

Great Scott:
The Marquee Rivalry
by
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Marquee Industrial was known far and wide in the business world for being the leader in steel, iron, and titanium manufacturing. Their new headquarters, built completely with materials from their factories by hard-working Americans, not only stands as a testament to their commitment to quality, but provides leading scientific minds with the resources they need to research new materials that will surely secure Marquee as the industry leader in structural engineering.

Scott didn't really care who the industry leader in structural engineering is. However, someone paid Scott a lot of money to keep Marquee from the top, so Scott had been spending the weekend in their shiny new headquarters, not far from it's sciences division. After a few days of costumes, stolen security passes, and chit-chat with people he pretended to know about subjects he pretended to be interested in, Scott found himself lying around in an air duct with a small palmtop computer and an mp3 player.

Scott laid on his back, gently nodding his head to his music. He found himself impressed with the structural integrity of the vent he was in. It was small, but gave just enough wiggle room for him to shift positions if he found himself uncomfortable. He had been in plenty of air ducts and this was the first one strong enough to allow him to rest in one spot and be comfortable. He held onto the screen, watching little red blips wander around. In the five hours he spent lying around and watching them move, Scott had given them all names and started to recognize their habits.

Scott named one of the red dots Adam. The red dot Scott had named Adam had been sitting at his post all day, motionless in his chair at the security station. In five hours, he had moved only twice, to answer the door for the red dot Scott had named Carter. It wasn't clear whether the red dot Scott had named Adam was a diligent worker, or simply prone to napping at his desk. Scott hoped for the best and planned for the worst. The red dot Scott had named Benny was quite the opposite. Whether nervous or preoccupied, he'd wandered back and forth. He'd enter the room, sit at his desk for a while, then get up some 20 minutes later to get a snack. He'd sit back down to enjoy it, and apparently

couldn't hold his intake, since he'd have to go to the bathroom soon enough. Either compulsive or simply not that bright, the red dot Scott had named Benny still didn't learn his lesson and would get up for another drink he'd just have to fire out again later.

The red dot Scott had named Carter might have been in charge or something. He didn't work in that room, or at least didn't have access, since every time he came to the office he needed the red dot Scott had named Adam to get up and let him in. There was actually a good chance the red dot Scott had named Carter wasn't the same person each time he showed up, but given this amount of time he would stay close to the other two when he was in the room, Scott gathered they were talking about something with either familiarity or professional enthusiasm.

With the "Happy Feet" soundtrack providing the backdrop for his thoughts, Scott figured he had two options. Benny was coming up on the pissing stage of his input-output cycle, which would leave Adam alone in the room, his stable nature making him a perfect target for incapacitation, which would leave security a non-issue as Scott conducted his business in the laboratories. However, Carter's appearance was growing regular, and if it stayed on the same pattern it had been taking, it would probably coincide with Benny's absence. This would mean that if Scott was lucky, he could get in and out of the room while Adam opened the door for Carter, and neither man would ever know anything had happened at all.

Scott shook his head back and forth with "Boogie Wonderland," trying to decide. Unable to, he pushed a button on the side of the screen and a small touchscreen keyboard appeared in front of the little red dots. Scott quickly tapped on the screen.

Miles away from Scott's air vent, Jack sat at his computer, busying himself by reorganizing files in his catalog network. The last contact he received from Scott was earlier that day, stating he had a target and planned to move in that night. Somewhere between alphabetizing 'Dashiki, Diamond of between 'Curtis, Tom' and 'Daisuke, Jigen' he was interrupted by an instant-message window with a

small padlock symbol on the corner.

S: hey pick a number

Jack sighed, closed his files for now, and dropped his hands to the keyboard.

J: No.

S: come on i need to decide something

J: I'm not going to play this stupid little game, Scott. Decide based on logic, don't make it a coin flip.

S: both plans can work i just want to know which one is more of a risk

J: Then think about it for one second and figure it out.

S: okay you just picked one im movin gin have the new feeds ready

J: You really need to learn to type. Which ones are we going with?

S: fuck u were using the alpha feeds sixty seconds

The window closed. Jack rolled his eyes and prepared the first of the two video feeds he and Scott had created a few weeks before hand.

Scott pressed the button on the side of the screen and the keyboard blipped off. He pocketed the screen, pulled the ear buds out of his head, wrapped them around his wrist and pulled his sleeve cuff over them. He turned on his stomach and inched forward slowly so he could see down into the room. Benny, a thin, younger man, was just on his way out on a trip to the bathroom, and Adam, a more portly, slightly older man was slouched over in his chair asleep. Ten seconds had passed.

