

## Will o' Wisp

"Wake up, you idiot," Boucher nudged.

Rembrandt snapped awake, feeling at once the consequences of sleeping in a car. His neck hurt in strange places, and he had twisted himself in such an angle that his legs were asleep. He kicked away wrappers of fast-food burgers, crusty with old grease and sauce. He shifted himself, checked that his belongings were still on him, and attempted a stretch. He also thought of his cat, also named Rembrandt, cozy and comfy back at his apartment coincidentally not too far from where they were stationed.

Rain pelted the car, tapping along the cracked wind shield like fingers on a piano. Swathes of neon bent around surfaces, glinting off the reflecting walls of the *Will o' Wisp*, the sides of the neighboring bars, and the rafters of new construction across the street, which provided excellent cover for their stake out.

Boucher straightened his tie. His mirrored visor rest on the dashboard, reflecting his broad chin and patchy stubble back at him.

"You know," he said, "you've really got to stop falling asleep on these missions. What if we aren't partnered up? What if you're stuck with Agent Eclipse or Porcelain Girl?"

"Oh please," Rembrandt said, "then I would be on my best behavior. I prefer to work with you anyway. People know we are friends."

Boucher looked outside, watched the rain collect into a puddle right outside his door. "This is no business for friends."

Rembrandt leaned back, took a sip of his old coke. The ice was melted and it was warm, but he craved the sweetness. He wiped his mouth with the back of a gloved hand, "And I would leave A.E. and P.G. out of your thoughts. They've always been nice to me."

"I don't think they had a choice," Boucher said.

He directed his attention back to the nightclub, where the *Will o' Wisp* had awakened like a sleeping beast. Music pumped out from inside, although from this distance it was just the heavy beats with enough force to send concentric rings through the puddles lining the street. Bouncers larger than linebackers stationed outside, checking IDs for scantily clad women and men dressed up in their Sunday best. Two beautiful women, tall as the bouncers were large, balanced on heels and wore dresses that cutoff just below the pelvis. They wore butterfly masks and were handing out an assortment of facades to the guests as they entered.

Boucher had been on other stakeouts before, and while no stakeout was particularly riveting, he did enjoy the sights. He liked looking at the almost-nothing getup of the women, accentuating their thighs and bottoms, revealing midriffs, inviting a gaze into the depths of their cleavage. He liked watching their hips shake unconsciously to the beat inside, or to fend off the

chill from the rain. It was a production line of sex trailing from the club, full of people willing to spend too much for cocktails that will only be justified if it ends up as a one-night stand.

“Are you ready?” Rembrandt said.

He reached into the back seat, cleared it from the wrapping paper of his Christmas present from his elderly neighbor, and retrieved his own mask. It was a 19<sup>th</sup> century gasmask, complete with bolted on eye pieces made of ruby. He holstered his pistol, his hidden knife, and carton of cigarettes. When he put on his helmet he turned to Boucher and saw his own reflection, and in that nonvisible gaze from Rembrandt to Boucher, he no longer saw his friend. The Mirror-Man had arrived.

They left the car and appeared from the darkness, hands in their pockets. They stepped into the neon perimeter of the *Will o' Wisp*, the reflection of the sign distorting on Boucher's helmet. Rembrandt noticed the little Djinn leaning over the *P* holding a martini and stroking a cartoonish beard. He wore a funny hat and the bottom half of his body disappeared into the stem of the *P* where upon closer inspection has a tiny valve so that it functioned a bottle.

Rembrandt nudged Boucher. “A little on the nose, don't you think?”

“I would have chosen another letter.”

“Let's go find this genie.”

The music exploded from the seams of the building, bursting from the door as its only escape. A beautiful and surprisingly well-placed saxophone interjection cut through the electric pandemonium of the sound like a safety raft of calm. They walked along the queue, listening to the whining voices of those who had chosen on their own volition to wait in the rain. Hell, Rembrandt thought, in another life he might be tempted to do so too. The *Will o' Wisp* is a popular club in the city, further accentuated by the fact that it emulates a masked ball every night. Even better, you can keep the masks as a token!

They walked to the bouncer, who stood a foot taller than them. They ignored the cries of the people in front as they cut in line, with Boucher waving them away as if they were gnats. The bouncer asked for IDs and they reached into the breast pockets of their coats and pulled out their card. Rembrandt feared that he may have accidentally mixed it up with his local pharmacy rewards card, but when he saw the bouncer's expression tighten and then relax, he knew he had brought the right one.

