape belly. “Anyway, no other issues to report, so I’m signing off.”

Dr. Reynolds announced that he was going on a brief vacation and would return in a few weeks, leaving a few of his colleagues in charge of the monitoring. Tobias continued the experiment diligently. That is to say, he spent at least a quarter of his time running on the treadmill and the rest of his time catching up on news and milling about on the internet. For each meal, he generally had three of the nutrient bars. Sometimes four if he was feeling a little hungrier from all the running he did, so that meant around nine or twelve of them each day.

The cheetah’s stomach tended to *growl* and *gurgle* noisily for hours after each meal. With no one else to talk to, he had taken to holding conversations with his middle. “Calm down, buddy. I know you miss the turkey and spinach but you gotta get used to running on this stuff.”

gurgle...

“I know.

GUUURGLE

“I know! Yeesh!” Tobias slapped his stomach. “Are you the gastric distress the doc was talking about? I'm gonna go sleep this off until you learn to behave yourself.”

Tobias flopped onto his cot and passed out. The cheetah's aggravated belly continued to grumble and churn under the sheets. He had no idea what kind of changes were brewing inside him.

Tobias clicked on the video log program. The cheetah's face was no longer so gaunt. It had puffed out with a bit of softness that covered up the harsh angles it once bore. “Day 54. I'm getting a little tired of eating these bars. As tasty as they are, they're no substitute for real food.”

Tobias sighed with frustration. “And I got some good news? Question mark? My stomach doesn't yell at me 24/7 anymore so I think I finally got used to digesting this space food. Got some bad news too though. I, uh, well just look.”

The cheetah tilted the terminal's camera downward at his middle. There was a distinct bulge in his midriff where his belly pressed against the front of the jumpsuit, straining the fabric. He unzipped the front and his furry middle expanded outward at its release. To the cheetah's continued chagrin, his hard earned abdominal muscles were long gone. He pinched a bit of flab between his fingers for the camera. He wasn't what you'd call 'fat' yet, but he was definitely sporting the beginnings of a pot belly. His abdominal muscles had been repurposed as scaffolding to hold up his starter gut.

“Pretty dire, right? I know what you're thinking. I've been hitting the treadmill almost nonstop every waking hour. Do I look like someone who would gain weight easily? Err...” The cheetah self consciously put a paw on his slightly rounded middle. “I mean not this second obviously but when I got here did I look like someone who didn't understand fitness? Something's wrong with me and I need to

call the doctor as soon as he gets back from that vacation.” He sighs. “Fatass signing off.”

Day 60 came. Dr. Reynolds finally returned from his vacation just in time for the cheetah's bimonthly physical.

The doctor's voice chirped through the intercom. “I'm coming in!”

Klaxons blared and the pressure doors cycled. Out marched the wolf that had brought Tobias here. The cheetah almost didn't recognize his face, it had been so long.

“Hey, doc.”

“Hello, Tobias. I understand you have some concerns?”

“Sure do. I mean look at this, have you ever seen anything like it?” The cheetah unzipped his jumpsuit and showed off his burgeoning starter belly. The doctor stifled a short chuckle.

“I have seen this phenomenon before, Tobias. Looks like you put on a bit of weight.”

“Doc...” Tobias blushed.

“Clothes off, step on the scale, please.”

Tobias obediently stripped down and stepped onto the portable scale the doctor brought. It reported 213.3233 pounds.

“It's nothing to worry about, could happen to anyone. Just incorporate some treadmill time into your routine and-”

“That's the thing, Doc. I spend practically every waking moment on that thing and this still happened. You can look at the tapes if you don't believe me.”

The wolf scratched his chin. “No, I believe you. Hmm. This *is* a mystery.”

“I'm not the best biologist, but you gotta have calories in being bigger than calories out to gain weight, right?”

“That's how it generally works, yes.”

“And all I eat are these specially made space food things that barely fill you up. It takes like four of them just to feel like you had a bowl of cereal. Used to make my stomach noisy as hell, but that stopped happening a little while back. So I just have a handful of those at each meal and-”

The doctor went wide eyed “What?!”

“Uh, a handful? Like usually three for breakfast, three for lunch, three for-”

“Oh dear, oh dear.” The doctor paces nervously.

“Is something wrong?”

“You said you were following the instructions! Three entire bars at each meal? Oh no...” He pressed his head into his paws.

“I'm not supposed to fill up on them?”

“No! The instructions were very explicit. One eighth of one bar at most for each meal.”

“Seriously? I didn't think there was a wrong way to eat health food.”

