

***This one is shorter, because I'd already been working for the magazine for a while.***

## **Лотерея! Lotería! 名 奖券;彩票;抽签;运气;命运**

In capital cities from Yerevan, Armenia to Harare, Zimbabwe, Internet cafes have a new business: the American Green Card Lottery. The yearly lottery has been around for nearly a decade, allowing people from "under-represented" countries to have a shot at precious permanent immigrant status in the United States. About fifty-five thousand people a year hit the jackpot, out of almost ten million who apply. Until 2003, applications were filed on paper. Two years ago, the government began requiring all applications to be filed on the Internet. That reduces paperwork, with the added benefit of weighting the applicant pool toward the technically-savvy. (Applicants must have a high school education or have worked at least two years in careers as diverse as "potter," "gas compressor operator," or "stripper" – presumably of paint, not clothing.) In many countries, Internet cafes charge extra to help applicants fill out forms. Some lottery-form companies are upstanding, some are bogus. Their intense competition, played out on neon storefronts in cities all over the third-world, give a reality-TV feel to the business of emigration. Only a dozen countries, including China and Mexico, are excluded. Winners can bring spouses and children under 21, and everybody gets not only a green card but a free plane ticket to the U.S. It's one of the strategies for bringing enough legal, tax-paying workers to the United States to support aging baby boomers as they enter their Social Security years.

Judging from accounts posted on the Green Card Lottery website, the lucky winners often find the reality of settling into this country rocky, as they struggle to parse the mysterious world of apartment rentals, credit cards, and jobs. I think this would make a great process story about the uniquely roulette-wheel way Americans love fates to be decided. I'd start with one winner's situation at home, what he knew about the U.S. and how he learned it, how he applied (and how many times – in the early years, you could submit as many applications as you wanted, now it's one a year). I'd follow his application to the Kentucky Consular Center, where the program has been administered for the past four years, and show how the drawings are done. I'd show my subject opening the winner's letter: "Congratulations, you are among those randomly selected . . ." and the struggle to accomplish the second round of paperwork (one typo here means certain disqualification). Then: the goodbyes, the arrival and adjustment to their new home in the big PX. I'd check with the subject's family and friends back home to see how this all looks from

the other end -- whether, knowing what they know of how it's turned out, they're envious or dubious.