



Two Tribes

A GROTOCRACY STORY

Part I: Headache	3
Part II: Caution, Sharp Edges	12
Part III: The Hard Sell	27
Part IV: Firing Blind.....	33
Part V: Peacemaker	49
Part VI: Out With The Old	59
Epilogue.....	63

Part I: Headache

Blue gazed at the metal door in front of her. It seemed surprisingly small, an anomaly made more notable by the fact the door was attached to something as unrelentingly huge as Boris. Still, she knew she needed to go in. She had been told by Tinka to install a new neural cable into (squishy) Boris' skull, but that required going into the titan's body, something she'd always shied away from in the past. Not this time though. This time she wasn't going to back down, that's not orky at all. This time she was going to face her fear and head into the beast, like a true ork would.

"You dere, state your bizness." A voice emanated from a little speaker above the door.

"I'm Blue, I'm 'ere to install a new nyooral implant f'r Boris."

"A'right den, come in. But no muckin' about, we's got pro-see-jeer to follow."

The door opened slowly. Blue saw that it was at least a foot thick, and made of solid steel. When it was completely open, she gingerly stepped inside. As her eyes adjusted to the lack of light, she saw that the room was actually fairly small, and filled with chain-link fencing, forming a sort of cage around the doorway. The only illumination in the room was a spotlight, aimed in her direction.

"Now, it's my duty t' in-form ya that under secshun five seven of da- Hold on, you ain't no grot! Yer blue!"

"Oh, I didn't know ya knew me. Yeah, I'm Blue, I'm--"

"Shaddup ya git, I don't know ya, I'm sayin' yer Blue. Not Green. You ain't no Grot. Boys!"

"No, no, I am a grot. I am. Honest. I'm 'ere because Big Mek Tinka Zizzbitz told me to go an'--"

"Big Mek Tinka? Hm." Blue could hear the sound of rustling papers, followed by a sigh.

“Alright, in *dat* case, it’s my duty t’ in-form ya dat under secshun eight-two amend-mint bee, ya must report to da ‘Ed councillor right now. Gork be wit’ you. Boys.”

Two grots clad in rough squig leathers, both with a shield shaped badge, appeared in the cage next to her. Each one roughly grabbed an arm, and frog-marched Blue down a dingy, dripping corridor. Despite her attempt to stay fearless and steely, Blue was beginning to get a bit frightened by the situation she’d found herself in.

She followed the security-grots without question. Eventually, they reached another set of doors. One of the grots pushed a button, which pinged merrily. The doors slid open, and Blue was shoved into a small metal box, followed by the two grots. One of them pushed another button. The doors slid shut, and the box began to move.

* * *

“The Big Mek? Ok. And you’re absolutely sure about the blue skin? Ok, ok. No, far from it. I want an audience immediately.” The head councillor put down the phone, and leaned back in his chair. He smiled with satisfaction, and pressed a button on his desk.

“Cancel this morning’s appointments. I have somebody important to meet.”

* * *

Blue felt herself heading upwards in the metal box, pulled by some unknown force. This was a first for her, she’d never been in such a contraption before, and she’d be a lying git if she said she enjoyed it. After what seemed like an age, the box stopped moving and the doors slid open. Her senses were immediately assaulted from all directions. They were in a grimy marketplace, surrounded on all sides by massive pistons. Blue had never expected to see something like this. Outside, the orks pretty much krumped one another to get what they wanted. Here, grots were buying, selling, haggling, shouting, and there wasn’t any krumping anywhere.

“Getcha ‘ot squig tea ‘ere! Much cheaper dan da stuff from dat stall over dere!”

“Shootas, all shapes ‘nd sizes, one for every grot! Show yer’ Shootist identity card fer a discount!”

“Genuine hair squigs! Become a new grot! The newest fashun!”

“Choppas, choppas, choppas! I’ve got more chainswords dan sense! Get ‘em while they’re cheap! Dis stall is affiliated wit’ da Choppist’s Guild!”

Blue walked as if in a trance through the market, the grots steering her this way and that, finding their way through the maze-like stalls. There were so many things she would have loved to stop and look at, but it was pretty clear she wasn’t going to be allowed to stop for a browse. They eventually found another set of sliding doors, sending Blue crashing out of her daze. Not another bloody lifting box, she thought.

They all got in, and the steel coffin started moving upwards again. And kept moving. And moving. And moving. Blue began to wonder if they were ever going to reach where they were supposed to be going, or if the box was actually just wobbling around on the same spot. Knowing ork tech, it could well be. Eventually, though, the doors opened, onto yet another feast for the eyes.

The Council Chambers and Head Offices (named after their location, she later discovered) were a particularly special sight. Gone was the grime, the muck, and the rust. In its place was brushed metal and reflective surfaces, everything *gleamed*. There were even coloured bits of paper on the walls, which seemed to have been painted in a random, squiggly sort of way. Blue couldn’t work out why anyone would paint something that wasn’t armour or tech.

Grots were milling around the area, carrying stacks of paper, talking to each other, and generally acting as if Blue wasn’t there. She was surprised to see that they were all wearing what looked to be some sort of cloth armour, but with a flappy, hangy bit.

“They’re called “soots an’ ties” or summat,” muttered one of the security grots, “unorky if y’ ask me.”

