

Everyone plays games. Some are just better at it than others.

If You Could Just Wait a Moment

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The anteroom was spacious, filled with delightful artworks. In truth, it was some of the best work Jason Teignmouth had seen. He would have hired this artist to work on his apps in an instant. At the far end was a long desk, behind which was seated a comely brunette receptionist. All the walls were glass. Beyond the glass as a series of staircases which ended in a transparent door leading to the anteroom. Not your ordinary stairs mind you. The one to his right had a normal height, but the second step as at least seven feet tall. You could walk up this step you'd have to climb over it. The architect must have been working out of an insane asylum. There appeared to be no other entrances or exits to the room. At the opposite end of the room from the receptionist appeared to be a slot machine. None of this helped explain where Jason was or how he got there.

"Excuse me," he asked the pleasant looking receptionist, "but what is this place?"

She smiled as if conversing with him was the most delightful part of her day, "I sorry, but I can't answer any of your questions until you have the correct items in your inventory." Jason looked more than puzzled. Without waiting for him to formulate an additional question, she added, "It's all in your instruction book." She indicated his right hand.

"That one was free," she winked.

When Jason looked down and he saw it. He had never even been aware he was carrying it. The work had no title and no author. Jason sat back down on one of the many seats and, like all the others in the room, started pawing through the text. After careful research, Jason discovered that in order to find out exactly where he was required two Mark V Rings, which in turn required twenty Ring Salvage components. There was some artwork showing a Mark V Ring accompanying the text. It looked as ominous and delightful as the glowing Lord of the Rings movie prop. Each of these rings required eight Relays, twelve Emitter Crystals, and fifty purple class Polyalloy components. He watched closely as other people in the room rushed up to the slot machine excitedly, pulled the lever and then quietly returned to their seats as if the device had taken away the family puppy.

In the instructions, he read you got one token to use in the machine every five minutes. This seemed to be quite true, over a dozen had fallen into his lap from the ceiling while he'd been reading. Continuing on in the text, he additionally discovered he could only acquire a total of 144 tokens at any one time. Once he reached that level, the tokens would stop dropping. He would need to spend some at the machine before they would resume dropping. He resumed reading about a mind-numbing number of special officers available, none of which he truly understood from the explanation provided.

Once he collected his 144 tokens he walked up to the slot machine. According to the machine, each attempt cost him from eight to twenty tokens each. Every pay level had different amounts of prizes associated with them.

On his first attempt, he spent eight tokens in the machine. He pulled the handle and an Emitter Crystal fell into the tray. He collected it gleefully. Only eleven more to go and he could trade them in for some Ring Salvage components. The machine showed one of the rewards for spending sixteen tokens at once was two Emitter Crystals. Hoping to speed up his collection, he fed the machine sixteen tokens.

He rubbed his hands together and pulled the bar. Out fell a badger's liver. Not only did it not help him towards his current goal, but it smelled atrocious. None of his other attempts yielded much of significance, so he sat down again. He was quickly overcome by a funk, bordering on a deep depression. This wasn't going to take hours, it was going to take months.

Another player excitedly ran up to the slot machine. But, in his case, he didn't return to his seat. He rushed up to the receptionist and unloaded a whole series of items on her desk. "Ah, excellent," the receptionist remarked, "well done." She smiled back at him. It didn't seem to be a pleasant smile at all, in fact, it gave Jason the chills simply watching her display the expression. "The first part of the answer to your question is ... 'You are in...' Keep playing." Her grin was almost horrifying.

Jason sighed deeply. The components didn't give you whole answers, only partial sentences. He had a tough time recalling when he had felt more dejected. Still, the tokens kept falling in his lap and he took his usually fruitless trips to the machine. In his head, he calculated that the odds of winning a needed component was less than 1%.

The only clock in the room had nothing but a second hand. Its constant tick showed the passage of time, but without the higher values of minutes and hours, it had little meaning. Growing bored, he endeavored to steal tokens from another player. His hands not only passed right through the tokens but through the player as well without interference. His intended victim didn't seem to notice the attempt at all, he simply remained seated, pouring through the text of his instruction book. This was when Jason recognized him, it was Oscar Melville, a fellow game designer.

As he looked around, he began to realize everyone in the room was a game designer. Over in the corner was Harold Littleman, the author of the *Monk's Revenge* App. *Slice of Time* was represented as well as *Total Zombie Nuclear Holocaust* and the *Revenge of the Angry Snits*. He'd known every one of the people in the room from conventions or online images.

About this time, he became aware that despite the extraordinary amount of time he'd spent in the room, he neither hungered or felt the need to relieve himself. The realization of the obvious conclusion was explosive. He rushed up to the pretty receptionist as if he had discovered a vaccine for cancer.

"I'm dead," he announced, "and this is hell!"

"This isn't Hell," she laughed, replying with a huge, ominous smile on her face, "oh, no. In Hell, the torture sometimes stops."