

Officer Phil

"So I have 15 pages left in the book, but I have to know, does Bea show up in the later books?"

"What the fuck, how did you stop reading a book 15 pages before the end?"

"I was tired, I don't know. But tell me about Bea, but keep the spoilers to a minimum."

"Yes she does. I cannot believe you didn't just finish the book last night, but you do you, Phil."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm glad to hear Bea shows up. I have to figure out how to get the next book, normally officer Santana lends me a copy but she's dealing with some stuff."

"I usually go to the library."

Phil comically slaps a fin against his forehead.

"Why didn't I think of that – thanks for the tip! Anyways, the judge wanted to say we will start at 10am tomorrow. There is some lawyer stuff that came up that they need to discuss in the morning. Also I was reflecting this morning and you all are my favorite jury. You guys are funny, thoughtful, prompt, and just overall vibes. While I was thinking, I remembered I once had a juror who snuck in booze and got very drunk during the proceedings. You would not believe the fury this woman had when we held her in contempt of court! I honestly felt bad for her, it seemed like the kind of drinking that you do out of obligation and not out of fun. I really hope she's okay... Well anyways, see you tomorrow folks!"

"Hey Phil, one question before we go, I see you sometimes playing with the spiral cable that connects to the handheld speaker on your chest. Is the bottom of the cable connected to anything?"

"Can I let you all in on a little secret? The port for the wire is busted on my walkie, and I'm too scared to tell my boss cause there have been some budget cuts lately and I don't want to say anything. I think it makes me look more official so yeah it's just for the look at this point. Have a good evening everyone and see you tomorrow morning!"

As if a school bell went off, the jurors race to grab their belongings, not pushing, but not anything close to orderly, Phil wishing he had an anemometer to put a measurement to the chaos. After the last juror leaves the deliberation room, Phil fumbles through the settings in his netpad to lock the door, and heads down stairs to the security office. Stepping inside, Phil immediately checks the security monitors to see the jurors leave the courthouse. What a beautiful galaxy we live in he reflects on: what a strange eclectic intersection of so many species, professions, socio-economic backgrounds, and more. A deep sense of pride fills his gills as he knows that his role in the judicial process is important and allows justice to prevail.

One, two, three breaths. Phil slowly assesses and moves each muscle in his body. Fins above the head, stretch to the left, to the right, back, forward, and one final stretch to the ceiling. A satisfying pop of the vertebrae giving him the cooling release he was looking for. And now he's off. Off from work. Off towards his daughter's race.

Coming out of the office strong, Phil takes long strides through the hallway, weaving past colleagues as they slowly meander to the exit. He mounts the handrail, gaining pace, leaning into the corners, picking up further

and further speed. With learned elegance, he dismounts the rail into a forward roll, transferring the momentum into his speed walking. But wait, here comes officer Storm, his on-and-off again rival.

The two quickly size each other up, and Storm, seeing an opportunity pushes to the outside of the hallway, setting himself up for the straightaway around the next corner. Phil drops back momentarily, knowing that at this hour, the odds of people crowding the hallway are large. Turning the corner, a phalanx of law students crowds the hallway, Storm gently pushing and prodding to break through. Phil releases some stored water on his scales, making himself slippery in the process, and swims through the reef of law students. And it's Phil by a nose! Storm huffing extends a hand out, the rivals acknowledging the end of this battle but not the end of the war.

Outside the courthouse, Phil takes a deep breath through his gills, tasting the tiny bits of saliva, sweat, etc that the air recyclers don't catch – it's weird that home has a particular flavor that's kind of kinky he thinks. The pleasant rays of light from Saavgh slightly toasting his scales. Checking the time on his netpad and doing mathematical gymnastics in his head, Phil decides he can get fermented tofu sausage on a roll, a favorite of his.

Only a few minutes away from the courthouse doors, Phil finds his favorite vendor, Jmbob Jim. Every time Phil approaches the cart, his brain twitches a bit when he looks for the i in the first name but doesn't find it till the last name, the sign perpetually looking like someone stole a letter. Jmbob with his purple skin and six arms was a sight to behold. Wearing a hunting vest with sauce bottles, spices, and various forms of grease, he will sling sausages faster than your netpad can pay for them.

"Fresh off the recycler and 90% real soy byproduct, you won't believe the prices! Hey you sir, you look like you could be eating sausage right now... Phil! You look skinny! Get over here and let me give you one of my experimental sausages, 5% more filler but 10% more fun™. I'm not kidding about that trademark Phil, I paid real money for that. My friend said I could make real money from it."