The march continued through the shining hallways, another maze like the market, only this time with rather a different atmosphere. Blue found herself feeling uneasy. She could deal with potential krumpings, her speed and hidden armament could see to that, but there was something more here. Something

dangerous. Surely not. She looked around. Grots were smiling sweetly and exchanging pleasantries, laughing around a bubbling tank of water (clean water too, she noticed, where in Gork's name did they get that?), apologising when they bumped into one another and holding the door open for more grots to pass. Well, thought Blue, whatever it is that's wrong, it'll have to wait.

They had arrived at a stern looking door, with an even sterner looking grot sitting at a desk next to it. The grot was wearing a hair squig. It was shaped into a bun. Also of note were the spectacles perched on the end of a nose which had been liberally coated in light-green powder. He was wearing a blouse. He didn't look much like a he at all, Blue's subconscious mused, kindling some early memories of something known as "gender". The conscious part of Blue's brain wasn't quite so eloquent in its judgment. All that part could muster was the simple observation "that grot is proppa muckin' about". On the desk was a metal plaque shouting SECRETARY at anyone who bothered to read it, as well as a bit of paper covered in black and white squares and some writing. The grot was scribbling away at it with a stubby pencil.

"You'll have to come back later, the councillor's very busy", the secretary stated, in a way that suggested the councillor was not very busy at all, "On account of all the politics and stuff that he's doing. It's elekshun season don't ya know. Now bugger off. Oh, I don't suppose any of you know a word that's five letters long and means "to hideously maim"?"

"This 'ere's dat Blue grot wot sed somethin' about the Big Mek. Some Grot was s'pposed to tellyfone. I guess 'da bugger didn't," said the guard on the left, ignoring the question.

"Yer, and I ain't ev'n supposed to be workin' today what with it bein' my day off. So let's not muck about too much, eh?" said the guard on the right. Blue kept staring at the peculiar grot in front of her. It had painted on eyebrows. Blue had never seen eyebrows before.

"Fine. Give me a moment." The secretary sighed, and pushed a button on a little box in front of her (Blue had decided to refer to the Grot as "her", despite not really knowing why). She spoke into it. "There's some Blue git, er, gentlegrot here to see you."

"Ah yes, do send her in. I'm not busy," the box said, in a rather tinny way. The doors began to slowly open, automatically. Blue wondered why all the doors she

had opened before entering Boris took so much effort, when they were clearly capable of opening themselves.

“The councillor will see you now.” The secretary looked down again, at her piece of paper.

“Krump”, said Blue.

“What?” said the secretary.

“That word. It’s krump.”

“Ah. Of course,” the secretary huffed, “I hate when they use slang”.

Blue entered the councillors office, leaving the guards on the other side of the door. It was immaculate. Everything was clean, tidy, and well painted. It had more of those peculiar little squares on the wall, though this time instead of random wobbly lines and colours, it contained a picture of a Grots. They all were wearing a soot and tye, a brushed-back hair squig, and a smile. There were two dates under each picture, up until the last one. Blue briefly wondered why.

Even the room itself was shaped rather oddly, by the standards of regular ork construction. Instead of being roughly-geometric-with-spiky-bits, the walls were curved. They started from a point at the main door, widening out in the middle of the room, and ending in another point, this time with a window. The shape was very distinctive. If you weren’t feeling very imaginative, you could almost call it the-

“Welcome to the squashed-circle office!” An exquisitely dressed (even by human standards) Grot stood up from behind an imposing desk, with a beaming smile.

“I am the head councillor, and I am so pleased to make your acquaintance. I trust you have been treated well on your way up here? I do hope so. I’d hate to have a guest not feel welcome.” He walked over to Blue, grabbing her hand and shaking it animatedly. Blue was too surprised to retaliate.

“Oh, you don’t need to introduce yourself, I know all about you and where you came from. I’m sure everyone who is anyone has heard the story of the discovery of the Blue grot, and her rise to power through an ability to fix

anything that still has wires attached to it. Yes, it's really quite heartwarming. There's rather too much darkness in the world sometimes, it's nice for a shining beacon of hope to exist in amongst it all."

Blue didn't quite know how to respond.

"I'm sure you have your reasons to have visited the grotocra- *Titanopolis* today, and I'm sure you'd rather like to get on with whatever they are as soon as you can. I would of course, never even attempt to stop you from doing your no-doubt essential and valuable work. What is it, incidentally, you were wanting to do?"

Blue began to open her mouth. He started talking again.

"Actually, forget I even asked, that sort of information is not something I need to know. How rude of me. I'm very sorry. I wouldn't want to offend such an essential part of life in the Scraploota family. That would be quite wrong of me; I think I'd die of embarrassment."

Blue quietly wished he would.

"Anyway, I'm getting off track. You see, and I say this with a heavy heart, I am in trouble. I try to be the best Grot I can be, I work hard for my constituents, and spend countless hours toiling in the fields of interpersonal conflict. All in the interest of the greater good." Blue recognised this term, it conjured unpleasant memories.

"And still, apparently it isn't enough. I am afraid I need your help. Now, before you begin asking questions, let me explain things to you in a way that will allow us both to understand each other completely. I know you're very busy, so I'll be as brief as possible. When I'm finished, you can review the situation, and tell me plainly if you will aid me in my endeavours to make this titan a better place. I assure you that nothing bad will happen to you if you were to say no. Will that be alright?" He paused for breath. The first he seemed to have taken so far, Blue thought.