Scott pulled the gun out from his pocket, and pointed it at portly Adam through the vent. With his other hand, he produced a crooked screwdriver, designed to let him unscrew a ventilation cover from the inside. Not moving his pointed gun from the sleepy guard, he loosened the four screws, and silently caught the vent cover as it started to fall. He gently placed it and the screws inside of the vent, and silently slinked out of the opening, never taking his gun's aim off of it's target. Twenty seconds

had passed.

Scott tiptoed himself on the floor, right next to sleeping Adam. He reached over to access the keyboard, and one-handedly unlocked network security to the ports his partner would need to access. Scott was close enough to Adam now that he needed to be careful to not let the gun he held touch the gentle sleeper's forehead. At the forty-five second mark the network was open and ready for reception. At the forty-seven second mark, Scott turned around. Carter stared wide-eyed into the room as a stranger wearing a tight black bodysuit held a gun to the head of his sleeping friend.

“Shit!” Scott yelled. He fired a sedative from his gun into the neck of the sleeping guard, and immediately fired another through the glass window. The dart sliced a neat hole through the safety glass, and found its way into Carter's neck. He fell to the floor with a heavy drop.

“Jack, I need the beta feeds.” Scott said quickly.

Jack heard him. “I don't have them loaded, how soon?”

“Right now. Two seconds ago.”

“Shit, okay, stay there if you can.”

Scott didn't move. He stood perfectly still, watching himself on the security camera and silently prayed that whoever would go over those tapes later was impressively stupid.

“Okay, they're loaded. Take two steps to your right and don't move for five seconds.”

Scott positioned himself and didn't move.

“Three seconds, two seconds, one second. Go!”

Scott bolted for the door. As he threw the door open and ran left through the hallway, security blared warnings of intrusion as its cameras showed him throwing the door open and running right.

After turning a few corners and convincing himself that anyone that might have been following him wasn't anymore, Scott burst into a restroom, scurrying back into the air shaft fast enough that he didn't notice whether or not it was occupied. The familiar surroundings helped to steady his nerves,

and gave him a chance to take a deep breath and calm himself. Before he took the opportunity, two short buzzes emanated from his pocket. Scott retrieved the small computer.

J: What the hell just happened?

S: i misstimed someone's patterns it happens

J: If I had said "two," would we not be having this problem?

S: man f u this is why we have backups besides now leave me alone while security s distracted

Scott closed the screen and pocketed it, ignoring the buzzing from Jack's messages. He traced his path in the air to regain his bearings, closed his eyes to remember the map he had been studying, and crawled his way to his destination, happy that for once in his life the ventilation system was set to 'cool' instead of 'heat.'

Scott wound his way into the R&D division's developmental labs, which he understood to hold his target. Along the way he'd disabled three pressure sensors, enjoyed the view of an office affair taking place in the secretary bullpen, and wondered how somebody managed to leave a penny in an air duct. As he wound his way farther and farther eastward in the building, he would occasionally hear a guard's assistance in the west wings. The bumbling antics of overpaid rent-a-cops always helped to push on and cheer up an under motivated thief, and Scott was smiling when he found the safe locked-entrance of Experimental Materials Storage to actually be unguarded.

Scott poked his head out from the high ceiling's duct and took a quick look around. With the coast clear and nothing showing up on nearby radar, he took the 12-foot drop with a grunt and roll when hitting the ground. He stood facing the large steel door and it's security offerings. He casually typed in the password he'd gotten from a drunk executive at the company loyalty party he crashed a few weeks earlier, gave the touch pad his fingerprint that Jack had hacked into the system the previous week, and for the voice command he belted out a flawless impersonation of the office manager's voice, which he'd composited from two secretaries' who were sick of him trying to put the moves on them and

a stock boy's who was much less bitter, but more talented.

The door's internals clicked and chunked and whirred until it slowly opened for him. Scott took one last look behind him, and wandered on in. He walked around in the vault, admiring the shelves of new plastics that could withstand tremendous heat, metals with reduced pliability without the cost of integrity, and polymers that were light enough to throw around, yet strong enough to hold a dump truck full of solidified concrete. He contemplated nabbing a few bits of material to take back home to Jack as an apology for screwing the security pooch, but the last thing he needed was to admit to his partner he was capable of screwing up.