Dr. Reynolds sighed. “It's not just health food, as you put it. We packed thousands of calories in each bar to conserve weight, yes, but it also operates on the metabolism as well. It's supposed to adapt to the body's long term energy storage mechanisms and stretch out nutrients for months or years on end.”

The cheetah cocked his head to the side. “Is that... bad? It's a pain, but I can lose weight if I need to. Y'all can just switch me back to regular food for the rest of the experiment, right?”

The doctor shook his head. “It's not that simple. You overexposed your body to the nutrient bars and your system has adapted to getting energy exclusively from them.”

“I can't just stop?”

“No. You need to maintain your consumption rate until your body passes the theoretical Vindermann metabolic threshold, and only after that point will it be safe to transition back into conventional sustenance. Possibly.”

“Wait, what?”

“You need to keep eating those bars at the same rate until your system stabilizes and then we can get you back on a normal diet. Hopefully.”

The cheetah blinked and shook head. “You've gotta be kidding. This is a joke, right?”

“It's very serious, I'm afraid. Jumping the gun on this would be fatal.”

“How long is it gonna take to for me to reach that Vindawhatsit threshold?”

“...Approximately two months, if the theory is correct.”

Tobias slapped himself on the face in frustration.

“I'm gonna put on a whole lot of weight, right? Am I understanding this correctly?”

“Yes. That's inevitable at this point, unfortunately.”

“And medically, that's the right thing to do?”

“Get fat. Doctor's orders.”

The cheetah gulped and looked down at his middle. The small bit of starter pudge there seemed insignificant next to the giant, billowing gut he was imagining.

“There's no getting around it?”

The doctor slowly circled around the chubby cheetah and took stock of his gains. “I'm afraid not. You're going to be putting on a *lot* of weight before you can even *think* of losing it.”

“Mmf. If you say so. Is the experiment scrapped now?”

“Hmm? Oh. Well, it's *changed*, but this is still inside the scope of what we're looking for. This turn of events was a possibility we considered, and your efforts will contribute to our knowledge of interplanetary nutritional challenges.”

Tobias nodded solemnly. “As long as it's still helpful to the astronauts, I'm in.”

“Very helpful, I imagine!” The doctor took a long look at the cheetah's middle. Gears were turning in his mind. He reached forward to cup a paw around the underside of Tobias's belly and gave it a small heft. The cheetah blushed at the touch but kept his composure. “Now that I think about it... this could be very advantageous for our research...” The wolf unglued his eyes from the cheetah's middle

and made eye contact with him. “Keep up the good work. I'll be back in another two months for the next physical. I'll, uh, leave the scale here for you.”

Without another word, the doctor turned around and left. The hissing of air repressurizing let Tobias know that he was once again sealed in the testing environment all on his lonesome. His midriff took that moment to growl angrily in hunger. The cheetah chastised his stomach.

“You got me in a lot of trouble, buddy.”

“Day 79.” Tobias spoke into the terminal's camera. The cheetah's face was definitely softening, and a double chin was unsubtly creeping up beneath his jawline. “Still pretty boring, feeling okay though, all things considered. Aaaand... an update on this...” He shifted the camera downward. The cheetah's potbelly bulged firmly against the front of his jumpsuit, like he was hiding a throw pillow inside it. “241 pounds, baby!”

He rapidly unzipped the front of the outfit and a small wave of cheetah tum bulged outward. “Oh yeahhhh!” He grinned and chuckled sheepishly. “Yeah... Kool-Aid man joke. I'm bored, sue me.” Tobias turned to his side and tried sucking in his gut. At maximum compression, it was just about flush with his chest. After a few seconds he couldn't hold it any longer and let it pooch out a few inches over the zipper. He had to laugh at the absurdity of his situation and switched off the camera without another word.

“Oh you are *kidding* me...”

Tobias struggled over and over with his jumpsuit. He leaned against the wall, trying desperately to slip the jumpsuit's waist over his chunky rump. Whenever he succeeded in getting some purchase over his hefty backside, it pulled away some sorely needed slack in the front where his belly forced the

zipper apart.

“Rrraaagh!”

With a herculean effort, the cheetah sucked in his gut and slipped the back of the jumpsuit over his butt and quickly zipped up the front before he lost the opportunity. The result was a tubby cheetah stuffed into a skintight wrapper like a sausage casing. He took a celebratory breath of relief and praised himself. The suit clung to his rump cheeks like it was vacuum sealed, leaving nothing to the imagination. His gut, likewise, bulged forward and outward in a flabby mound pressed into a more spherical shape by the straining fabric.