"Alright" she replied, simply.

“Wonderful! Well, I’ll get right onto explaining everything. Now, I’m sure you’ve noticed that Boris is not entirely symmetrical.” She hadn’t. She didn’t even know what the word meant.

“That is to say, although he has two arms, both arms are vastly different in what is attached to them. On the left arm, there are a large number of sharp instruments, designed to cleave, maim, and otherwise rend asunder anything in their swishing path. On the right arm, there are guns of all types, designed to obliterate, annihilate, and, er, blow up whatever they are aimed at. It is in this distinction that the problem has arisen. Due to a combination of the undereducated masses running wild, tribal mentalities, and the silly way that two nearly identical groups will find countless minor things to disagree on, we have a situation on our hands.

“The Choppists of the left arm, who believe in the sanctity of the bladed weapon, and the Shootists of the right arm, who believe in the righteousness of the gun, are at loggerheads, and I do believe that civil war could be just around the corner. In the interest of my political campaign for the coming election, I would rather like that not to happen. Oh, and for the sake of the wellbeing of the citizens, of course”. He smiled again. It was the same smile Blue had seen in the corridors she had walked through to get here. There was something wrong about that smile, she just couldn’t put her finger on what it was.

“Now, on to where you come in. I’ve heard a lot about your ability to fix things. Mostly technical in nature, true, but I feel your talents could be used in a different way. Not just to fix machines, but to fix minds. To make the two factions realise their differences are barely differences after all. I’m more than certain you’re capable of it. So what do you say? Yes, or no? Will you help the citizens of this Titan? Will you help Boris’ health? Will you help *me*?”

He beamed at her expectantly. Blue looked him straight in the eye.

“No.”

“Pardon me?”

“I said no. Bugger off an’ leave me alone. I’m ‘ere to fix Boris’s nyoorals, not muck about with a bunch of grots. Ya git.”

The head councillor didn’t react. His smile stayed plastered to his face.

“Oh, that’s a shame. We really were hoping your answer would be different. I’m sure your “Mr Squig” was hoping it would be different too.” He pressed a button. and a viewscreen switched on behind him. On it, Blue saw her beloved pet in a small cage, growling angrily and headbutting the sturdy bars. A bubbling vat of water was placed next to him, on a burner.

“I’m sure he’ll taste nice as squig tea, at least.”

Blue stared at the screen, her face a mix of surprise, anger, and fear.

“YOU- YOU BASTARD! YOU ZOGGIN’ BASTARD!” She pointed a finger at him, furiously.

“GIVE HIM BACK, OR I’LL- I’ll... Zog...”

She slumped, realising there was nothing she could do. If she tried to krump him it’d be the pot for Mr Squig. Even if she killed him, he’d have planned for someone else to do the deed in his absence. Blue collapsed into a chair, defeated. The chair was soft, and comfy. Everything about this place was wrong.

“So, are you willing to amend your previous decision? I’d hate for this meeting to end on a sour, or should I say, tea-flavoured note.” The smile was still there. There was malice behind it. He didn’t wait for a response.

“Good. Now, I think it’s time for you to meet the two sides. The left and the right. The “superpowers”, as they like to think of themselves. There will be two new guards waiting outside for you. They will take you to the left arm first.” He began to usher her out of the door.

“And please don’t think about running away. I’m sure Mr Squig would be very disappointed. Goodbye.”

* * *

On the long walk to the left arm, Blue realised what it was that had made her so uneasy in that set of gleaming rooms. It was the friendliness, or at least, the way everyone pretended to be friendly. Orks, and by extension grots, were constantly trying to get at each other. You could only get to the top by being the biggest and the strongest. That’s how things were done. Don’t like something some

other git did? Krump him. It's as simple as that. It was how society had always worked, and it led to shaky friendships based on the age old theory that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. That, and there were some gits you just weren't sure you could win against in a fight, so it would be better not to try just yet.

That was what was wrong with the council chambers. The reason Blue hadn't managed to find the source of her uneasiness was because it wasn't that there was something there. It was that there was something *missing*. The grots were being nice to each other not because they weren't sure they could win in a fight, or because they were planning a fight, but because they weren't ever going to fight. Fighting wasn't something they were about. Blue shuddered at the thought. They were *networking*. They had created a system where to get on top it was about making people like you, getting them to trust you, and hoping they recommend you to somewhere higher. Why get your hands dirty when you could get to the top by words alone?

True, the only way the head councillor had managed to convince her to work for him was through solid action, but she was of the old mentality. No, the *true* mentality, that the only way to get things is through force. In this case force against something Blue cared about, but force nonetheless. Words don't have power. They're just noises. Complicated, fancy breathing. Words are mucking about by their very nature.

Part II: Caution, Sharp Edges

They had arrived at the left arm. It had a gateway, and a neon sign. It was quite plain, barring a few knife shapes stencilled in different places. The sign read:

“THE LEFT ARM”

And slightly below it, in smaller print:

“Home of the Choppists”

Slightly below that, in even smaller print:

“Any Shootists will get chopped to bits”

Below that, in larger print again:

“BE SURE TO VISIT OUR KNIVES THROUGH THE AGES MUSEUM”

Following her smartly dressed Head Council guards, Blue walked through the gateway. They were met by a small, bored looking grot sitting in a booth, and a turnstile. The grot was covered from head to toe in scars, and had a hat made entirely of knives on his head. The blades were pointing upwards. He could be sure he wouldn't be bothered by pigeons.

