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Tales

ALL THAT GLITTERS



Sci-Fi

All That Glitters

A One Dollar Tale

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All That Glitters

1

“I’ve finally done it, senators,” a voice beamed throughout the chamber. “After three years of work, my project is finally done.”

The man speaking wore a rundown blue and green robe. He stood in the center of a large white room. Tall grey columns stood in all four of the chamber’s corners. Six more stood firm in the center—the man occupied the space in between them. Rows of seats lined the walls, all filled with men and women wearing long white robes.

“You’ve been wasting the government’s money for years, Phineyus,” an older gentleman in the front row said. “What should lead us to believe that your invention works now?”

“I’ve seen it!” another, much younger white-robed gentleman said as he stood up. “He’s converted the entire collected scrolls of Othellius and managed to store them in his device.”

“That’s impossible!” the older man yelled.

“Please! Senators!” Phineyus pleaded. “Allow me to show you an example!”

The younger man turned to the older one. “Any objections to that, Glounious?”

“None at all, Arleous,” the elder said after a short silence.

Phineyus smiled as he reached into his pocket. “Here it is!” he said holding up his hand, revealing the results of years of labor. Against the palm of his opened hand sat a sparkling oval-shaped blue-green gem.

“You can’t be serious!” Glounious yelled in protest. “You rant and rave for years, and then present *that* before us?”

“You don’t understand, Glounious, as you don’t understand most things in this world,” Arleous stated. “Phineyus has found a way to harness energy into the gem.”

“Impossible!”

“No, it’s not!” Phineyus yelled. “It’s true! Electric current is running through this piece, and through the electric current, in cryptic form, thousands of parchments of information!”

“Senators!” Glounious said standing, raising his arms. “This is ludicrous, not only should we stop funding this so called ‘scientist,’ but he should be sent to the asylum for rehabilitation!”

“His claims are anything but false,” Arleous interjected.

“Prove them, then!” Glounious demanded.

“I will!” Phineyus said, running through the main chamber door. A moment later, a loud, rumbling noise could be heard as the scientist rolled a large, four-wheeled cart bearing two trays into the center of the senate hall. Large crystals of multiple colors sat on one tray, a huge clear-colored crystal sat on the other. There were murmurs amongst the members of the crowd. “Ladies and gentlemen of the senate, the gem I showed you earlier was just a storage device. These crystals here are the translators.”

“Translators of what?” Glounious asked.

“Of the information stored, of course!” Phineyus leaned down, tampering with the different-colored crystals while he spoke. “Using contained electric charges captured from lightning storms, I managed to be able to lightly modify other running electric currents so that they carry patterns in the same way our languages have patterns. As such, contents of parchments, scrolls, maps—anything can be stored in unimaginable quantities!” He stood up straight, checking everything one last time before holding up the small, sparkling gem once more. “Now, senators, if you please, watch the clear crystal on the second tray.” He leaned in, placing the small gem in the center of the first tray in the middle of the circle made up of large crystals. “Here we go!” he said as he tapped the side of one of the crystals.

Before a second passed, sparks flew among all of the gems on the tray—they started to move in a circular pattern. The red, green, blue, and purple colors started to blend together. After a moment, the clear crystal on the second tray started to glow bright yellow. Against the crystal’s edge, patterns started to appear—text appeared, and the members of the chamber mumbled and muttered in awe.

“Look at the text!” one of them yelled.

“It’s real! That’s the introduction to one of the scrolls of Othellius!” another said jumping to her feet.

“It can’t be!” Glounious yelled.

“Yes, it can be!” Arleous proclaimed. “Phineyus has done it! He has created a storage device unlike any other we have seen!”

“How much information can it store?” a woman asked Phineyus as she stood up and walked to him—other senators flocked to the device in the center as well.

“This one here is a small one, but these gems come in all shapes and sizes,” the inventor answered. “And depending on the density and the amount of electric current you can store inside them, you can store anywhere from a few hundred scrolls and letters, to entire libraries’ worth of material.”

“This is amazing!”

“It’s a new age!” One of the senators proclaimed. “These new universal libraries will enlighten us all. Every child can have all the knowledge and culture of our entire planet at their disposal—in the palms of their hands!”

Glounious sat back hiding amongst the crowd, his head found its way to his hands. Phineyus stood proudly in the center of the hall, hands on his hips, smiling as half of the hall’s occupants examined his invention. Arleous crossed his arms, observing proudly the reactions of the chamber.

Months had passed since the senate meeting when Arleous walked along the streets of the city. He wore a blue robe, tied tightly so the ends would not drag in the mud. He observed the white and gray buildings as he moved—they varied in size and shape, from small, cozy cottages to tall community complexes. Any number of people lived in each one, and people were scattered in all directions performing their daily duties, chores, and routines.