“Phew. Good enough, I hope.” He addressed his belly. “Gettin' pretty big there, buddy. Gettin' to be kind of a pest.” The cheetah plodded off to the terminal for his daily video log. The jumpsuit creaked and stretched ominously with every movement.

“Day 91. No changes of note. Other than the usual changes, I mean. I'm up to 280 pounds now. Hooray.” He does some unenthusiastic jazz hands for the camera. And also-

RIIIIP

Tobias blushes and goes silent. He gingerly turns around and takes a look at his backside. His ears droop in dismay. “Ladies and gentlemen, my ass is now too fat for my uniform. Or maybe it's the gut taking up too much space and not leaving enough room for my ass. Either way, looks like I'm officially fat now.”

The cheetah absentmindedly rubbed at his chunky belly with one paw, a habit that he had picked up in the past couple weeks. It squished readily, but maintained a somewhat mound-like shape as he hefted it about.

“I never imagined I'd ever look like this in a million years. Man, what would my gym buddies say if they saw me this way... Anyway, fatboy is logging off for now.”

Click.

“Good evening folks. Day 111 of the 'idiot gets fat for science' show. I passed 300 pounds today. I don't fit in my jumpsuits at all anymore, so that's why you see me rockin' the undies look.”

“I changed some filters today on the oxygen regulators like they showed me, it should stay good until-”

Dr Reynolds's voice filtered through the intercom suddenly. “Good evening, Tobias. I reviewed one of your earlier video logs and got an idea when you mentioned those 'gym buddies.' Occasional contact with family and friends is important even in deep space, so I arranged a video call with the Tristar Gym you liked to frequent back home.”

The cheetah's face went pale and he whimpered to himself. “Oh no, no no no...”

Tobias flipped his chair around and took cover behind it, peeking over the top of the headrest.

A window popped up on the terminal revealing a video feed of a local gym. A powerfully built tiger with thick, corded muscle fiddled with the webcam. “Hey everyone, he's on! Gather around!”

A group of nearly a dozen sweaty gymgoers crowded around the webcam clamoring for a glimpse of the big space hero.

“Where's Tobias? I don't see him.”

“Oh, behind that chair. Hey Toby, we can barely see you! Come out!”

Tobias blushed a deep crimson. “H-hey, Fred. Looking pumped there. How've you been?”

The tiger flexed a massive bicep proudly. “Heh, about the same as always. But you know that, I wanna hear about you! It's been ages! I want to hear about your space adventures.”

Other familiar faces crowded around next to Fred, craning their necks to try and spot Tobias through his chair camouflage. Fred continued. “Man, everyone here wants to see the cool space cat. You makin' gains in space camp?”

Tobias gulped. “Um, you could say that.”

Fred laughed. “You gotta tell us all about that astronaut training regimen. Knowing you, I bet

you got some *massive* gains.”

The cheetah blushed even harder and slowly nodded. “Mhmm... Well... I'm not really an astronaut, I'm just helping with research and-”

“And why're you hiding back there? Come on out!”

Tobias took a deep breath and pushed the chair aside and stood up into view of the camera.

Fred's eyes went wide and his jaw dropped to the floor.

“Toby...”

The cheetah sheepishly rubbed at the round expanse of the heavy gut hanging out in front of him. “Heh, um...”

Fred and the other gym members gasped and looked back and forth at the screen and hurled conjectures at each other.

“Is that really him?”

“Does he not care how he looks anymore?”

“Is this some kind of prank?”

“What the *hell* are they feeding him?”

Fred calmed down the rabble and spoke up. “Toby... Tobias... Man, what have you been doing? I can't believe it. C'mon, let me check out the damage.”

The cheetah grunted and did a quick spin for the camera, showing off and hefting the bulging gut hanging like a lead weight off his abdomen and the voluminous rump that he'd been building.

“...damn, man. I hate to say it but you got one *fat* ass. Not to mention that gut. I remember when you could literally bounce a quarter off your abs.”

Tobias covered his eyes with one paw and sheepishly answered. “There was a... um... food accident.”

“A *food accident*? Is that what they're calling it these days?”

“No really, it wasn't my fault! Mostly!”

Fred rolled his eyes. “Dude, it's okay. You had a moment of weakness and couldn't put down the pizza. I'll help you slim down and get back to fighting shape again.” Everyone in the gym nodded along in agreement with Fred.

“Thank you. The program's only half over though, I still have a long while to go and I hope I don't get too much bigger until then.”

“Bigger?!”

“My metabolism is all messed up from the chemicals and-”

“Dude, you don't have to rationalize it for me. I don't know what's going on, but I'll roll you into the leg press in three months is that's what it's gonna take.”

“...Appreciate it.”