“Welcome to the left arm let me ask you a few questions have you ever been or do you ever intend to be a member of the Shootists?” There was a script in front of him. He was clearly clever enough to read, but hadn't quite managed to get to grips with the nuances of punctuation.

“No?” Blue guessed. He crossed a box.

“Have you ever been in trouble with the Choppist's guild for any reason including theft assault or murder of a member?”

“No?” She guessed again. He crossed another box.

“Are you carrying a blade of at least three inches on your person at this moment in time?” She wasn’t sure how to answer this. He saw her confused expression, and continued, “Look, it sez ‘ere that you’z gotta have a blade or ya ain’t allowed in, okay? So just say yes”

“Yes,” she stated. This was not actually a lie; she had a four inch long flick knife in her trouser pocket.

“Wonderful thank you for your cooperation you may go in now have a nice day and be sure to try our famous squig knife cake a torn palate guaranteed or your money back.”

The guards showed a pass, and the turnstile became bathed in a green light. With that, Blue stepped through, and into the left arm.

* * *

Stabwound, leader of the Choppists, was having a bad day. He’d recently been told the maintenance on the main chainsword had been suspended on account of “too many deaths”, and until working conditions could be made safer no more work was to be done. The workers had formed a union. It was those zogging Shootists, he thought, they were always trying to mess with his plans. Every good Choppist knows you can’t trust a Shootist as far as you can throw their severed head, and this “yoonyun” bunch seemed like Shootists with signs instead of guns. All he’d wanted was to add a few more blades to the teeth of the chainsword, was that too much to ask? Not for the stupid gits to jump on board with the idea of workers’ rights, whatever they were.

He slumped down on his chair, and immediately jumped up again with a shout. It was made entirely of knives and swords, and a part of the seat had come loose and stabbed him right in the arse. For the third time that day, he wondered what had made him think a chair made of blades was a good idea.

Out of frustration, he reached for one of the many knives on the table next to him. There were two pictures on the wall, of two Grots. They both looked quite similar. That was because they were the joint leaders of the Shootists, Dak and Ka (or Ka and Dak, but don’t let them hear you say that). The pictures were covered in tiny nicks, the effect of many, many knives having been embedded there in the past. Stabwound threw the knife at the pictures. It went right between them both. This was a very bad day.

There was a knock at the door.

“Wutizzit,” grunted Stabwound. He wasn’t in the mood for visitors. He wasn’t really in the mood for anything. With the way his day was going so far if he even tried a minor stabbing he’d probably sever his own artery.

“It’s, er, some git wot wants to see you, boss”, said a voice behind the door.

“Wot for?” The voice behind the door paused. There was a muffled exchange of words.

“Sez they’re from the ‘ed council on offishul bizness, sah,” said the voice. The ‘ed council, Stabwound thought. Good. I’ll give ‘em a good stabbin’ in that case, for messin’ up my work. Nobody crosses old Stabwound and lives to tell the tale. At least, lives to tell the tale without a few holes in him first.

“Show ‘im in,” said Stabwound to the door. It opened, letting him get a good look at the visitor. Seeing who it was, Stabwound’s brain went through a few different thoughts in a very short period of time, which was unusual for him. The thoughts went as follows:

1. That git’s blue
2. That git’s not a politician
3. That git’s the Big Mek’s grot
4. Oh zog

Stabwound had not always been a Choppist. Well, he had, obviously. He’d always been a Choppist in his heart. But there was a time before he’d entered into Boris and risen through the Choppist ranks. Back then, he’d just been a regular grot who did what grots do, with a bit of an affinity for sharp things. Back then, he’d watched Blue. He was *terrified* of Blue. Stabwound was, if not brave, at least foolhardy enough not to care about his own wellbeing most of the time. The way he’d seen Blue deal with the grots who messed with her though, it just wasn’t right.

Whenever some git got in her face, she would krump them well beyond what was necessary. It was the sort of krumping that not only sends a message to the

victim, but everyone who sees it too. She never krumped them with her own hands (though he had seen a spanner used a few times), she would usually use some new weapon of coordinated destruction, which she'd then label "a success having passed its experimentation phase". When you've seen "Blue's patented inside out gun" used even once, the memory sticks with you forever. That was back when she was younger though, and less orky (he'd never even dream of calling her unorky though, the punishments dealt out to anyone who said that were too gruesome for words). Now, she was older, wiser, and orkier than ever. If those krumpings were what she came up with when she was less orky, Stabwound couldn't even imagine what they might be like now.

Actually, Stabwound was incorrect. Previous retributions had been seen by enough grots for them to understand that you don't mess with Blue, so now she was left alone most of the time. Even the stupidest grots aren't *that* stupid. Except, perhaps, for Stabwound.

* * *

Blue stood at the door of the Choppist boss's headquarters. There were two crossed swords mounted on the door. She had asked one of the guards if that was the Choppist's symbol, but he had simply replied "nah, they don't have a symbol, they just put blades on everything". She heard a muffled "Show 'im in", and entered.