Scott followed the metals' alphabetic organization structure, hoping to find “Carbonized Transitory Beryllium – Development Stage.” Apparently a new form of light-weight bladdity blah, this earth-metal alloy can withstand doot-dee-doo under whatever stuff. To Scott it all boiled down to “We want what they have” and he gets paid for it. In between a mass of endless chemical names and stickers proclaiming everything under the roof of the building to be known to the state of California to cause cancer, he found a small filing cabinet one might find in a college student's dorm room with all the right words to betray itself as Scott's goal.

Scott popped the keyhole on the small cabinet and knelt down to rifle through it's few contents. It contained only a few scattered folders covered in “AUTHORIZED PERSONELL” and “ORIGINAL” markings all over them. Scott emptied the few meager folders from the cabinet just as he heard the door slam behind him. He stood with a start and turned to see a long, thin figure stand before him. The mask it wore lacked a hole for a face or eyes, but the strong, defiant stance and curved figure betrayed it as one Scott was easily familiar with.

“Winter?” he asked with a mixture of surprise and dread.

Before she had a chance to answer, they both looked to see all the lights in the room turn out and alarms begin to flare.

“God dammit,” Scott said, his body's motion lost in the darkness. “Are we going to work together this time, or is one of us going to throw the other to the dogs?”

“Come on, you idiot,” She replied, and Scott felt her strong hand on his arm.

In the darkness, Scott was lost to the scene around him. He ran as he felt himself pulled forward, the hard pop of gunshots providing the only hint as to what was happening. He instinctively held his breath and relaxed his body as he realized he was falling downward, and eagerly sucked on the small rebreather shoved into his mouth after hitting the dark, cold water. He followed the ripples in the water ahead of him until he found enough light to guide him on his own. The two swam on for what seemed to be nearly ten minutes, though when Scott was helped out of the water in a small wooded area, his fingers had yet to begin to prune. He spit the small steel tube out of his mouth, welcoming air that hadn't been hastily recycled into his lungs.

“How many times is this going to happen, Scott?” the woman asked.

Scott coughed up some water. “Oh, fuck you! This was my job!”

“Was your job.” She spoke as she peeled herself out of her wetsuit, revealing a long, tightly braided ponytail and some form of tightly-knit bodysuit that had kept bone dry. She turned the wet rubber inside out and dropped it on the ground before rifling through some bushes. “Where are you located.”

“Yeah, okay.” Scott said, standing in his underwear trying to ring out his soaking wet shirt and pants. “Why am I going to tell you where I am now. Are they monitoring you, or just tracking every move you make.”

“Fine.” she said, opening a briefcase she had taken from the nearby brush. “I guess I won't give you a ride home. Stand back a bit.” She pulled a small metal ball out from the case and placed it on the suit. After smoking for a few seconds, it caught fire and began burning the suit into ash.” Scott watched as the rubber began to crumble.

“Is the polymer what's dissolving like that, or is it chemica--”

“Oh, I'm not going to tell you.” She said, mocking him.

“Hey, that's great. How's that agency of yours going to like your sense of humor when they go over every second of little Miss Summer's day in detail?”

“Please, I've done enough for Top Central that I don't need mommy watching over me, and if they were monitoring me someone would have come out of that bush by now to kill me for helping you. Now I'll ask you again. Are you going to take a free ride with me, or are you going to stand there in your Y-fronts while I leave with the files you insist are yours?”

“I'm drying my clothes out, I didn't-- Wait, shit!” Scott reeled back in horror of his own idiocy. “I lost the files somewhere! They're probably still in the water!”

Winter calmly raised a heavy black dossier case to Scott's eyes and batted him in the head with them. “Christ, Scott, how do you even get by in this line of work? You didn't bring anything to transport the files, I bet half your equipment's still back there, and you were completely unprepared for an interception! This is high-level corporate framing here!”

“Oh, come on,” Scott insisted, flapping his still-wet pants before sliding them on his body. “This is simple smash-and-go stuff, how was I going to know--”

“This is a high-level frame job, Scott! Atlas Plastics is stealing the originals to the Beryllium Polymers to frame Marquee of infringement! If you had done any research into your target or the client, you would have known they were being watched by a handful of whitehat organizations!”

Scott, ringing out more of the water from his shirt, rolled his eyes at her. “Okay, that all came out as blah blah blah. I have a target, a drop-off and a payment date. That's what I need to get by.”

Winter turned from him, exhausted. “That's why you're not going to get anywhere.”