“It was good to see you. Good luck with the mission.”

“Good to see you too! G'night!”

The webcam switched off, leaving the room silent. Tobias's stomach gurgled hungrily, demanding attention.

“Quiet, you.”

Day 120 finally came. Doctor Reynolds arrived through the mechanical portal with a hiss of pressurizing air. Tobias watched him enter while leaning against the wall in his underwear, the only clothing left that fit him, and just barely at that.

“Good morning, Tobias.”

“Good morning, Doctor.” The bloated cheetah stepped away from the wall, prompting a heavy, pendulous shake of his belly.

“Oh my...”

“What's up?”

“Oh, nothing, it's just that the visual effect is much more *pronounced* in person compared to seeing it on the monitor. In any case, it's time for your physical.”

The cheetah grinned. “Oh, Doc. I think I might have put on a little weight.”

“Just a little? You've grown well past the point of obesity and you've still got more weight to add before it'll be safe to start reversing the damage to your metabolism.”

“Wow. Way to soften the blow, Doc.”

“Sorry...”

The doctor cleared his throat. “Ahem. Let's see how your weight is doing.”

“331 pounds, Doc.”

“I need to measure it for myself, you understand”

Tobias sighed and stepped on the scale. Dr. Reynolds watched and waited for the numbers to stabilize. “Hmm. 333.2212 pounds. Interesting”

The cheetah was too jaded by the situation now to be shocked, but it still registered as curious to him. “I swear it was 331 just a couple hours ago. I haven't eaten anything since.”

“Yes, I checked the scale's log. You put on two pounds in just a few short hours. Fascinating.”

“Fascinating?”

“The chemical compound in the nutrient bars has reached a saturation point in your body. I believe you have now passed the Vindermann threshold I spoke of before.”

“Saturation point?”

“It means that the reaction is reversible now.”

Tobias sighed with relief.

“It also means that your body is predisposed to adding mass at an *exponential* rate now.”

The doctor whispered to himself. “To be able to study *that* process... the things I could discover...”

“You okay Doctor?”

“Oh, yes, just musing.”

“What did you mean by exponential?”

“Well to put it simply, anything you eat right now is going to make you very, *very* fat, very, *very* fast.”

“That doesn't sound good! Can you fix it?”

“Well, yes, I just need to inject you with the oppositional compound and it should set things in motion just fine. However...”

“However?”

“Your, uh, gut represents a potentially massive breakthrough in medical science. If I could get your permission to study the miraculous energy to matter transfer happening with your weight gain, the implications for medical science would be astounding. Heck, maybe even engineering could benefit from it.”

“No way, Doc. I'm fat enough already. Just give me the antidote.”

The wolf stayed silent for a moment, strategizing. “It would be of tremendous help to the pursuit of space exploration.”

“...Ugh. In that case, I guess I really have to accept.”

Dr. Reynolds flashed a toothy grin. “Wonderful! Just give me a moment to get some instruments set up and we can begin shortly!”

The cheetah muttered to his gut. “What have you gotten me into this time?”

Guuurgle...

“Almost... there!” The lupine scientist hauled and placed the final of several sophisticated machines all throughout the testing zone. Tobias took in the sight of countless flashing lights, monitors and sensors, all seemingly directed at one central point in the middle of the living quarters.

“Mr. Tobias, if you would step into the marked zone there and remove your clothing.”

The cheetah apprehensively stepped into the center of all the machinery and took off his elastic longjohns, the only clothing that still somewhat fit him at this point.

The doctor busily filed information into his tablet and looked at Tobias. “Widen your stance, please. And hold your arms on the grips to the side.”

“Like this?” The cheetah did as he was told and changed his position. He looked like a very round, fat, Vitruvian Man.

“Just like that, thank you. Now, if you'll excuse me...”

Without warning, the machines whirred into action and the doctor began rubbing the cheetah's belly with both paws, gently yet firmly kneading it. He hefted the bottom heavy mound of fat up and down, feeling its geography and memorizing every shape and contour. Next, he squeezed and kneaded at the love handles and how they gently transitioned outward and inward to the fat on the hips.

“Oof. Umm...”

“Quiet, please, I have to concentrate extra hard on this part...”

The doctor typed away at his tablet and circled around the cheetah's backside. In one quick motion, he grasped at the cheetah's weighty rump with both paws and began squeezing and hefting the two globes.

“D-Doctor!” The cheetah blushed a deep red.

“Stay calm, please. Almost done.”

The doctor finished with one last authoritative pat on the rump.

“All done.”

“...What was that for?”

“I needed to get a complete baseline read of your fat deposits. Next comes the exciting part where we see exactly how they change when faced with a massive caloric onslaught.”