The office was not spacious, but the sheer number of knives, swords, axes, spears, and anything else you can think of that's sharp that were on the walls made it seem suffocating. It wasn't even all weaponry, she noticed, some of it was cutlery. The scarred grot in front of her appeared to be going through some mental gymnastics. His face contorted from angry, to confused, to scared, to a sort of amiable nervousness.

"Er. Hullo. I'm Stabwound, Choppist leader. Er, do sit down." He gestured at a chair. It was made of breadknives. She decided not to.

"I'm 'ere from the 'ed council. Offishal business, an' all that. Only I couldn't give two zogs about the council, they've forced me to help 'em or else."

On the way from the gate to the Choppist headquarters (not very far, they were located in the upper shoulder), Blue had been formulating a plan. She reasoned that the way you fix a problem with most bits of tech is to work backwards, until

you find the source of the problem. Since this dispute was clearly relating to the two factions hating each other, the source of the problem would surely show itself if the two were to explain to each other exactly what they hated. When the problem was found, the solution could be formed. Simple. In theory.

“Well, wut does those ‘ed council gits want?” Stabwound tried to be as polite as he could. Politeness didn’t really come naturally to him.

“See, they got me tryin’ to fix this zoggin left-arm, right-arm fee-ass-co, but nobody said what I’m meant to do or nuthin’,” Blue sulked, “So now I got to work out how to fix it, an’ then actually fix it.”

“Why don’t you try krumpin’ em?” Stabwound asked, as nicely as possible.

“DON’T YA THINK I ALREADY THOUGHTTA THAT?” Blue thundered. Stabwound had thought he was being helpful. This was a very bad day. Now it looked like it might also be his last.

“I can’t do anything or they sed they’ll boil my squig. That was not a joke neither, if you laugh I will zoggin’ KILL you.” She looked like she meant it. “Anyway, I worked out what I’m going to do. You’re going to meet with the Shootist leader, and then you’re going to work out the problem, or I’ll krump you both so ‘ard you’ll, you’ll, urm, be very zoggin’ sore! I’m tellin’ him the same thing.”

This suggestion started a fire in Stabwound’s heart. It was one thing to be scared of being krumped, but even *suggesting* a meeting with the Shootists was just over the line, even if it was Blue suggesting it.

“No,” said Stabwound, defiantly. Then he saw Blue’s reaction, and more importantly the potentially horrific weapon about to be drawn. This softened his opinion a little. “Well, ok, maybe there’s one fing needs sortin’, an’ if I can get that fixed I’ll giz it some thought”.

“I don’t want some zoggin’ THOUGHT, I want you to do the zoggin’ meetin’!” Blue kept her hand on her weapon. Contrary to what Stabwound believed, it wasn’t actually horrifying, it was simply the flick knife from earlier. The things she could do with it though, now those were horrifying.

“Alright, alright, if you’z go down and fix my problem, I’ll do the zoggin’ meet.” Stabwound was defeated, but at least this way he could get something out of the arrangement.

“All my work’s been stopped on ‘ccount of all dem deffs. Now, you of all grots know that I don’t give two zogs about what stupid gits do on tha job, only now some of da daft gits have made a “yoonyun” or summat, an’ they won’t work even when I tell ‘em. Nowt I can do. So, you can find some way ta get all my guys to quit this muckin’ about an’ get ‘em back to workin’, I’ll do what ya’ zoggin’ want.”

A small part of him was actually almost happy at the result of this meeting. He had a problem, she had a problem, and her problem was bigger. One meeting with those Shootist gits? He could manage that to get these gullible buggers to give up all this union nonsense. He had a feeling Blue would find some way to fix it, and if she didn’t, he didn’t have to do what she was asking. It was win/win, as far as he was concerned.

“I’ll get one of the swingees to come up and show you where all the daft gits are, an’ you can do whatever, even kill ‘em or wotever. Just get ‘em workin’. Unless they’re dead. You do know how to use da wires, right?” Blue looked blankly at him. “Zog. Well, a flash git like you’z gonna learn fast. ‘Ere’s some hooks anyway, free of charge o’course.”

Blue was handed some strange devices. There were four of them, each with a small leather strap, and a long metal rod ending in a hook.

“Ya’ put ‘em on both ya’ hands, and both ya’ legs. Proppa easy. You’ll see why soon. Anyway, just wait a bit outside an’ some git’ll come and get you.” Blue left the room, turning over the strange hooks in her hands. I’d better put them on, she thought. How hard could it be?

* * *

“Send for my tailor,” said the Head Councillor into his speaky-box. The election was fast approaching, and he wanted to make sure he was the best dressed git in the running.

* * *

About ten minutes later, a lithe looking grot appeared, with hooks on each limb, the same type Blue had been given. She was ready to go, although her hooves had made the leg hooks quite awkward to put on. A bit of brute force, swearing, and a good kick had bent them into shape nicely.

“Gotz ya ‘ookz a see, wellz good, you’z gunna need ‘em where we’z goin’. I’z Cutlass, da foregrot of secta’ B eye eye vee.” The grot had a thick accent, and a lot of scars. Blue couldn’t tell if the scars were a form of tattoo to show loyalty to the Choppists, or just the natural result of working around knives too much.