“Where do I need to go!” Scott paused to slide his still-soaking Under Armor tee on. “I've got more money than I would have gotten if I stayed military, and I don't have to kowtow to a bunch of

Illuminati hopefuls.”

“God dammit, that's it.” She cleared brush away to get to a hidden motorcycle. “This is what happens when I try to help some fucking idiot.” She pulled a jacket out of the case, hastily zipped it up, and slammed the briefcase and the dossier holder into the bike's carry canister. She hopped up into the bike's seat. “See you, Scott. Try not to get killed.”

“Wait, don't.” Scott reached his hand forward and walked up to the bike. When he got there, he stood silently and brushed his hand along the bike's chrome piping. He stopped to consider his words. “You're driving a Shovelhead now, or is this the agency's?”

Winter leaned her head back, exasperated. “Scott, what are you doing?”

“Why'd you leave us?”

They both looked at each other, shocked by the suddenness of the question. Winter broke the stare by turning to start the engine. “Scott, I really don't have time for this.”

“Oh, come on!” Scott yelled as he punched the bike's case, desperate to make more noise than it's engine. “You left your brother and me high and dry without any explanation or warning. Was it just a power issue or did you want more money?”

“Scott please, I don't want to sit here and make you think you and Jack aren't good enough or whatever you'll take from it.”

Scott juked back and forth, his body becoming more animated. “Just talk, for God's sake! I deserve that much as least!” He was in front of the bike at this point, and stared intently in her eyes. She sighed heavily, turning the bike off.

“Is Jack listening to this?”

“No, this is me and you. Why'd you leave?”

She leaned back in her seat, and stopped to choose her words. “Scott you're going to be taking job after job until you die. Don't kid yourself either, this is what's going to happen to you. You're

going to fuck up some job, or piss off the wrong person, or get in someone's way that isn't me. For God's sake, what would have happened to you tonight if anyone else had been sent there tonight beside me?"

Scott shifted his weight from one leg to the other, turning away from her only for a moment, still not saying a word.

"Look," she continued. "Maybe I'm wrong, I mean you certainly have talent. No offense, but I wouldn't have pulled off some of the stuff you have with the mistakes you make. The point is that if you never made any real money or get any real power you'd still be perfectly happy running around with Jack playing spy. I'm glad you feel that way, I really do. I just can't feel the same way. I'm doing real work with real equipment that I watch change things all around me."

A brief pause passed between them, and they both found things to look at until Scott spoke up again.

"It hasn't been as fun without you."

She smiled a genuine smile at him, and leaned over the handlebars to kiss him on the forehead. "Thanks. That actually means a lot." She settled back down in the seat and turned the bike back on. "Last chance for a ride back into town!" She hollered over the engine.

Scott simply took a few steps to the back of the bike, and patted it twice. She gave one last wave, revved up the engine and rode away into the darkness.

Scott watched her drive off, his hands in his wet pockets, until she was out of sight then leaned into the nearby brush to retrieve the dossier case he had stolen from the bike's trunk during their argument. That stupid bitch gives him a lecture about how she's a grownup now because she walked out of a game? Fuck her. While Winter's running around with a halo on her head for walking being too good for her friends, Scott's got another successful job under his belt and a big, overgrown corporation that just can't wait to have their balls squeezed when Scott shows up with their Carbon

Tracker Whatever-The-Fuck.

Scott pulled the computer from his pocket, a bit wet, a little scratched, but in no bad form, charted a map home and started walking, with a license to print his own money tucked under his arm. As he walked he popped his ear buds in and serenaded himself to a Spanish reprise of “My Way.”

Winter pulled her bike over into the rest stop. She settled down next to the gas pump, and scratched at her hair as she got off. After popping the spout into the tank and starting to fill, she opened the Harley's trunk and smiled to herself. She pulled a phone out of her pocket and hit the speed dial.

“Summers, Authorization code 302-89-02-83. Beta.” She leaned her weight to her other hip and gave a quick smile and wave to the friendly man who walked by. “Yeah, it's me. Mmm-hmm. Yeah, they know. They did? Oh wow, that's great.”

She popped the false back of the trunk open and pulled out the documents she had taken from the Marquee building. “Yeah, I've got 'em in my hands right now, but they can't have 'em back until they get processed. Two days. Great, I'll see you then.”

She slapped the phone closed and dropped it back into her pocket. After she finished fueling she sauntered in to pay and walked out with a hot dog, which she finished before heading back on the road.