

The Sewer was bustling with more people and courtesy droids than usual. Daydream couldn't decide if that was a good thing due to the amount of coverage they would have or bad because there were so many eyeballs and tracers about.

Gentle checked his wristlet.

"He's running late," he said.

"He'll be here don't worry. Probably just cashing in some old debts or something."

Daydream tried to sound confident but with each passing moment, he was growing more and more worried.

Off in the distance, Daydream caught a short shadow dodging in and out of the crowd. His hands were dug into his pockets and his shoulders hunched. Daydream kicked a rock for Gentle's attention and nodded in that direction.

"Finally," Gentle exhaled. "I was getting worried."

"See, I told you he's good," Daydream chuckled slightly. Magma looked up long enough to see Daydream and Gentle standing off the side of a building. They went back into the alley as to not be seen or heard by any prying eyes or ears. Magma looked to see if he was being followed then snuck in.

"Hey, guys. Sorry, I'm late," he admitted.

"Yeah, we thought you weren't going to show there for a minute. What's the holdup?"

Gentle's voice deepened when he tried to sound menacing and bigger than he really was.

Always made Daydream laugh.

"Ah, you know. A little of this. A little of that, but bam!" Magma pulled out four sec passes from his pocket.

“Oh, wow. You weren’t kidding. We are really going to do this.” Gentle grabbed one and Daydream another. They took their turns fitting it on their wristlets and feeling it pull tight for a secure fit.

“Boys, I’m telling you. I’m making it to the moon’s surface,” Daydream confidently.

“Isn’t that the idea?” Magma asked.

“Yeah, but usually what happens is you find a floor you like and stay. There’s not a whole lot of people that stick it out to the end.” Gentle explained.

“Magma, we owe you big time. How did you even get these in the first place?” Daydream twisted his wrist back and forth and watched the tier 7 security clearance flash its light dance.

“I have my ways. Just remember, we need to meet up with my Uncle when we get topside. I don’t know where he is, but he’s known around town so it shouldn’t be too hard to find him. He’ll be able to get us to the next couple of floors,” Magma explained. Gentle clapped his hands together

“Alright, gentlemen, let’s hit the elevator.”

“Not so fast,” Daydream said.

“Yeah, who’s the other sec pass for?” Magma asked.

“Oh, that’s right. Day over here is bringing his girlfriend,” Gentle joked.

“Wait, seriously dude?” Daydream shrugged his shoulders.

“What? We’ve been going together for a while. I happened to mention it to her in a sort of passing fashion and she was into it. So I thought, why not? She’s cute. Might help our chances to get into the upper fifty, you know?” Daydream reasoned, but he knew better. He was afraid to go without her. He didn’t know what would happen if he wasn’t around to help protect her. Sewer isn’t just called that because everything falls down here, it’s also filled with rats.

“Nah, he’s going to marry this one. I got a feeling,” Gentle confessed. Daydream didn’t think it was too bad of an idea but kept that to himself.

“Ay, she’s got this one on a tight leash,” Magma joked.

“Yeah, and I can take that leash and beat you with it too, Magma. Don’t you forget.” The light voice echoed down the alleyway where the boys were plotting. From the crowd stepped out Cinders and clutched to her side was her younger sister Patch.

“No, no, no. Cinders coming is one thing, but I am not babysitting her kid sister.” Gentle protested. Patch put on her meanest face and walked right up to Gentle and stomped hard down on Gentle’s foot sending him back and hopping and howling like a dog. Cinders covered her laugh and Magma did his best to quiet Gentle down.

“You couldn’t babysit a cactus,” Patch said. Daydream pulled Cinders to his side.

“Hey, I don’t think it’s a good idea to bring your little sister along.” Cinders pull her arm back.

“I have to bring her. Where is she going to go? In a home or the hole? You want to send a little girl to the hole, Day?” Daydream shook his head no. “People go to the hole and never come back. I will not stand by and let that happen to my kid sister. Either she comes with us or I’m not going.” Her mind was made up, Daydream knew. He’d come to this sort of crossroad with her before.

“But we’ve only got one more sec pass. How are we going to get her in?” Daydream asked. Cinders pulled Patch to her, grabbed her wrist, and lifted it for Daydream to see her wristlet. The colors flashed around and read out Patch as a dependent to Cinders. He looked back at her confused.

“You’re not the only one who knows people,” she said with a wink. “Come on, I’ve had about enough of this place. Let’s race!” Still holding Patch’s arm, she and Cinders took off out of

the alleyway and onto the busy street. Daydream ran after them followed by Gentle and Magma.”

“Wait! We need a plan,” Magma called after them.

They weaved and pushed their way through the busy streets. They all caught up to Cinders and Patch with Gentle bringing up the rear. Cinders made a beeline for the floor’s elevator.

“What plan do we need? The first ones to the surface win,” Cinders called over her shoulder.

“All I know is if I make it to the upper fifty, I’m going to find a floor that I can just relax until the end of my days,” Gentle said.

“I heard that there’s a whole floor that looks right out the Simpsons!” Patch exclaimed.

“Just as long as we get out of here, I’ll set up anywhere,” Daydream said grabbing Cinders by the hand. She squeezed his back.

They were soon upon the elevator. There was a line forming, day workers, and they filed in behind. The excitement grew as they got closer and closer. Finally, they were next to board the lift.

When the two iron doors opened, an elderly man dressed in a dark, red suit, lined with polished brass buttons glared at them.

“Security passes out, please,” instructed the Operator. They all extended the wristlets and one by one the Operator scanned them. He doubled checked Patch to verify her status, then waved her through. Once everyone was on board, the Operator pulled a large lever closing the doors. He pressed a few buttons and the floor underneath them pushed them up.

At first, they thought the elevator was enclosed, surrounded by blackness, but once they cleared the industrial floors, Daydream and the rest were presented to their first real view of the

outside. The emptiness of space accented by the stars that shimmered in the distance light-years away. Past Earth below them and the bright side of the Moon above them. Patch pushed her face up against the glass.

“Guys, there it is.” Everyone did the same. The elevator shaft went for hundreds of thousands of miles and at its end, the Moon’s surface.

“That’s where we’re going,” Daydream said as he huddled close to Cinders. She smiled back at him. They were really going to do it, she thought. The race was about to begin.

After a few moments, the elevator slowed its pace and came to a jerking halt. Everyone grabbed onto something or someone to brace themselves.

“Oh, sorry. Old shaft, this one. Been needing maintenance for some time now. Here you are, City Wake. It’s currently 74 degrees, 0800 hours.” The Operator pulled back the lever and the iron doors pulled apart. A bright beam of light cast down on them forcing them to shield their eyes. Daydream was the first to walk through and onto the platform.

“Enjoy your stay,” the Operator called after.

There were roads and massive skyscrapers that seemed to stretch forever. Looking up, the sky was a blue they’d never seen before. A slight breeze hit Gentle’s face. Something in the air smelled sweet.

Magma was the last to exit. When he crossed onto the platform, his sec pass went off. Everyone turned back to him. Magma looked down at his wrist and then to Daydream, his eyes wide.

“Not you, I’m afraid.” The Operator grabbed Magma by the shoulder and pulled him back into the lift. He pushed the lever and the doors closed with a ka-chunk. The elevator fell as fast as ever down back down to the Sewer.

They stood in silence.

This was it.

The race had begun.