

The Leasemeat Farm

It was a tower of crap. Well, OK, it wasn't exactly crap, more processed solid waste suspended in a gel matrix. And I suppose it wasn't exactly a tower either, though I'm not sure what you'd call it. There's no "up" in zero-G, so it could just as easily be long as tall. I was floating at one end of a long cylindrical shaft, the "tower" in question extending along the shaft's center for what had to be half a kilometer.

The tower consisted of black metal disks spaced about a meter apart. Sandwiched between the disks was a mass of goop that could have been gray or brown. It was hard to tell which in the dim crimson glow bathing the area. Altogether it reminded me of a stack of Oreos with cream you absolutely did not want to eat.

«Whatcha think?» It was Micah, the supervisor running the farm. Micah was his human-pronounceable name. I couldn't resist the pun given the crop he tended, Micah the mycologist. The name fit him to a tee, too, the sort of hayseed name I'd expect someone with his upbringing and hobbies to have if he were a human. Threaded throughout the goop were hairlike webs of mycelium, and his job was to ensure the leasemeat they produced was fit to eat.

"Smells like a cow pasture," I coughed.

He drank in the fetid air, then rattled off half a dozen untranslatable olfactory words. «Smells like these fellers are ready to harvest,» he yipped. He plunged a paw into the gel with a sickening slurping squelch and drew out a fleshy disk-shaped fruiting body the size of a dinner plate. He brushed off the little globs of gel clinging to the mass as well as the fur on his foreleg. They were caught in the air current and began drifting toward the air filters.

«Yessiree! This 'un's nice 'n ripe.» He growled, scoring the flesh with a claw and releasing a cloud of spores that were also caught up in the circulating air.

He tore off a chunk and popped it in his mouth. I stifled a dry heave. A gray-furred assistant floated past. «So gross,» she growled. «That's not how you're supposed to eat it,» she said turning to me. «We cook it first.» She turned her attention to a section where fruiting bodies had erupted from the gel into the open air. With her tail holding fast to a bar on the wall, she began plucking off the fleshy disks with her hind feet and placing them in a box hanging from her foreleg, daintily flicking away any flecks of gel that clung to her claws. «That IS processed fecal matter you know.» She barked, gesturing with her snout toward the gel.

«'Course I know. And whatcha think dirt is but poop 'n dead stuff thats' been ate up and spit out by fungus just like this leasemeat here. Dirt don't hurt. Makes no difference if it's natural or re-cycled by us sophonts.»

She growled in disgust again and continued her harvest in silence.

I stared down the length of the tower. There had to be metric tons of leasemeat fungus, enough to handily feed the thousands of souls in this orbital colony, on four legs or two. Given leasemeat is THE staple food of spacers, that gel had to be 90 percent, shall we say, recycled leasemeat itself. A little self-sufficient circle of life.

Revision #1

Created 2026-06-01 20:48:48 UTC by Lurker

Updated 2026-06-01 20:48:48 UTC by Lurker