

So, this week has been an adventure for me for reasons I'll keep to myself. That being said, part of this idea came from an unsettlingly vivid dream I had last night. But I think this might be one of my favorite stories thus far and probably will grow into something more. I hope you enjoy. Next week I should be back to posting on Wednesday. Thanks for your patience. Happy Thursday.

Testing

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“After this we’re done. True blue officers of the law,” said Jeremy.

“If we make it,” replied Paul solemnly. The two walked through the large grayish-white stone archway, into a wide open room of the same stone from floor to ceiling. In the middle of the room were two stone benches with green bushes on either side. As the two men neared the benches Jeremy couldn’t help wonder how the bushes were staying alive in this room with its man-made fluorescent lighting, and no natural sunlight.

“We’re gonna make it man. We’ve already proven that we’re not like the rest.” As Jeremy spoke he saw Paul’s face drop and said a silent prayer for the man. The entrance tests had been hard on him, they were designed to make one face their demons and determine whether or not a man would be able to stand strong against the threats of greenies. And it seemed Paul had many more demons than most.

They’d started training with ten other cadets only a week earlier, but to the men it was a lifetime ago. Heart was what the recruiters called the first test. It was designed to see if when push came to shove, a man would make the right decision. Each cadet was escorted to a solitary confinement that was then filled with hallucinogenic gas designed to bring one’s deepest desires to life—for many men it was family or loved ones that would appear. Then the challenge came, it was about protecting humanity no matter what, even if it meant the cadet would have to kill the things he most loved. Which it normally did. Half the class didn’t make it past day one.

The next test was Body. All the men had assumed this would be the easiest and some had even gone so far as to call it a “free pass” test. Jeremy saw the smiles on the recruiters faces when they heard that and immediately knew, no matter what the test entailed, nothing about it would be a freebie. Each man was given a piece of sensitive information that was to be for their eyes only, no matter what. Then the torture started. Three days, multiple increasingly sick methods of “information retrieval,” and another three cadets went home.

The final test was Mind, and here the last two cadets stood.

“What do you think we’re supposed to do?” Asked Paul cautiously standing absolutely still as if touching anything may shatter the framework of reality.

“I’m not sure,” said Jeremy, eyes glued on the vibrant green of one of the small shrubs. He couldn’t explain why but it was wrong, the whole place. From the ash white of the walls to the immense green of the shrub, and the more deeply he stared, the more he knew, this would be their hardest test yet.

“Do you think we should sit down?” Asked Paul, glancing at the benches like they were monsters ready to consume him if he accidentally made eye contact.

“Maybe we should...” then it happened. The room spun in their eyes like a man who’s had far too many drinks. Queasiness set in and Jeremy had to fight the urge to vomit. A ringing erupted in his mind and Jeremy closed his eyes while pressing the palms of his hands to his temples. Whatever had hit them hadn’t taken it’s time and come on slowly, it hit them like a truck going down a steep incline at full speed.

“Gentlemen,” it was a woman’s voice, the Instructor. “Welcome to the final test, here we decide if your mind can stand up to the weapons of the greenies. As you know,” Jeremy had to fight to understand the words and momentarily he wondered if Paul was still there with him, but the room spun so vigorously when his eyes opened he dared not look. “A strong mind scrambling effect attacks the human brain when in close contact with the alien life forms. Some men can withstand it while others can’t. In both of your pockets, you will find a permanent marker. The test is quite simple. Anywhere in the room, on any surface, you must write your name three times. You will have two minutes starting now. Begin.”

Jeremy took his hands from his head, still keeping his eyes closed, and pushed himself to his knees. He didn’t know when it happened but at some point he’d fallen into the fetal position. Lifting one hand he reached into his right pocket and pulled out the marker, falling on his head as he did so, unable to hold himself up with his deteriorating motor skills.

“Open your eyes,” he whispered to himself. “Open your eyes!” He said louder and this time forced the lids to separate. The room still spun like a ride at an amusement park. Jeremy used his left hand to try and lift his body again and only resulted in re-slammng his head on the floor.

“Just write,” he said to himself. Forcing his eyes to focus on the marker in his hand he shakily began scrawling letters on the floor. Even in the rotating room he could see the marks he was making were barely legible, but it didn’t matter as long as they read his name three times in a row. After an eternity the buzzer rang, but the room didn’t stop spinning. Jeremy heard footsteps approaching as the marker fell from his hand.

“Tsk, Tsk, we had such hope in you.” The disappointment was surprising.

“Huh?” Jeremy managed to get past his lips. “But, I wrote my name,” he said, “three times, like you said,” every word was breathy and forced.

“Enough,” she called to the empty room. The feeling began to subside, “Open the door.” Jeremy stared at the eerie green of the shrubs as the woman above him came into focus.

“Cadet, can you tell me your name?” Asked the woman in a more kind voice than he’d heard since the training started.

“Of course,” the words were less breathy and talking became easier. “My name is Jeremy Caldwell.”

“And where do you think you are right now?”

“I’m finishing the final test of the mind for entrance into the force.”

“This is going to be hard for you to hear but in an hour I promise you’ll be okay. I need you to open your eyes.” Jeremy was confused, his eyes were open, weren’t they?

Then everything faded the white stone melted into the padded room of his solitary confinement. The gas. The memories. It all came back to him in a rush and he saw a woman standing in an open doorway.

“Now again Cadet, what is your name?” She asked again soothingly. Tears welled in his eyes, and his heart dropped to the pit of his stomach.

“My name is Paul Caldwell.”

“Yes and where are you?”

“I think,” he sniffled hard, “I think I just failed the first test, Heart.”

“Yes Cadet, you are correct. And who is Jeremy Caldwell?” She asked. Paul remembered his brother well, he was the whole reason he was here.

“My baby brother, he died two years ago and I swore I would make this happen for him.” Paul cried harder, he thought he was over the death of his brother, but it appeared his demons still had a hold on him.

“Very good cadet, there is always next year. Take your time to gather your thoughts and when you’re ready we can escort you to your ride.”