The cards were issued from the Academy and to a casual observer they were blank, as white as an Arctic expanse. They were grafted microscopically with indents akin to a QR code. These semi-invisible etchings, based on Egyptian hieroglyphics of ancient shamans, psychologically pressure point the viewer on a subconscious, subliminal level. The bouncer is looking for an VIP identification, and within this blank picture, like a viewer looking at abstract art, the burly man unconsciously orients himself to see what his mind is already set up to see, tapping into a brickwork of stimuli that he had no idea was being set. The cards also work for

machines, which Rembrandt was unsure how, and for certain rewards programs at select department stores, which Rembrandt was quite grateful.

The bouncer ushered them in. They passed the two buxom ladies who offered them lacy masks. Boucher dismissed them and pointed to his own reflective helmet and Rembrandt's gas mask. They straightened their ties and entered the mouth of the neon bathed *Will o' Wisp*.

The interior of the club unfolded like a Chinese fortune teller. Women in sequin outfits danced from hangings platforms designed to look like clouds. Lofts crossed with balconies, giving a kaleidoscopic hue to the glass ceiling, unobscured by the neighboring buildings. The floor flashed in neon, oscillating between red and blue to the heavy beat of the baseline that loomed over the music like a royal on a throne. Long legs supported swinging hips across the dancefloor, poising the women into teacup positions with cocktails on a silver platter adorned with rubies. Spotlights flashed onto the sweating and swaying crowd, temporarily masking the DJ in flashes of primordial light the color of candied ribbons. Incense occupied the empty spaces between bodies like a lurking ghost.

Rembrandt and Boucher passed a couple wearing vanity masks and another group of girls wearing porcelain over their eyes.

"P.G. does it better," Rembrandt said.

Boucher said, "Porcelain Girl doesn't have as big knockers."

They made their way along the sides of the *Will o' Wisp*, careful not to knock into a cocktail server or a patron unleashed by the music. The floor became slightly stickier as they descended into the pit, which was an orgiastic collective of swaying bodies and twisted limbs, a tangled beast, the multi-headed serpent.

They rounded the dance floor and found the bar. They pushed themselves between two young men, business types, from Rembrandt's perception, who slaved at a company and exploded their wallets on the weekend like a teenager withholding masturbation. One wore a fox mask and the other a wolf mask.

Boucher tapped on the shoulder of the fox. "Pardon me, we've got to sit there."

"We'll be done in fifteen minutes, mate," The fox said.

"We want to sit there now."

The fox curved his head, silently conferred with Wolf. "Too bad. There are other seats."

Rembrandt thought that if the masks could snarl, they would be doing so. He saw jaws clench tight underneath both the Fox and Wolf's masks. He put a hand on the Wolf's shoulder and leaned the nozzle of his mask close. He withdrew a hand from his pocket and wiggled his fingers together, although this was for flare, and revealed a nickel that he found on the sidewalk not four hours ago.

“I won’t call this a bribe, Mr. Wolf, but my friend and I had some very good news and would like to celebrate. I won’t go too much into it, but we’ve come into some wealth. Here, as a token of gratitude.”

The wolf already had his hand out. Rembrandt dropped the nickel into his palm.

He continued, “It doesn’t take a genius to recognize what you have in your hand. Use this to buy your friends and perhaps a couple of girls some drinks. A trade for a trade. Unfortunately, you’ll have to find some girls first, but that can’t be too hard.”

The wolf licked at his lips. He stared at the coin then slammed it into his pocket. The wolf and fox left the stools, and when Rembrandt and Boucher occupied them, they were still warm.

“I had it handled,” Boucher said, his face now prisms of the multicolored bottles on the bar.

“Intimidation is for later,” Rembrandt said.

“Whatever. What did you do to convince him to leave with just a nickel?”

Rembrandt swung on the stool, watched the men join the writhing beast in the middle of the pit. Flashes of light brought them in and out of existence, ushered by the DJ who commanded the crowd like a snake charmer.

“I engraved the quarter with a druidic symbol. *As Above So Below.*”

“A tree? You’ve got silly tricks, Rembrandt.”

“Don’t confuse silly with clever, Mirror-man. The symbol is a tree, yes, but the unconscious meaning of the term “As Above So Below” is the encompassing nature of duality”

“I don’t follow.” A wide hiped woman was gyrating on his reflective helmet.

