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about

### Schadenfreude

The final contestant walked away from the camera and returned to his pedestal. Light flickered on the eleven other contestants, and the doll-like host walked onto the main stage. He lifted a microphone to his plastic smile.

“There you have it, folks. These are your fine contestants,” he said. “Make sure to cast your votes during the commercial break!”

Each player got their fair share of bright, neon-colored lights and stereotypical game-show music. Charles ran his hand across the scar on the side of his head. Crusts of blood flaked off from the surgical incision; he could feel where they had put the chip. His brain pulsed with each beat of his heart, and the gameshow noises and lights increased the intensity.

“Aaaaand, cut!” said one of the camera men. A few recorder drones flew out to keep a live feed on the contestants. Each mini-clique conversed, but were interrupted by the host.

“Good show, you guys. Some of you killed it more than others, but you were even better than Mr. Darwin said you were.”

“Who the fuck do you think you are?” Sam asked.

“Well, the one and only, Jeremy Wilson.”

“You're lucky we're like dogs in here, smart ass. I'd rip that smile off of you if I wouldn't get shot for it.”

“Calm down, Sam,” Charles said. “Jeremy, can we be done with this shit soon please? My head is killing me.”

“Don't you worry your pretty little head, Charles. We are running through our final commercial break, and then we'll be done after the first elimination.”

Jeremy skipped away, and smiled as if he were a kid in a candy store.

“That dude is way too fucking happy about this shit. It makes me sick,” said one of the girls.

“What do you think he's going to do when one of us goes, Nikhol? Suck our dicks goodbye as a show of gratitude?”

“Not all of us have dicks, asshole.”

The strong smell of chemicals wafted into Charles' vicinity, and his headache resumed pounding, and his cut oozed out opaque blood.

Charles turned towards the smell's origin, and a drone focused on a cleaning unit.

The rest of the crews returned to their stations, and the recorders flew out of sight. A couple of armed guards accompanied them. They loaded their rifles and stood at attention.

Jeremy returned with multiple sets of white overcoats and goggles.

“The hell are those for?” Nikhol asked.

“Just put these on. It's a safety request from Mr. Darwin himself.”

Jeremy giggled, and passed out a set to everyone. Charles slipped into the material right before the lights and music came back on.

“Aaaand, Action!”

“Welcome back, folks!” said Jeremy. “I hope you've all submitted your votes, because now it's time to play, First Impressions.”

A short chime played as the words “First impressions” displayed on a screen. Numbers began to climb for each contestant, and stopped one by one. Sam had the most votes, and another chime played along with balloons falling from the ceiling.

“Congratulations, Sam! You managed to be the least liked person out of everyone!”

“Wait, that the fuck? What kind of show is this?”

“It's plain and simple, Sam. No one likes a kiddie fiddler. It was nice knowing you!”

The guards raised their rifles toward Sam.

“Wait, no! Plea--”

The two unloaded their entire magazines into Sam. Blood splattered onto each contestant, and the dark red imprinted onto their white clothing. Sam fell off of his pedestal, and rested in a bloody heap next to Charles. Even after Charles wiped the blood off of his goggles, Sam's shredded body was unrecognizable. His vision went black.