He came to a bridge—one of many bridges in the city compensating for the rivers and lakes that ran across their civilization. Arleous moved at a decent pace, holding many scrolls tightly

under his right arm. Across the bridge was a tall, blue building in front of which was a line. Dozens of people, each holding scrolls, or books, or maps stood waiting their turn to enter. Arleous smiled, walking around them, towards the back door of the complex.

“Senator!” Phineyus said, upon seeing Arleous enter through the back entrance. He held open his arms for his friend’s approach—making visible the entirety of the new bright blue and purple robe he wore.

“Hello, Professor,” Arleous said, wrapping his free arm around his friend, feeling both of Phineyus’s arms grab him in turn. “How goes it?”

“Better than you would believe!” the inventor said, separating from the senator and walking over towards a large arrangement similar to the two-tray display from the cart in the senate chamber—only much larger.

“Amazing, this device gets bigger and bigger every time I see it,” Arleous commented.

“Well, we have to keep adjusting. We’re getting more and more information to convert every day. And don’t forget it used to be just my assistants and me; now, the senate has sent me officials from all walks of life! I have translators of all different languages, physicists, mathematicians, scientists, writers, philosophers, lawyers, musicians—we’ve even figured out how to convert the electric currents to simulate music!”

The senator smiled. “This is the biggest invention of our time, Phineyus. Your UL devices are becoming a household item.”

“And day after day more people are bringing me their scrolls, books, and other storage forms to trade in for the newest and updated versions.”

Arleous laughed. “Not me, I’m just bringing them because they take up too much room in my house, and I’d rather have the information in the UL anyway.” He placed the scrolls he brought onto a small table near the crystal set up.

“I tell you, it hasn’t even been a year since that day in the senate hall, and scrolls, books, parchments—everything we used to consider so cherished and so important are becoming obsolete.

In a few years, you won't see scrolls or books anywhere except in museums."

"Well, the device has so many more benefits than our old storage systems it's much more permanent. Books and scrolls deteriorate after time, ink fades away, and after a few generations what was written is lost. With these, we'll be able to pass down information for generations! Even Glounious has given up on trying to keep things stagnant in the senate from what I can tell."

"Yes, he has—last week he came here to get a UL."

The senator smiled. "I never thought I'd see the day, after all those initiatives to preserve scrolls and books."

"That makes two of us. After all those tirades he went on about the dangers of keeping all our information in one place, who would have thought he'd come around?"

"Seriously, though, can you help me out here?" Arleous asked pointing to his scrolls on the table.

Phineyus sighed and picked up the scrolls. "Am I going to need a translator this time, or are all these in our language?"

The two friends laughed as they walked over to the work station.

2

Harsh winds blew across the desert. In the middle of the swirling brown, two white figures left footprints as they walked. Their limbs and torsos were bulky, and large golden helmets topped their heads. Clear face-shields protected their eyes from the storm, and their belts were loaded with equipment of all kinds. Microphones enabled them to speak to each other. The two figures moved, both holding small square devices, attempting to read the small screens that told them the spots where they should be taking samples.

“I don’t see how those jerks in the lab can try to tell us that water ever existed around these parts.”

“They have to tell us that—they need to give us some reason for being out here.”

“I mean seriously, they expect us to find something worthwhile after that big meteor supposedly hit this place six thousand years ago?”

“Actually, I don’t think they really do. But unless they have conclusive data that there’s no life here, and that there is no possibility of life forming here, it will be hard to convince all those liberal groups to start building out here.”

The two figures pressed on, doing their best to not be pushed back by the winds.

“About here should be good,” one of them said.

“How do you figure?”

“There’re a lot of mineral readings here.”

“Alright then,” the second said dropping to his knees. He pulled a glass tube and a scooper from his belt and began to take a sample from the ground.

The first one walked around, pressing buttons on his device, scouting for another area to look into. After moving for a few moments, he felt something hard on the ground underneath him. Stopping, he bent down and took a look. “Hey, Bob!” he yelled.

“What?”

“I think I found something!” he said as he started digging. He pulled a chunk of sand out from the ground, and held his hand out in front of him, letting the wind blow away it all away, until all that remained in his palm was a sparkling oval shaped blue-green gem.

3

“Marion, you gotta help me!” a young man said running through the front door of the shop.

“What’ve ya gotten yourself into now, sonny?” the elderly lady behind the counter asked.

“It’s our anniversary!” he blurted out. “And I haven’t gotten her anything!”

“Sally ain’t gonna like that much. When are you boys gonna learn?”

“I don’t know,” Jack said, leaning against the counter. “I’m an idiot. But I need to get her something nice. What have you got for me?”

“Well, that’s a mighty good question.”