“I gave him a nickel, which is money. His mind did not track that it was a nickel, but that it was money. Of course, one could say money isn’t everything, but our friends Mr. Wolf and Mr. Fox probably think money is *everything*. As above, so below. I tapped into it. They saw money and the rest of the associations took over. I made Mr. Wolf think he held the world in his hands.”

“So, for them, is it as above, or so below?”

Rembrandt shrugged. “I don’t know. It’s a nickel.”

Boucher scoffed. It was rare that Boucher showed any interest to Rembrandt’s tricks, and although Rembrandt should be respectful to Boucher’s rare display of humbled ignorance, he could not help but capitalize on this rare powershift.

Boucher changed the subjects. “Our genie is here. You think it’s the DJ?”

“Maybe. The letters fit.”

They spun around and faced the bar. The bartender arrived. He wore a silken vest and a cherrywood mask fashioned like a totem. He asked what they would like to drink. Rembrandt opened his mouth to order a Shirley Temple but Boucher stopped him. He gazed at the bottles along the lighted bar, glittering under miniature spotlights: ruby, sapphire, quartz.

Boucher pointed to one of the bottles on the top shelf. "I want that one."

The bartender stopped drying his glass and flung the rag over his shoulder. He stepped up on the latter and retrieved the bottle, displaying an old cognac that Rembrandt was sure to have been passed down by so many generations as to be forgotten. He poured a glass, straight, and slid the glass over to Boucher.

Rembrandt chuckled. "Genies live in bottles, no?"

Boucher lifted his visor, revealing a stubbled chin and wormy lips. He took the glass back and swallowed the drink, even though it was not a shot. "Genies are flaunters. If I were a genie, I'd want the most gorgeous bottle and the most expensive, so no one opens it. And if a bottle opens and nothing comes out, well, we know where he lives."

Rembrandt flashed Boucher a look from the side of his mask. A woman cast in ruby swung pendulum hips in the distorted reflection. "You plan on drinking yourself to victory, Mirror-man?"

"One might consider that drink an offering," Boucher said. He waved down the bartender. "What else do you have? The oldest bottle here."

The bartender turned and gazed upon the wall. Bottles glistened against the tiles like precious stones, shaking slightly to match the heavy base line from the dance floor. He shouted that they have three bottles, all highly expensive. He directed their attention to a scotch from directly from Scotland, a Mezcal from Mexico, and a Chhaang from India."

"Oh, Mirrorman, from India," Rembrandt said, surprised that Boucher's idea was feasible.

"All unopened?" Boucher asked.

"All unopened," the bartender confirmed, "although from what I hear they can't be very good. You're better off finding something better for cheaper."

Rembrandt returned his hands to his pockets. He leaned forward, so that the totem mask of the bartender gazed back. "And who told you that?"

"The owner," the bartender said. He picked up a bottle of mid-tier vodka. "This is good, from Iceland."

"No elves today," Boucher growled under his breath. Rembrandt kicked him and he composed himself, "How much is a glass?"

The bartender hopped from one foot to the next. He started to make an old fashioned, for seemingly no one. Rembrandt knew this was to keep his hands busy. "We've been told, because

the bottles are so old, that you're going to have to buy the whole bottle if we are going to open it. They are really expensive."

"That's fine. How much is the bottle?"

The bartender tilted his head. "Are you sure, sir? Here, a complimentary drink."

Boucher tapped gloved fingers on the bar. The reverb from the electronic swing music bounced against his blazer. "We'd like to buy all those bottles."

"I would need to get manager approval," the bartender said.

Rembrandt leaned back. "We'd really wish you allow us to purchase those bottles without a fuss. We are good for it." He retrieved three more coins, quarters this time, each engraved with the druidic markings. He slid them across the bar top. He repeated. "We are good for it."

The bartender paused, looked around, and pocketed the coins. Although this was of no consequence, Rembrandt was glad to see his faith in humanity had not been restored. He did not know what sum the bartender had seen in those coins, but it was enough to make him squirrel them away like nuts.

The bartender deflated and opened the whisky. He took two glasses.

Boucher raised a hand. "Oh no, not that one. Not yet."

The bartender thumbed the cap and levitated the tilted bottle over the glasses. "No? Every second you open the bottle it depreciates in value. Let's spend time with this one first."

"No," Boucher said. "The mezcal first, por favor."

