



Testing
Kaolin Fire

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About the author:

Kaolin Fire is a conglomeration of ideas, side projects, and experiments. Web development is his primary occupation, but he also develops computer games, edits Greatest Uncommon Denominator Magazine, and occasionally teaches computer science. He has had short fiction published in Strange Horizons, Tuesday Shorts, Escape Velocity, and Alienskin Magazine, among others.

Testing. Testing.

Six metal walls: floor, ceiling, four lateral barriers to the outside world. Two circular windows face each other, leading out to bleak darkness. A table sits a little off from the center of the room, surrounded by nine chairs.

Testing. Testing.

The tone drones on monotonously.

In six of the chairs sit a grim group of intellectuals, faces drawn long, trying to make the best of their situation. Their gaze avoids the three empty chairs, the two windows, and the vat of bubbling liquid in one of the corners of the room.

"Johnny to bat: Ace showing, skinny hidden, dealer's got eleven up."

"Hit me." The test pattern was growing dimmer.

"That's a deuce for you, nothing wild. Some harsh reality for ya folks, three showing, skinny hidden."

"Hit me." The test pattern was growing dimmer. He dipped his hand into the bowl of pinkish gruel in the center, and had a sip of thick liquid. Life... life wasn't that bad, when you got used to it.

"A jack smothers. Ace and a deuce, nothing hiding nine or over."

"Bust." There was a sigh from the crowd. "Signal's still there, could last another five minutes. Pass it on, Mike?"

testing. testing. fainter.

"Right-o. George, I see a lovely little lady sitting there up top, what would you like to play?"

"I'd like a hit if you don't mind."

"Call 'em as you want 'em. Laying down a cute little eight, how's that suit you?"

George smiled and flipped his down card. "Twenty one."

The crowd clapped, always appreciative of a good turn of luck. Especially appreciative of a good turn of luck.

"Well, Steve, on to you. A four up, whatcha hiding?"

testing. testing.

"Umm. Pass."

"You sure? Best you've got is a fifteen, dealer's showing some wealth on the table... "

"Pass, Mike."

"Well, I suppose there is a bust on the table. I can understand a hesitance to play. Especially with a twenty-one also up. Jones? A four showing... "

"I think I'll have to stick with the coward's way, I'm just not feeling my oats right now." He helped himself to some gruel, looking sick to his stomach.

... t .. sting .. te .. ng. The people about the table paused and looked at each other, hiding their thoughts from themselves as best they could.

"Jake? You've got an ace up, how can I do you?"

"Ah, what the hell. Hit me."

"Ten down, didn't do you any good."

"Yeah, I think I'll stay, thanks. I might flirt with it, but I'm not suicidal yet."

... tes .khkhk. es .khkhkhk.

"Well, that's it. Looks like it was on your hand, Jonny," looking at the guy who had busted.

"Looks like it is." Johnny got up, stretched, walked over to the corner of the room and lay his head down on a large flattened rock. The dealer got up and stood over him.

"You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to scream. You have the right to an enjoyable life for so long as you can win it. In you, we will live on. In us, you will live on. I pray that what you go to, if there is such a thing, is better than this." There was a polite and respectful spattering of applause. The dealer brought a large rock down hard through Jonny's skull.

The group got together and stripped the corpse, shared his clothing, and went about disseminating his meat. Less choice parts of his body were poured into the vat, chemically burbling to itself, turning biomass into steam, steam turning a turbine which was connected to a large radio transceiver and a small radio receiver.

Testing. Testing.

On his way back to the table, Mike tossed a furtive glance out the port. Outside was a barren wasteland. Someone, hopefully, was listening. "Okay... George, your deal, clean up the table."

From the same author on Feedbacks

The Last to Have Sex (2002)

[2300 words]

To put it simply, Jerome was fat. His only erogenous zone was his mouth.

But putting it simply didn't do justice to the rolls of flesh he carted around daily, the sheen of sweat that trickled from his pits, his forehead, his belly.

Putting it simply didn't do justice to Jerome, for though he was simple of mind and large of body, *he was*, for better or worse, a human being. And despite appearances, an evolved human being.

Dreaming Lies to Change the Truth (2008)

[620 words] She wove lies of leaves and fruit as she crawled about the tree; it had rotted and split, but her webbing held it whole. She wove eight-faceted apples that glistened like negative prisms, sucking in all heat and life.



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