

The Food Machine by Agatha Mallett

We invented the food machines a while back. Very simple little devices, we thought—and simpler in operation.

Simply put on the small, safe, stylish headset, and cycle the power on. As you eat, a little EM field messes with your head, and you perceive that you're eating chocolate, cake, candy—anything really. If your salad tastes bland, turn it into maple syrup! Need to drink water for your health? Suddenly, it's soda! Your 50¢ PB&J is now a tray of expensive Turkish delight!

The first purchases of the product were the employees who invented it, of course. Then came the talk show hosts they interviewed. A month or so later, and now practically every American household has a food machine. Most have several, for family-style meals.

Everyone loved it. The parents didn't have to deal with whiny kids, and the kids didn't have to deal with eating the damn veggies every Thursday. It's just cake, cake, cake, every day.

You can imagine the problem.

Sure, a lot of expensive eateries went out of business, and a lot of people went on diets and lost a lot of weight. A few kids died from eating comically vile things. A larger number of people gorged themselves to death.

But the real problem is that it turns out that if you eat something every day, you get sick of it. Humans thrive on variety—and essentially everyone, it turned out, had basically been mixing/matching sweets in their machines for months.

The obvious escape was to just revert back once in a while. But, having subsisted on simulated sweets for so long, people found the taste of real, unadulterated food horrendous. Even savory foods tasted bitter in comparison. How can saffron rice compare to the *Platonic ideal* of chocolate mousse? Flatly, it can't. Real food—even the real desserts—simply tasted too awful compared to the fictitious ecstasy provided by the machines.