The bartender hesitated before relenting and putting the cap back on. He twisted, retrieved the bottle, and opened it again. Just as he was going to pour, Boucher stopped him again. He pointed to the Chhaang.

The bartender deflated, aware that he had no choice but to do as told. He took the Chaang, which was in Rembrandt's opinion the most beautiful of the bottles and held it up to the flashing neon lights as if contemplating to drop it.

"Go on," Rembrandt said, watching the bartender struggle.

The bartender opened the bottle, lowered his hands to the glasses, and tilted. Nothing came out of the neck. He tilted even more, comically angling the Chhaang until it was directly upside down. Not a drop. Could have been dust.

The bartender stammered. "My apologies, it appears this bottle *has* been purchased. I'm afraid I'll have to-

"Meet us outside," Boucher said, leaning over the bar and drawing close to the totem mask.

“Pardon.”

Boucher opened his blazer, revealing a pistol holstered to the inside of the fabric. “Don’t make a scene, genie. We’ve been tagging you for a while now. Your kind surely has some lovers that you are favorable for. If you don’t do this the easy way, then the club will go down and this neon empire of yours will be lost.”

“By the way,” Rembrandt said, “you’re cover is a bit...on the nose. The genie aesthetic is obvious. High marks to hiding in plain sight, though. My only advice, if there is a next time, is that you could have run when you had the chance.”

The bartender froze and swore in a tongue that neither Rembrandt nor Boucher was familiar with. He put down his rag, emboldened himself as if ready to take a stand. He stared at them both from behind his wooden mask in a way that he was looking down at them. Then his gaze shifted over their shoulders and to the club, to the banisters, the women gyrating on clouds, the candy-coating of neon. He swore again and followed Rembrandt and Boucher outside.

The alley was humid and damp, fresh from rainfall. The ruby illumination of the *Will o’ Wisp* peaked from the end of the avenue, but it was so far removed that it served only as a beacon to freedom. Rembrandt and Boucher pushed the bartender from the landing and into a puddle. The music muted into rhythmic bass lines as Boucher kicked the door shut with his heel. The bartender scrambled to his feet, ignoring the gravel stuck into his hands. He kept to the wall as Rembrandt drew his pistol and aimed the ironsights at his brows.

He inspected the totem mask. “Not bad. Looks like something we would wear, huh, Mirror-man?”

“I’ve seen better,” he said, crossing the length of the ally with a flapping of his blazer. He pinned the bartender to the wall.

“I’ve seen worse, too,” he said, thinking specifically of Kaleidoscope. Where Kaleidoscope’s mask waned in its effectiveness for stealth, it was efficient for kids with epilepsy.

Boucher placed a gloved hand on the edges of the bartender’s façade. “Don’t try to mesmerize me with your *junoon kee chakaachaundh*, genie. You will only see yourself, like Narcissus.”

“Wrong mission, Mirror-man.”

Boucher tore the totem mask from the bartender. He tossed the lifeless thing into a puddle at their feet. The bartender revealed himself to be a sniveling man with a long face, tears glistening in beady eyes, drools puffing from the corners of trembling lips. Boucher inspected him.

“You’ve got no horns underneath the mask, genie, nor is your beard the common cut. Clever disguise behind the mask. But where is the flame in your eyes?”

Rembrandt knew what he was talking about. Genies, for all their tricks and illusions, both optical and mental, give their ethereal form away like a backwards held card in a poker game. A

permanent fixture, the irises of genies are lit with small flames, akin to a meager candlelight, an emblem of their prodigy from the eternal fire beast Ifrit.

The bartender sniffled. He trembled against the wall. "I don't know."

Boucher twisted his wrist, causing the bartender to wince. Rembrandt cocked his pistol. "We have you dead to rights, genie. Stop playing your games."

The bartender shook his head. "Oh please, please don't kill me. He didn't say this was going to happen."

Boucher was preparing a fist into the bartender's sweaty chin, but at this he froze. "He?"

Rembrandt said, "Pardon?"

The bartender squirmed, started to hyper-ventilate. "He never said that I would be attacked. Please. I have a wife and kids."

Rembrandt put away his pistol. He put a hand on Boucher's shoulder. He said, "Let him down."

"It could be another trick."

Rembrandt looked the squirming man up and down. Mud and shit plastered the kneecaps of his dress pants where Boucher had kicked him into the alley. Tears streamed down his cheek, one side glistening ruby from the neon gloss to their right.