“Wellz, we’z off ta da site nowz, followz me.” He turned, setting off at a brisk pace, foot-hooks clicking on the steel deck. Blue had to hurry to keep up. A few moments later, the spectacle that was the left arm gaped in front of her. It was massive. Cavernous. It was also covered in wires like spiders webs, with the occasional building suspended in amongst the mess. Since Boris had his arm pointing vertically at the moment, it seemed a long way down, with no decks of any sort to break a fall. She realised what the hooks were for now. Clever really, when there’s no set position for what is “up”.

“Keepz followin’, I’z gunna go slowz just cuz you’z new,” said Cutlass. He found a wire, pointing downwards. He clicked one of his arm-hooks on, and began to slide, picking up speed quickly, before leaping off. Flying through the air, one of his foot-hooks made contact with another wire, sending him careening off in another direction. As quickly as he had made contact, he disconnected the foot hook and grabbed a wire with his arm, spinning like a gymnast, and slowing all of his momentum. Now stationary, he turned and looked for Blue, who was a distance away.

“Wat you’z waitin’ for? Just grab’z on an’ follow!” Blue hesitated for a moment, but realised that there was no alternative. She was going to have to learn the wires even if it killed her. And it might. She clicked her arm into the same wire as Cutlass had started on, and started to slide. She promptly lost control, crashed into a cluster of wires, and swore loudly. This was going to take some practice.

* * *

An hour later, she was beginning to get the hang of it. They were stopped in one of the many suspended buildings, this one a café (others were workshops, sleeping quarters, and of course, the knife museum). Even the inside of the

buildings were strange, as they had also been designed with the regular movement of Boris in mind. The tables and chairs were suspended from more wires, and weighted on the bottom, so no matter where Boris moved they would always be pointed at the ground. Cutlass had decided a break had been a good idea, as in his words he was “gaggin’ for a cuppa”.

“You’z squig tea alrigh’?” Nowt betta’ afta’z some swingin’ dan a cuppa ‘ot squig tea.” As nice as the sentiment was, Blue was feeling a little uncomfortable. Tea doesn’t taste as nice when it could have been made out of your own pet. She decided to change the subject.

“Is it lots further? My arm’s proppa sore.” When you’re used to walking around on two feet (or hooves, as the case may be), traveling mostly by your arms is a strange feeling, and rather exhausting. Blue was proud of her muscles, but couldn’t help but think they were more of a hindrance than a help in this strange place. All of these grots seemed skinny. It just wasn’t right.

“Nahz, th’ restz of da way we’z can takez da speedwires. Maybez fifteen minnits,” said Cutlass. He had described the speedwires to her earlier, apparently they were long, unbroken series of angled wires, for speedy travel with all grots traveling in the same direction. “Kinda’ funz,” he had said, “only it’z a proppa bugger to getz back up againz”. Blue decided she’d just hope Boris would have to scratch his head while they were on the way back.

“Alright then, all finished the tea, can we go now?” Blue was getting impatient; all she was supposed to be doing was doing a simple neural job on squishy-Boris, and now it had been *hours*, Tinka would be wondering where she’d gone to. Not that he’d be able to come and try to find her anyway, she thought. The corridors were much too cramped for a big Ork like Tinka.

“Yeahz, we’z off,” Cutlass sighed and clicked an arm into an overhead wire. He threw a few teef on the table, and began to swing towards the door. The doors of these buildings were barely doors at all, they were just holes cut out of a wall, right in the centre. Why bother with anything else when you don’t know which direction you’d be facing in five minutes?

They swung in tandem, Cutlass with the precision and ease of a lifetime, and Blue a little clumsily. Nearly there, she thought.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, they arrived (they had been held up for five minutes by an unfortunate grot who hadn't slowed down for his stop on the speedwire, and ripped his arm right off trying to grab it). Ahead of them was the engine of Boris's chainsword. Like everything else, it was huge, mean, and held together with a lot of questionable welding. In front of it a large number of grots were hanging around (quite literally), with signs proclaiming things like "Workers Unite", "We demand better rights", "Better working conditions or else" and one that simply said "Ragh". Later, Blue asked the holder of the last one what it meant. He said he was told to bring a sign that showed his anger and frustration at the continued lack of respect of the working masses by the dictatorial upper class. He just wasn't very eloquent.

The picket line (or, in reality, picket vague-cluster) didn't seem very imposing. In fact, thought Blue, they all just looked like they needed a good krumping. Still, she had been tasked with fixing the problem, and something told her that just beating them all into submission wouldn't really be much help, even if it would be quite satisfying.

"Dat'z demz there. Dunnoz what to do ma'selfz, dem buggers all talkz too much an' it gives me an 'eadachez," Cutlass huffed, "Youz go and sortz it outz, I'z gunna stay over 'ere".

Blue nodded and slowly swung over to the throng of grots. "Hullo," she said, loudly enough that at least a few of them could hear her, "Who's in charge 'ere?"

A few grots looked about to proclaim themselves as leader, but as they were puffing up their chests and trying to look regal, a shout emerged from the centre of the mass of green.

"That would be me."

Slowly, a hole opened up, and a small, unassuming grot swung through it. He contrasted the other grots quite wildly. For one thing, he was *clean*. Ok, he was wearing the right uniform (rags, random bits of metal, the occasional knife), but everything was spotless. He looked like someone who was in fancy dress of a Choppist worker. All the good parts, every bit of clothing in exactly the right place, but none of the bad parts like grime and scars.

