

Lottery

"... Three hundred and twelve Callistonians! Three hundred - and TWELVE can ya b'lieve it, Janus?"

"Well it's only been ten cycles since the Arcadian Senate announced our annexation and I don't think any of us are alone in feeling that clock tick, Marrick."

"Well one day down but luckily for someone today... NOT a dollar short! Thats right stay tuned after arte for the 'after party' with Arthur Dalus. Only one lucky gun! Will it be yours?"

The commbox fizzed and popped on the bar and the image froze again. Janus and Marrick sat frozen in neon, eyeing each other in that effortlessly fake way that only pretty and rich people could. The holo unfocussed and flashed off as the robotic commbox jumped up, small plates jutting out from the bottom. A much smaller holo of a cartoon face projected over the space where a head would be on the box.

"Break time Filly!" the bot buzzed as it waddled toward the edge of the bar jerking to the left then right as small high-powered fans sprang from its sides and launched it out the shattered window above the saloon door.

Orion watched it as it winked out of sight toward the Tower just outside town. Behind them a portly Arcadian man grumbled at the end of the bar nursing a tin mug of orange liquor. Orion glanced at him for a moment then raised their own tin,

"Filly? This your bar then?"

"Mmmh" the man almost sighed in agreement, lifting his head and tipping his ragged synhemp cattlemen hat. Orion huffed a quiet laugh at the irony. Here was an Arcadian, down on his luck no doubt but an Arcadian nonetheless at his *own* bar taking reavers' chits from out in the belt all the way to Titan. He was down six cups from what Orion's count and seemed like another comatose patron when they walked in after their first shift.

"Not a good first impression" they said under their breath. Well it was only the first saloon and Orion didn't have high hopes for it to begin with..

"Not lookin' forward to it?" Orion asked a little louder, prompting a glance from the barkeep.

"Theyre your ken though ain't they? *Arcadia Forever*, right?" they said, grinning. Filly just stared at his tin, eyes blank. The irony was that this saloon would be *annexed* by a 350 kiloton orbital lance when that countdown reached zero. All the nationalistic pills this 'Cadian swallowed for 'king and country' were starting to sour now that their atrocities would include him.

Orion got up, walked over to the slumped man and dug out two rusty Belt chits from their boot, dropping them into his drink. "Maybe you should save those, entrance fee is steeper than ever. Could be your lucky day" they said as they turned to get their coat and hat which hung at the other end of the bar.

Orion said it but secretly hoped the man didn't enter. Three hundred thousand was enough to compete with and though it probably wouldn't make a difference Orion didn't want anyone, especially a 'Cadian, to take *their* shot. Orion's boot scraped on the jagged dust-clumps outside and peaked under their hat at the artificial sun as it crested the Tower, noon. They had

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started working at time control this morning and would be due for clock-in on the top floor soon. An aero-bus whirred as it landed nearby and Orion picked up their pace to meet it at the stop.

"Watch your ste - welcome to Callisto air - please present your designation card to this point of service drone." A medium size cylindrical bot droned as Orion hopped up through the gate-door of the bus. They slipped a cord from their neck with a duroglass chit on the end and slapped it on top of the bot. It buzzed for a moment then a small holo appeared above it 'productivity'. Orion retrieved their designation chit and slipped it back over their neck.

"Please hold on to the railing." The aero-bus intercom rang out. The vehicle silently rose then whirred as it hovered toward the Towers twelfth level, high enough to see the holographic tears in the artificial sky where the fields met. The Tower stretched all the way to the top like a space needle. At its base it was 15 square kilometers and billowing dust as the drills bore into the surface. So far the Tower had uncovered three O-bones as they were colloquially referred to. O-bones, Orrick bones, were artifacts left by the Orrick, a long dead spacefolk whose first relic was responsible for humanity's greatest leap towards true spacefaring when they uncovered it on Mars.

Relics like that made prospectors out of desperate folk like Orion. Reavers lined up at drill sites on Luna, all over the Belt and most recently on Callisto. So many that they had a lottery system for it now and Orion had been buying tickets for fifteen years. The arte-sky disappeared from the viewport as an airbridge enveloped the bus as it docked with the Tower.

"Watch your ste-" the intercom buzzed as the gate opened. Orion stepped out into the airbridge tunnel and started toward the exit. They clutched their coat pocket for the four chits they saved for the entrance fee. Exiting the airbridge onto the twelfth floor terminal they looked around for the lottery kiosk. The terminal was massive and bustling as hundreds crossed from airbridges onto the floor to be on time for second shift.

Level twelve was dedicated to Productivity Maintenance. In charge of managing the arte-sky and climate control. A natural day on Callisto was close to seventeen terran days so they operated an artificial sky and climate to imitate a workable environment. People rushed about in an undulating swarm towards their work stations. A small queue was forming around a lottery kiosk nearby that Orion spotted after a moment.

"Please have your entrance fee ready. By casting your ticket, you accept full liability in the event of maiming, death, or any other misfortune in the pursuit of a relic. Be aware: dig sites have been known to contain active security systems. Good luck Reaver!" the kiosk sound system repeated over and over as people filed in to cast their tickets. After slipping the four chits into the receptacle a small square of synpaper jetted out of the kiosk printer,

19043-A-7: Orion Walker

The ticket was still hot from the printer and Orion waved it in the air to cool it off before shoving it into the slot of the aluminum box on top of the kiosk.