Jack took a step back from the counter and looked around. There was the candy section, filled with heart-shaped boxes of chocolate—he knew his wife loved chocolate well enough. Then there were the stuffed animals, dozens of animals from bears to rabbits lined the shelves. “How about a teddy bear?” he asked.

“Didn’t you get her one of those for Christmas?”

Jack sighed. “That I did,” he said pacing around the store. “And I suppose since I got her chocolates for Valentine’s Day, that’s out too?”

“See, boy, now you’re catching on.”

He thought for a moment, “What about jewelry?” he asked after a pause.

“There you go, sonny. Women always like jewelry. And the more expensive, the better!” she said with a smile.

Jack narrowed his eyes, and let out a mock laugh. Walking over to the jewelry section, he looked through the glass at the rings, bracelets and necklaces available on the shelf. “What should I get her? She was born in July.”

“Unfortunately, it’s hard to get rubies out here. But you know, Jack, there are so many new stones these days—especially now.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” he said with a sigh.

Marion smiled. “I’ve got my hands on one right now,” she said pulling out a small box from behind the counter. “This one is pretty rare, I predict the prices will go up soon.” She opened the box.

Jack’s mouth opened slightly as he saw the necklace inside. “Oh my God, that’s beautiful!”

“Just because my store ain’t computerized means I don’t have connections, huh?” she winked.

Jack laughed. “Let me see that.” Marion handed him the box. “Oh my God, this is perfect!” he yelled.

“Isn’t it?” she winked.

“How much?”

“For you, Jack? Not much at all,” she named a price.

“Deal!” he said instantly, pulled out his wallet and handed her his credit card.

Marion smiled as she completed the transaction. “Sally’s gonna love it.”

“I know she will!” he exclaimed. “Thanks a bunch!” he said.

“Have a good one, sonny!” she offered.

Jack headed out of the shop as quickly as he entered, pacing back home fast enough to wrap the present before his wife got home. He looked up at the dome that covered their city—the protector, keeping them safe from the sand storms on the distant world that had become his second home. As he walked, he couldn’t help opening the box once more. Smiling, he picked up the necklace and held it out, looking in awe at the golden chain, and the sparkling oval shaped blue-green gem in the center.

4

“Down here, Governor!” the miner yelled.

“Hold on a second, my ring got caught on the rope! We’re not all used to this!” the portly man lowering himself down the long shaft yelled. When his feet touched the rocky floor he disconnected his harness and followed his guide through the dimly lit tunnel.

“It was a complete accident I tell yah!” The miner said as he navigated his way through the corridor, ducking underneath the support beams. The man wore a blue and orange uniform and wore a helmet that bore the light that led their way. “Just pure luck, that’s what it was!” The two men came to the end of the tunnel. Rocks and gravel were spread all over the floor, to the left was an entry way. “This way, sir, this way!”

The governor followed the miner through the entrance way, and entered into a large expanse. The room was at least several hundred feet in length and width. “Oh my God...” he said aloud as he got his first clear look at its contents.

“Governor!” a third man said walking over to the newcomers said. He wore a long brown coat and spectacles. “I’m glad you’re here!”

“Hello, Doctor,” the politician said shaking the man’s hand. “I can’t believe this, it’s really true!” he walked to the center of chamber, gazing at the treasure around him. Piled against the walls, spread across the floor, books, parchments, letters, papers, sculptures, scrolls were littered everywhere. “This really proves it then, doesn’t it? All the theories?” he asked turning to the archeologist.

“It is true, sir,” the doctor nodded. “There is no doubt now that life existed on this planet many, many years before we came here.”

“After all those years digging under the city for minerals, I’ve finally hit pay-dirt!” the miner exclaimed.

“This is going to change history as we know it,” the Governor said. “But how is it possible that this has been preserved for so long?”

“Luck is my best guess,” the doctor replied. “This chamber was made of pure stone, and lava from a volcano might have run over it and solidified, protecting it and preserving it from external forces until our friends hacked through the defenses to find it.”

“Is any of this material intact enough for us to examine?”

“It’s possible, but very little,” the doctor said as looked from pile to pile. “We have to remember, this is its first exposure to oxygen in countless centuries...we don’t know how it will react if we attempt to move it, or bring it above ground.”

“Then we’ll have to bring others down here to examine it while we can!” the governor offered.

“No question there, the question now is, are there other chambers like this hidden under our city? Or is this roomful going to be all we’ll ever know of this ancient civilization?”

The governor nodded, crossing his arms. “It would be nice if we knew more about them, but at this point it’d be hard to say if we ever will.” He brought his hand to his mouth, scratching his chin. His golden ring shined as the light from the miner’s helmet reflected off of the oval shaped, blue-green gem in the center.

~End.