"Is it 15% more money?"

"Phil, you think I would make my favorite customer pay extra money for an experiment?"

"No offense, but you're a real affarista. I've seen you charge old ladies extra for using UBI."

"Hey. Hey. You think the payouts for UBI happen everyday, Phil? I have to hedge against those bastards, always freezing payments to stop the budget crisis. But for you today, Phil has a special price. Free for two."

"You know I can't do that, I will tip you what I owe."

"Ahh friend, that is what we call brotherly love. You get my free sausages and I get free from tax. It's just an explosion of joy."

"Maybe ease it on the sexual innuendos Jmbob, you'll stop having my erect-attention."

"Oh Phil, I see what you did there. Clever, clever"

All the while during the conversation, Jmbob was crafting the two sausages simultaneously, toasting the buns, grilling and saucing the dogs. By the time the last syllable of "er" is uttered from his mouth, he finishes wrapping the sausages and hands them over to Phil. The aroma immediately hits him and he can't wait. He

opens the wrapping, surveys the beautiful interplay between the grilled tofu, glistening brown sauce, chunks of fillerfun™, all on a piece of bread so basic its formula hasn't changed in thousands of years. Phil takes his first bite, and the fillerfun™ immediately starts bouncing around his mouth. As the rest of the sausage and roll enter as his lips close, the fillerfun™ bounces through them both, shredding the sausage and roll into a slurry of fermented grain soaked in brown. Overcome by joy? Fear? Confusion? Horniness? Phil sizes up Jmbob.

"Jmbob, I can't give my daughter this sausage, it's too spicy."

"Oh friend, experiment sausage just for you. I packed her favorite. Wish her luck on the race for me, I wish I could be there but most of these sausages won't sell themselves."

"Will do. Let me know when your nonna is making her ragu soon, okay? I want to learn how to make it. Emily says she's learning to cook at school and I think a nice Sunday gravy would help her think of home you know?"

"I think this, Sunday, friend. Sunday, yes. Meet at my place bright and early and we can walk over together."

"Ciao borchia."

With the remaining sausage in fin and his tummy full, Phil saunters to the tube station. He admires the absurdity of the entrance, underneath the first legislative building in the ring, the hustle and bustle of the tube station in stark contrast with the morose facade that stands for bureaucracy everywhere. He maneuvers past tourists as they linger near the entrance, Phil muttering under his breath the very lines the tour guide is saying at that moment.

"... galactic law 2B8C-39ZQ was first enacted in the very building behind us, banning legislators from purchasing stocks during their first month in office. Believe it or not, it's the first law of its kind to not be repealed immediately by lawmakers. However ..."

Phil chuckles as he remembers the first lawmaker that came through his courtroom being prosecuted by that law. It turns out that time dilation effects from gravity were unaccounted for in the law and that happens to be quite the loop hole. Well, it's not his job to administer the law, well I guess it sort of is but it feels different.

Phil takes the lift down to his platform, holding the sausage in his fin enjoying the warmth it provides on this cold day. As if it is a universal law of the universe, the temperature regulator of the platform pumps cold air during this cold winter day and if it was summer, hot humid air, somehow only in spring and fall when an act of god makes it just right. A small shiver works its way down Phil's spine as he waits on the platform.

"Hi my name is Xelxelbra and I won the kids' contest to announce announce things for the tube station. My mom said I couldn't say duck on air so I had to say it. Also if anyone has seen teddy, I lost him yesterday. Teddy, if you're listening, come home. Oh yeah, announce-ments. The lifter for East Crossing station is sideways or something, I don't know but it sounds bad. And the galactic federation of football universe tournament is coming to the ring soon, so yeah, plan for fans drinking b-e-e-r-s and being rowdy. And teddy, I know what you did and I forgive you. Love you mom, Xel out."

"Please step back from the platform edge, your tube is arriving."

Phil waits for the exiting passengers to clear past before he steps onto the tube. Finding a seat directly across from two teens playing the latest holographic fighting game, Phil sits back and zones out while watching the inunnguaq teen crush his friend into gravel in the game. Before he knows it he is at his station and he steps off.

It's a short walk from the station exit to the track facility. Brushed metal beams set at a variety of angles create the artistic entrance to the stadium, the familiar subtle blue hues of the scanning devices checking him for weapons. Through the gates, he walks the concourse counter clockwise, observing the various parents, friends, and other spectators as they purchase overpriced concessions that don't have the same uniqueness of flavor that Jmbob's sausages have.