Boucher dropped him. The bartender folded onto himself. "Explain yourself."

The bartender wiped his mouth. "I met him the other night, at this club. He was bartending and I had a couple drinks. We got to talking. All I wanted was a week away from my boring life, my nagging wife, my rotten kids..."

"Move this along," Rembrandt said, "don't make us feel bad for you."

The man continued, "He joked he was a genie and asked what I wanted most. I wanted to be apart of this electricity, I said, meaning the club. I wanted to dance and get plastered and not care about money and responsibility. I wanted to fuck. Jokingly he offered to switch places and jokingly I accepted. I woke up the next morning in a hotel room with the outfit he was wearing. I walked into the club to find him and he was gone. Everyone just saw me as the bartender. And I was good at it, and the money wasn't as good as I could make at the office, but it was *mine* and the booze was *free* and the women...oh god, Nancy, oh Nancy what has happened to me?" He paused, picked his bloodied face from the cradle of his hands. "Are you going to kill me?"

Boucher and Rembrandt looked at one another. After a couple seconds, Rembrandt said, "Unfortunately for you, we are not. We don't want to waste a bullet, and if you were as easy to squash as a bug we would do so, but we're bigger than that, so the weight of your stupid life will have to crush you down in increments."

"Unless," Boucher added, "you tell us what the genie looks like. Is he here?"

The man nodded. “Yes.”

“Tell us.”

They reentered the *Will o' Wisp*. Swaying hips atop exposed thighs rubbed against erect penises in tight jeans. Lips locked on the backs of necks; breasts pressed against breast. The dancers on the clouds were gyrating as if performing a rite, sweating from the headlights flashing ruby, sapphire, and emerald in random patterns. The DJ bounced on the stage.

“Shall we, Mirror-man?” Rembrandt said, stopping at the foot of the stairs leading to the VIP lounge.

“We shall, Rembrandt.”

Boucher led the way. It was not time for talking anymore. They had been tricked, and even though the experience was not pleasant, Rembrandt applauded their target for the ingenuity. Boucher took this sleight personally, as he always does. They argued in the car just last week that his anger issues would eventually get the better of him, and that their marks are typically the kind to evoke anger through their clever tricks and tactics of diversion. Wendigos can displace their screams, which was common knowledge, but they could also replicate human voices, which was not common knowledge. Gorgons can shed skin that petrifies into obstacles to trip over, which was as gross as it was irritating.

They slipped past security with their rune-engraved cards. Before Rembrandt could warn Boucher on his etiquette, he had already unleashed a kick into the door, bursting it from its hinges, and entered the thick humidity of smoke incense.

The lounge was cast in material the color of blood. Gold beads hung from the sides. A flurry of scantily clad women, full breasted and mostly topless, scattered about in a whirlwind of shirt skirts and jewels as the shards of the door landed onto the carpet. Two ogres of security guards advanced on Boucher and Rembrandt but fell like discarded laundry after they retracted the knives hidden underneath their sleeves. Their blood matched the carpet, which was already slightly squishy from the spilled tequila and vodka.

They found a bare-chested man wearing a fez hat sitting arms spread along the couch. He held a cigar in one hand and a cocktail in the other. Topless women cowered in the corner of the room, but his confidence was pungent enough to give Boucher and even Rembrandt tunnel vision. His skin was cast in bronze, and his teeth were the color of an elephant's tusk. Dark shades masked his eyes.

“Gigs up,” Rembrandt said, ignoring the splotches of blood on his blazer and pulling out the pistol, “clever ruse though. Take your glasses off. Let us see the fire.”

Boucher sighed, repeating the same threat that they had given to the bartender, although Rembrandt noticed a significant decrease of moxie on this second venture.

The genie cocked his head, revealing shining earrings. He flexed his pectorals, swallowed the last of his drink. The cigar that he cradled in his right hand had gone out in the fury of their

entrance, and with that same hand the genie took off his glasses and held the smoldering cigar in front of his face. He started at it with eyes housing a small fire, flickering in the irises like a contained lantern. The cigar reignited and he returned it to his lips. He stared at them from across the room, legs still crossed, unified with the lounge décor and the electronic music blurring from underneath the balcony.

“Stand,” Boucher said.

The genie stood, his arms outstretched to illustrate that he had no plans to run or attack. He walked lightly over the slumped bodies of the bouncers. The neon lights danced on his caramel-colored skin. He walked to the wall as directed, making slow motions to puff at the last of his cigar and extinguish the fire on his forearm.

