

## A Card Game for Monkeys

Scientist A bursts through the door of the breakroom, shattering the air of quiet sterility that usually hangs over the secret lab.

Scientist B is eating his lunch. A very unassuming sandwich. Just cheese. When your work is so complex there is solace in a truly simple break. He has just taken a bite when the door gets flung open, and he continues to chew carefully while Scientist A stands there, fuming at the threshold.

She wants him to react now, to be alarmed, or at the very least a little bit ruffled, but the concept of the break truly is sacred, basically a form of meditation, and if the roles were reversed deep down she knows she would have finished her mouthful before severing ties with the human buoyancy that comes with doing nothing, and having no obligation to do anything either, too.

Sandwich swallowed, down he plummets, “what’s up?”

“What do you *mean* what’s up?” she seethes, mimicking his voice, “you know damn well what’s up. What the hell have you done to the monkeys?”

*They’re not monkeys* he thinks to himself, and sighs.

“You need to come with me right now,” she says, “you need to come *right* now, and explain.”

Resignedly Scientist A gets up and leaves his sandwich, his break, and follows Scientist B out the break room and down a quiet hallway, further and further, through some doors that need codes and some that need keycard swipes, passing closed door after closed door of testing rooms and store rooms and IT rooms and the second break room that’s actually closer to his work station, but that he avoids in the hope it makes it less likely he’ll be disturbed.

They stop at a door marked ‘Observation Room 2-1’. Scientist B punches in the door code without looking, it’s all muscle memory, just like their journey.

She huffs into the room ahead of him and then stands with her arms folded, looking pointedly through the observation glass and therefore pointedly not at him. There is a soft click as the door shuts behind them.

Scientist A hears the ruckus before he sees it. A cacophony of hooting, almost barking, standard excitable primate noises.

Intrigued by the sounds which are definitely out of place from within the usually sterile, quiet, secret lab, he takes his position next to Scientist B, takes stock of the image beyond the glass, and instantly starts laughing.

“It’s not *funny*,” Scientist B snaps, “it’s not funny at *all*.”

In front of the glass there is quite a plain room, a bit like an interrogation room. There is a desk in the middle and two chairs either side. Sitting (or rather, standing) across from each other at the table are two, huge, baboons.

Baboon A has a hand of playing cards, face down. So does Baboon B. Baboon A slaps one down face up, clumsily, in the way anyone would without opposable thumbs. Then Baboon B slaps one down too in the same manner. They keep going. Excitement mounts. Both baboons are whooping, standing up and sitting down in their chairs repeatedly, slapping the cards down. The pile in the middle of the table is a mess.

Baboon A: 5 of hearts.

Baboon B: 8 of spades.

Baboon A: 3 of spades.

Baboon B: Queen of diamonds.

Baboon A: 3 of clubs.

Baboon B: 7 of spades.

Baboon A: 4 of hearts.

Baboon B: Jack of clubs

Baboon A: Jack of...

Suddenly a cacophony erupts. Baboon B has flung it's hand across the room in an attempt to now assert possession of the pile in the middle but Baboon A is having none of it. Four paws on the pile, hard even to tell whose paw is rightfully instated.

Teeth are bared, the scrap continues with escalating noise, more cards have ended up on the floor and all over the place.

Scientist A is still laughing.

Eventually, though determined through card rules or baboon rules it's hard to say, the fighting stops. Baboon B sits down calmly and arranges the pile it has as neatly as possible with its paws; deft in primate terms, clumsy in human terms. As it does so it looks about the room, raising its brow in that funny little primate way that makes it come across as concerned or worried.

Baboon A on the other hand is making equally deft and clumsy progress collecting all of the cards that have ended up strewn about, grunting a little bit. Very endearing.

"It's *not* funny," Scientist B intones.

Scientist A looks at her, his expression full of mirth, "oh come on... Card playing baboons? You have to admit, that is a *bit* funny."

The game has begun again in the background of their conversation.

"That's *our* research you've interfered with, or should I say, ruined completely," Scientist A carries on, "we didn't get funding so you could mess around with some baboons and a pack of cards. The board is going to be absolutely furious. How are we even meant to write this up? It's all on camera you know, absolutely everything is on camera.

We were six hours into an eight hour experiment too. What the hell were you thinking? This is *our* research... you didn't even bother to ask me or anything... What the *hell* were you thinking!?"

Scientist A smiles, half sad, half wry.

Meanwhile Baboon A has just cheated a little bit and has noticed that it's about to put down the ace of diamonds onto the ace of hearts Baboon B has just put down. You can see it trying to work out how best to navigate this situation without being outed as a cheater (i.e. by putting the card down and keeping it's paw there) but simultaneously with keeping the advantage and emerging the victor.

Baboon B screeches, impatient, suspect.

Baboon A makes its move.

"I don't know," Scientist A eventually tells Scientist B after he watches the pair of animals scrapping again, queens and twos and aces flying around the room, "it was nothing personal in any case, and I'm sorry for ruining everything..."

...They just looked so unbelievably bored."