Finding gate 117, Phil enters and makes his way over to his usual seat, just to the right of the starting line. Waving to a few people he knows, he sits down on the seat sculpted for the average butt, a butt that only exists in statistics but not real life. Settled in, he scans the runners for Emily and spots her doing leg lifts with a teammate. Not wanting to distract her from her warmups, Phil reflects on the importance of this race.

If she finishes in the top 3, then she automatically secures a position on the varsity team. A top 6 finish and she is eligible for another qualifying race next week. Below that and she will be placed in the junior varsity team. He tries to remember what Emily said about the scholarship money for varsity players, something about a one for one match on tuition money? Phil shrugs as it doesn't matter in the end, if he needs to work overtime to ensure she gets the education she needs so be it. His daughter, a future college graduate. Not just a future graduate, a college athlete with a real chance at qualifying for the Olympics next cycle. Lost in his daydreams, he doesn't even realize that Emily starts walking towards him and hops over the wall.

"... Dad. Dad. Hellooooooooo, dad. Ring to dad, are you there?"

"This is ground control speaking, dad is ready for liftoff."

With the utterance of his favorite dad joke, Phil rushes over to his daughter and tries to launch her into the air. The kilos of muscle she has put on the past few years combined with the increased gravity of the moons on the far side of the planet pulling on him just a few more micro g's is enough to make him stop before her feet left the ground. Releasing his muscles a bit, he pulls her into a tight hug.

"Is that a sausage from Uncle Jim I smell?"

"Yeah I got you one for after the meet."

"Usual?"

"Usual."

Emily tilts her head in response, visibly shifting gears into the headspace for the race.

"Good luck fingerlin."

"Dad, I'm nearly 18, I'm not a fingerling anymore. Stop embarrassing me."

Emily trots off and starts getting into position, putting her feet onto the starting blocks. Phil settles in for the race.

"Welcome everyone to trackside at Asteroid Mining Incorporated Arena, where drilling meets explosive performances. Let's get ready for the opening bout in the Women's Intercollegiate 100-meter dash!"

"Wrex, this is a special cohort of first year students. Word on the street is that we may even see a PR tonight from lane 5 – Emily Bianchi in the olive green top. She ran a blazing fast 10.77 in the preliminary heats, even with a slight crosswind from the air recyclers."

"That's right, Muhammad, but don't forget lanes 6 and 8, the twins from Convex College. The two of them are Diamagnens and the sisters usually try to trap people in between them for their passive magnetism to push them off balance."

"Explain to the viewers Wrex why that is legal."

"Well, Muhammad, in Commonwealth v. Diandrane the courts ruled you can't discriminate against species innate abilities during un-augmented sporting contests. Ever since then the whole spirit of the game has changed. Some say for the better, others the worst, but both say that the game has definitely become more interesting."

"Well I for one think it's for the worst Wrex, but hey I don't get paid to complain."

"Wait, you get paid?"

"Like I said Wrex, let's focus on the start of the race. In just a few moments, the official will fire the starting gun and the race will begin."

"How much are you getting paid..."

And with that the crack of the gun marks the start.

"Just like I said Wrex, Bianchi leaps off the starting blocks and away from the twins."

"You can't keep ignoring me, just tell me how much you're being paid."

"Wow the twins have closed the gap at the 40 meter mark, and now look, they have Bianchi in the middle!"

"Dude."

"What's this, Bianchi spits out water. Wait! That's ferromagnetic sand that's being pulled into the twin's faces!"

"..."

"NINETY METERS! BIANCHI SURGES AHEAD! ACROSS THE FINISH LINE. 10.7 FLAT, NEW PR FOR BIANCHI!"

Phil jumps to his feet and erupts into clapping and yelling. The rest of the crowd jumps in and the stadium is filled for a moment with sheer exuberance.

"WREX, WHAT A RACE! BIANCHI WITH THE PR! THE TWINS FINISHING IN EIGHTH AND NINTH PLACE. TOTAL UPSET!"

"Not cool dude."

Phil vaults over the wall and rushes over to Emily. Panting and stretching her fins as far as above her head as she can, she makes eye contact with her dad and immediately starts to cry.

"Did I..."

"Em you did! 10.7 flat! And I bet if you keep your head and torso lower a little longer out of the blocks you might shave off a little more time too."

"Dad, do you think mom was watching?"

"Unless she lost access to the net, you bet her head was glued to her netpad."

"Hey dad, can I have that sausage now."

Phil hands over the sausage and the two of them start walking to the locker room.