Rembrandt said, “We’ve been searching for you for a couple weeks. Very impressive. Unfortunately, your kind is not welcome here.”

The genie smiled. “I knew you would be coming.”

Rembrandt scoffed. “Obviously.”

Boucher pulled out a hunter’s knife from a holster hidden on his back. It was thick and crusty with dried blood. “We need your life force, genie. If you made this easy for us, we would have taken it and sent you back to the bottle with the others. You could have had an easy imprisonment.”

Rembrandt shrugged, “But due to your tricks, I’m afraid that you’ve impressed us enough to consider you a larger threat. We are authorized to kill such threats.”

The genie held fast. Ignited eyes stared back at him from the Boucher’s reflective visor and Rembrandt’s own ruby lens.

Boucher added, “My partner here has a special bullet, infused with all sorts of charms and notches. We’ve done our homework. Normal bullets won’t kill you.” At this Boucher examined the blade, “But truth be told, you’ve pissed us off enough that we think you’ve earned a more...interesting execution.”

The genie cracked a smile. It was wolfish, hungry, a tombstone row of teeth. It was the type of smile that makes you believe in wishes. “I’m not the genie.”

“Your eyes, man,” Rembrandt sighed, “enough of the tricks Boucher. You’ll have to do your butchering somewhere else.”

Rembrandt pulled the trigger. The bullet zoomed across the floor and into the genie. The soundwave was enough to rattle the curtains but not powerful enough to disturb the orgiastic dance below.

The genie fell into the wall, slumping down in a paint brush of gore.

Boucher closed the distance and inspected the body. The genie’s chest rose and descended slowly, as if he was sleeping. He pulled out swab, stroked it over the bullet wound,

and held it close to this reflective visor. One could not see it from the outside, but the inside of Mirror-man's helmet had the capacity to run several calculations as well as an entire database on constellations. Mirror-man wore a supercomputer.

"Dammit," he said, "he's right. He's not the genie."

Rembrandt said, "Looks like a genie. Walks like a genie. Attitude like a genie."

"Not a genie," Boucher said.

"Not a genie," the genie smiled, "a man. A very lucky man."

Boucher tossed the swab over his shoulder and took the dying anomaly by the neck. At once the bronze casted man took on a shriveled quality, like beef jerky. His eyes had smoldered into sad, sunken gazes. Perfect teeth obtained sudden necrosis, hidden under a newly clefted lip torn asunder from amphetamines. The fez hat slumped across brows and greasy matted hair.

"This freaking genie," Rembrandt said. He holstered his pistol.

The imposter smiled, briefly shocked at his own reflection in Boucher's visor. Boucher instructed him to talk.

"The wish-giver found me, he did. Found me in an alley, cold and hungry. Said he could give me one week of power and all I had to do was say yes."

"He tricked you," Rembrandt said, surprised at how bad he felt.

The man croaked. "No. I was dying anyway. I ate and slept and fucked enough in this last week that it was worth it."

Rembrandt kicked a stool. "What is this, Mirror-man, invasion of the goddamn body snatchers? This djinn is playing us like cards. All of us. Everyone in this room."

"Where did he go?" Boucher said.

The man's grip loosened on Boucher's blazer. "We switched places, him and I. The next morning, he looked like me and I looked like him. After he granted my wish, he asked me if I could grant his."

"What was the wish?" Boucher said.

The man said, "To be like me. The idiot! He's living like a scab in the streets, and I get to die a genie! Ha!"

Boucher release his grip and the man fell, exhaling his final breath. They walked to the window, which was casted in a neon red from the *Will o' Wisp* sign adjacent to it. They looked down the streets full of passers-by, watching the electric energy of a Saturday night weave its sexual tension through the streets, underneath the looming buildings, some of which still held rectangular splotches of yellow underneath the stars.

Rembrandt said, "We got got. The Academy is going to have a field day."

Boucher swore under his breath. He picked up the fallen fez hat and crushed it in his palm, wishing that it were glass so it would break. He walked over the fallen body of the imposter and the security guard, up righted a dropped bottle of tequila, and poured a drink for Rembrandt and himself.

Rembrandt sighed, deflated, and accepted the drink, feeling the burn of trickery as they looked over the endless, sprawling city with all its hidden doors and twisting turns.