

Traveller

By Zearth Goh

"The price has changed. The rifle's yours for Forty million."

"Are you kidding?" The Endo across the table exclaimed, slamming a fist into the table as I sat there, not batting an eye. "You told me I could get one for only a small markup, so what's with this amount?"

"I bought that rifle for over the usual price. Weapons are in short supply, after all. If you don't have any intentions of buying, then I have other buyers who are on my waitlist."

"Fine fine. Twenty-five million then."

"Thirty-five. Final offer."

"Alright. I'll get your credits."

"A pleasure," I replied, handing the rifle to the Endo, chuckling as I left the room. It's a nice gun, I give you that. But the cosmetics give you no tactical advantages whatsoever. At the end of the day, it was his folly for letting me make a profit from this exchange.

Making my way out of the marketplace, it was hard to imagine that just days ago, this was just one of many bustling markets across Endo space. Now, it's but a fragment of its former self. Mercenaries roamed about, promising riches and glory to those they meet. Hoarders go store to store, buying up whatever ammo they could get their hands on. Others simply looked about, watching day by day as store after the store closed down, their windows boarded up.

The bar was no better. Heads hung about as Endos sat close to each other, exchanging stories and rumours. Most of those rumours were far-flung, talks about an Empire superweapon were thrown about, as do a Kingdom Corvette. One completely nonsensical rumour was about how a third party instigated the war to profit off the exchange, but so far nothing of that sort has been proven.

Sighing, I sat at the front bar, making small talk with the bartender, listening to jazz music playing. "Never seen an Endo like you before," an Endo said, taking a seat beside me, ordering a glass of rum from the bartender. "No one would've expected a dark horse to emerge at such a turn, yet you don't seem anywhere concerned about the whole affair."

"And I've never seen an Endo like you who orders wine at a bar," I retorted, taking a glance at the bartender shaking his head. "For us who have no need for food, you've tried too hard to sell the mood."

"Oh I know, Monsieur Lunar," they responded, pushing a YOLOL chip across the counter. "I never did have the expectation of you being one to care for anything apart from credits."

"Gustav the opportunistic... merchant. Now, why might I be meeting you here."

"Ah, Monsieur, I see we can skip the introductions. I understand that you're one who's time is in high demand, so I'll make this quick. To put it simply, I have an offer for you that you can't refuse."

"I've seen many offers, and I've refused most of them, but your confidence has... piqued my interest. So tell me."

"See, Lunar, my company figured that the arms industry will be a big factor in the current political climate. As you might imagine, the war requires weapons to come from somewhere and if you have a read of my full proposal, you'll understand how I intend to corner the market. An economic crash is inevitable and the only way you'll be able to earn any money would be through this contract. And of course, someone of your standing might also persuade some of your friends in the industry to do the same. You see where I'm going with this?"

"Spare me the marketing trite. What's in it for me?"

"For every investor that you recruit to the cause, you'll earn a cut in addition to a percentage of the total earnings."

"Ah yes, multi-level marketing, of course. This clearly isn't a pyramid scheme designed to bring you the most profit..."

"Of course not. I wouldn't try and-"

"But unfortunately for you, I'll be the one making you an offer. I want ninety percent of the total profits earned from my investment. Seventy for anyone I recommend to you."

"That's hardly any profit for my company!"

"I don't recall anyone around this station who is capable of financing your operations, Gustav. You either accept it, or you get nothing. Either way, I still make a profit."

"Give me some time to think about this."

"Of course. You have five minutes."