“You are currently looking at the combined forces of the Grot Labourers Union, formerly Choppist Workers United, formerly the Chainsword Engineer Collective, formerly the Boys of Sector B, formerly Them Gits What Keep Mucking About Instead of Working. I am Cudgel, their leader. Who might you be?” The grot didn’t speak like the rest either. Something was going on here.

“I’m Blue, an’ I hear you lot ain’t working. What’s goin’ on?” She couldn’t be bothered to try and discover the nuances of the situation.

“Well, “Blue”, we of the GLU are on strike. Strike. That’s when we refuse to work in protest. In this case we’re protesting against the terrible conditions we are forced to work in every day. Conditions which have claimed the lives of twenty-three workers in the last week alone. It’s absolutely despicable that a group in this day and age could be treated in such a way. So, we are refusing to work until our safety demands are met.

“These include, but are not limited to, personal protective equipment in the form of a helmet, gloves, and goggles for each grot, a completely overhauled permit system to be signed before any dangerous job, fire extinguishers kept near any potential ignition source, identity cards for every worker, and adequate records kept for all work going on at any time during the day.” He took a deep breath. Blue was stunned. She didn’t even know what a fire extinguisher was.

“What.” This was all she could muster.

“Oh, yes, safety may be a strange concept to someone as bourgeois as you, far from the world of work. I assure you that for those who are actively involved in labour, it is of great concern.”

“I ain’t boorjwaa you git, I don’t even know what it means. Are you going to work or what?” Blue was irritated.

“Ahem, I’m not sure you quite understood. We are not going to work until our demands are met. I can clearly see we aren’t going to make any headway here, so I’m afraid I’m going to leave you now, though I look forward to seeing you again when you’ve got more on the table to offer. Good day.” He turned and swung lazily back towards the horde of GLU members.

“Stop right there you zoggin’ git,” shouted Blue, swinging after him, “Something ain’t right here and I’m supposed to find out what it is. You ain’t going nowhere.”

“You’re quite right that there’s something that isn’t right here. It’s the way these poor workers are treated by their leaders whose duty it should be to protect them. We’re as dedicated to the Choppist cause as anyone, but-”

Suddenly, Blue’s brain kicked into gear. “Hold on, what did you say your name was again? It were Cudgel, right? Cudgel. You, there,” she pointed at a random grot, “what’s your name?”

“Me? I’z called Switchblade”.

“And you, what’s yours?” She pointed at another grot.

“Cleava”, the grot grunted.

“Right,” another grot got the pointed finger treatment.

“An’ I’m willin’ to bet your name is something like Rapier, or Stiletto, or Sawtooth.” The grot looked embarrassed.

“Er, it’s Butterknife.” A few grots sniggered.

“Close enough anyhow,” said Blue. She turned back to the union boss. “And your name is Cudgel. Do you know what a cudgel is?” The boss was facing Blue again. He looked a little nervous. Blue ploughed on.

“I do. A cudgel’s a stick. A stick for hittin’ folks. No blade on there at all.” A gasp went through the crowd. “You’re sayin’ you’re a true Choppist, and your name ain’t even a blade. There’s something that ain’t right about you.”

“Now, I’m sure we’d not want to jump to conclusions. Anyone can make a mistake like that, I had just picked a name that was unique, to stand out from the crowd,” he said, flustered.

“Hm. Well, alright, that’s a mistake that some stupid git could make, I s’ppose. How about this then; why are you so zoggin’ clean? I ain’t never seen a true worker as clean as that.” This question didn’t seem to bother him as much.

“Well, that’s quite simple. As I have explained to the other members of this union, it is down to my unmatched technical skills and ability to fix anything without even getting a smudge of grease, oil, or grime on my person. It’s quite uncanny.” He smiled, as if he’d just got himself out of a potentially awkward situation. As if on cue, somegrot shouted out from somewhere in the mass.

“It’s true, ‘e said ‘e’s so good that he had to get transferred from secta C cos’ he wus fixin’ things too fast there.” All the grot faces were nodding in agreement.

“You believe ‘im? We’ll see. ‘Ere, anyone got a chainkutlass on them or summat?” Blue asked, loudly. A voice piped up, somewhere in the green.

“I do, giz a minnit an’ I’ll come down.” A small grot started swinging in Blue’s direction. The chainkutlass was almost as big as he was. Gork knows how he carried it around everywhere. Blue took it, thanked him, and promptly ripped a bunch of wires from its motor.

“OY YA GIT WHAT YA’Z GO AN’ DO DAT FOR?” The grot was incensed.

“Calm down ya daft git. I could fix that in my sleep. So could you, prob’ly. Thing is, can you?” She handed it to “Cudgel”, who wrapped one arm around a wire, taking the weapon in both hands.

“Well, of course I can, but I have no interest in wasting my time doing such a thing. I’m a busy grot.” He tried to hand it back. Blue looked at him sternly.

“Fix it. Or can’t ya?” Blue noticed that where he was holding the cutlass his hand was becoming greasy, and also a little sweaty. So much for being so good he never gets dirty. What a daft thing to say, she thought.

“I-” He looked around at all the grot faces, watching with rapt attention. Hesitantly, he pulled at one of the wires.

“Well, er, of course I just put this into here and, er-” There was a bang, and sparks flew out of the chainkutlass’s motor.

“Wait, no, this one here-” Another bang.

