

Escape Room

The guide looked at me without slowing down. They gestured at my forehead; I guessed it meant I needed to allow their input.

-Is this your first time at one of our Trauma Experience Centers?

>yes

>no

My slow reaction time (233 millisecond average between visual intake and response), main factor in my being mildly abused at work, caused the prompt to lapse. Which was unfair. Had they directly asked instead of forcing me to select and confirm an option, I could have answered with more than one of the five allotted seconds to spare.

There had been a box on the waiver for necessary accommodations, and I had filled it in. I banished my resentment swift as I could. Their shoes were loud.

-What? No, nevermind. The experience is new no matter how many times you've done it.

I wanted to know why'd you even ask me the question then if the answer was so irrelevant but I was feeling shy and nervous that morning, due to the fact that the enormous lobby windows behind me showed any possible passing co-worker exactly where I was and how I was spending a good chunk of the 236 leisure minutes and 7,320 endora I had saved over the last rokkagetsukan. I wished briefly to have been struck by lightning and kidnapped by the gang of electricity urchins I saw on the way here.

Luckily in this neighborhood--prone to low-forming storms--the plexi would have had to be triple-thick, or subject to hourly repairs; this meant I was in no danger, for the moment, of being pelted by a less frugal fellow technician's maliciously errant work-case. Although if one of them saw me I would be sure to hear about it the next day.

In any case I bit my tongue. Soon we were out of the lobby.

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The hallway I was being led along was an ill-defined beige that seemed to shift constantly in the incongruously dingy light. An inanimate buzz provided a key center for my guide's metered tones. I kept my receiver on, in accordance with the instructions. Today my Experience would be something called Illinois Jones, a "bleakly satirical re-examination of the 2d film industry as an allegory for U.S. neocolonial practices during the Gregorian 80s." I felt that I had heard the name before.

-It's from Hollywood.

-I don't really know what that means. I don't have any Academy.

-They teach it in public.

-Do they?

-I don't know, probably. I got equivalency when I was 9.

-If--

Force quit was the only function I could rely on myself to activate without significant prior warning. I narrowly escaped asking the insensitive question about their chosen career.

When you're force-quit out of a conversation it feels like a door--a hinged one--slamming shut a decimeter from your face, maybe less, just enough to cave in the tip of your nose. I watched my guide's eye-corners well and dry over a short instant and considered that I had caused this.

But my tactless inquisition would have stung more, and life is about minimizing losses more than it is anything else. Plus the telly couldn't transfer tone--it wouldn't have captured the

lilt of sympathy that I would have accompanied the inquiry with, were I to communicate it vocally. It was all pure information, untainted by source.

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A drag that they never give a warning before they wipe your memory. But I did understand why that would be a security liability. Some people know how to counteract them. Still, it felt a little like a rude gesture to be, later, woken back up during those last few minutes when they dragged my just-washed body back onto the lobby couch, scar removal patches still dissolving into my upper back beneath my new souvenir tee shirt. Like most of the different kinds of people I could imagine, I would have preferred to be reinstated standing, fully awake.

It could have been retribution from the servicer, specific, for their smarting telly, or a more indiscriminate rage at whatever circumstances led them into one of the few non-creative careers still around. Either way it made my spending feel a little less justified, and added a dark tinge to the otherwise blank late morning and midday.