The doctor hauled out a metal crate the size of a toaster oven. He dials in a code on the attached keypad and opens it. The wolf's eyes light up at the sight. “Extra high caloric density nutrient bars! My

latest design.” He looks Tobias in the eye. “I need you to eat these.”

“More bars? Three of them like normal, right?”

“Not this time. I need you to ingest everything in this box.”

The cheetah gulped. “Oh man...”

“Let's get to work!”

Tobias grabbed the box of nutrient bars and started chomping away at them. This new version of them somehow tasted even better than the others and rekindled his taste for them, clearing the flavor burnout that had built up over the months.

Tobias was just starting to feel full when the cheetah's stomach rumbled ominously as he reached the halfway point. He glanced over at the doctor worryingly, but Dr. Reynolds assured him there was no problem.

Six bars remained. The doctor insisted that he continue. “You're very close! I'll help you.” He began massaging and kneading the cheetah's swollen belly, provoking another cacophony of rumbles and gurgles. The doctor could feel the mass of ultra high calorie meals in the cheetah pushing back from the inside past the layers of insulating fat. Knowing that his own chemical engineering transformed this formerly athletic cheetah so dramatically brought him a strange sense of pride. As Tobias slowed down, the wolf began to manually feed the last few bars to the cheetah.

“There you go. Last one down the tank.”

Tobias gulped. The final bar landed heavily in the cheetah's stomach. As if on cue, his swollen midriff let out a long, deepening *gurgle* as if to punctuate the whole ordeal.

The doctor gave the cheetah a hearty double pat on the top of his aching belly. “And now the tank is full. Good work, Tobias.”

The cheetah smiled weakly and let out a small burp.

The doctor wrapped a series of elastic bands around various points of the cheetah's body, then wired them into the machinery. “These will help register any changes we'll see! Now we just wait a few

moments for the fun to begin and I'll record your metabolism going into action.” The wolf rubbed his paws together eagerly. “I can't believe we're actually going to witness a massive accelerated metabolic weight gain! We're literally going to see you get fatter before our eyes!” He was positively giddy.

Tobias grimaced, thinking about the havoc he's set in motion on his waistline. “I'm, uh, happy for you, Doctor.”

An awkward minute passed in silence before Tobias speaks up. “So how long is this gonna take?”

The wolf looked at his tablet then at the cheetah, smiled and held up his paw with three digits and counted down.

Three...

Two...

One...

GUUUUUUURRRRRRGL

Tobias is overcome with a strange, but not unpleasant tingling sensation coursing through his entire body. The tingling gradually changed into gentle warmth, soothing the cheetah's pain and feeling all over like a clenched muscle that finally has a chance to relax. “Ahhh... ohhhh.”

The elastic bands on the cheetah begin to *streeetch* and creak, registering the measurement changes on the monitors. The doctor watched with rapt attention as the feline's belly began to slowly but surely soften, widen and bulge outward. Additional fat crept onto his body like a gentle trickle. The front of the cheetah's gut grew heavier and heavier, like a massive fruit ripening on the vine in fast motion. Love handles waxed heavily on his sides and the front tip of his belly began to point downwards, surrendering to gravity.

“D-Doc... it feels... so g-good...” The cheetah was at a loss for words, completely caught up in the never before seen sensation.

The wolf checked around the cheetah's backside for an update and wasn't disappointed. The

electronic elastic bands on his glutes were stretching beautifully. Each rump cheek swelled outwards with a firm, wide base covered in a globe of thick fat.

The doctor stepped back and placed both palms against the lower surface of the cheetah's rumbling, growing belly. He smiled and closed his eyes, feeling the creation of new fatty tissue with his own paws in real time. He grinned as he felt the feline's gut pressing into his palms with an actual tangible force of pure *growth*.

After a few short minutes, the growing finally stopped. The cheetah was left panting for breath, overcome with the sensation of becoming larger all over. The wolf surveyed the damage and began to poke and prod and knead and heft at the cheetah.

“Is... is it over?” gasped Tobias.

“It is, Tobias.” He took a look at the monitors. “Astounding. I'm standing before four hundred and forty two pounds of cheetah. This data will prove invaluable in calculating ration supplies for interplanetary travel.”

The hefty cheetah gave a salute. “Glad to be of service to space exploration.”

“And as luck would have it, today is the final day of the test environment program. I'd say it's been a rousing success, wouldn't you?”

“If it helps the space program, I'm all for it.”

“Ready to go home?”

“I think so. One thing before I leave, though.”

“What's that?”

“Can I bring some of these bars home with me?”