“Of course not that one, ha, no, it’s clearly if I connect this wire to this part!” There was a sizzle, and the handle fell off. Blue deftly caught it, and took the

rest of the chaincutlass from him. In five seconds, it was working perfectly again. The faces in the crowd now looked very, very angry.

“So, ya git, what are ya? Coz you clearly ain’t a Choppist. Maybe if you explain things right this mob won’t slice your eyeballs out. I’m listenin’.” The union boss broke down, terror in his eyes. Blue hadn’t thought grovelling would even be possible when hanging from a wire, but he managed.

“Ok, ok, ok, I’ll tell you everything, just please don’t let them kill me! I’ve seen what these barbarians do with those knives.” The crowd snarled.

“Ah! Ok, I work for the council. I admit it. They told me to come here and spread dissent among the workers. They want to control it all! That’s why they sent me. They told me about something called safety and said I had to get everyone to believe in it. I told them it was unorky but they said it didn’t matter and that if I did as I was told I’d get promoted to middle management of squig resources! Who could say no to that?” Blue was quite sure she could.

“Anyway, I came down here, bumped off a few workers and made their deaths look like accidents. Once that was done, it was easy to group everyone together and pass off this safety nonsense. When I got them on my side all I had to do was get work to cease, and demand better conditions for the workers. That way the Choppists would have to start keeping records, and letting us know exactly what they’re doing at all times. That’s all. The council just likes to know everything. It’s not my fault! I’m innocent! I was just following orders!”

He crumpled himself into a ball (again, hard to do when you’re hanging from a wire), and started muttering something about Mork protecting him. Blue looked around at the sea of faces. The signs had all been discarded, in favour of a large number of knives, swords, and other sharp instruments.

“Hey, boys,” she shouted, “Are you all gonna go back to work tomorrow?” There was a loud cheer of approval.

“Wunnerful. In that case, let ‘im have it.”

As she swung back to Cutlass, the sounds of swishing blades and squishing meat echoed in the belly of the arm. It was almost soothing. She had rather wanted to krump him herself, but she thought all of those misguided grots

probably deserved it more. Worrying about safety! It just wasn't right. The inside of Boris seemed to do some right funny things to a grot's head.

Cutlass was smoking a squigarette, nodding at the carnage.

"Goodz job on dat bizness dere, glad we'z can getz back ta work. Readyz ta go then? It'z a proppa climb up." Blue nodded, and gazed upwards. She couldn't see the top of the arm. There was a long way to go. Clicking an arm into another wire, she began to haul herself upwards.

"Race you to the top!"

* * *

"So, who do you think is going to win it this time?"

"Well, lots of teef are being bet on the incumbent, but I'm going to lend my support to the Minister for Applied Resources. He's looking strong."

"See more of the interview with the editor of Titanopolis Daily at 3pm on Squig News Twelve."

* * *

"So, you'z tellin' me they've just decided to work again? Jus' like dat?" Stabwound was completely baffled by what had happened over the course of the last three and a bit hours. A grot that he knew only as a blue whirlwind of unimaginable destruction turned up at his door, agreed to help him with minimum fuss, and now all of his problems were fixed. He made a note to thank Gork and Mork later.

"Yup. Your boys even got to dish out a good stabbing to help cheer them up." Blue, despite herself, felt quite proud of the job she had done.

"Well den. Just tell me where da meet is and I'z gunna be dere, you'z can count on dat."

"Great," said Blue. She smiled, and left.

Stabwound grinned at the ceiling. Finally, his day was looking up. With a happy sigh, he fell back into his chair.

“Bugger,” he said, as it impaled his bottom.

Part III: The Hard Sell

The guards had been waiting for Blue in the lobby of the Choppist's HQ. She'd been too preoccupied with her thoughts before to really look at them, but now she noticed one was tall and thin, and the other short and fat. It was quite amusing really. All they needed was a snappy name and a comedy routine, they could make it big in theatres.

"All done. We goin' to the right arm now?" asked Blue. The guards were surprised to see her looking so cheerful.

"Nah, got bizness. Dat is ta say, 'e's got bizness," said the tall guard.

"Yeah, 'e's right. I gotta pick up the new custom size uniform I ordered on account o' my growin' lots o' muscle in the last few weeks," said the short guard.

"Muscle my arse, what muscles are round ya belly?"

"I am in possession of a strong abdomen an' core, I'll have yew know."

"Must be strong holdin' all that squig pie in." They had the banter down, at least.

"Anyway," said the short guard, "We're off to the market."

The market! Maybe they'd let her get a chance to take real look around this time, maybe even she'd get to buy some things!

"I went through the market on my way up here!" Blue chattered, excitedly, "Oh I really wanted a chance to spend a few hours in it, there was so much to see! Please, I promise I won't run away, can I get some time to look around? Please?" The short guard looked puzzled.

"I suppose, but I wouldn't of thought you'd want to spend too long- Wait. You were in the other market. The one in Piston Plaza. Oh. Nah, that market's not got what I need. We're off to da sixty second market." Blue was puzzled by the

name, but figured it would just be a different name for the same sort of place. Both of the guards walked towards the door at once, bumping into each other.

“Afta you, Sergeant Little,”

“No, no, I insist, Offissa Large”

Blue Grinned.

* * *

On the way, talking to the now-chatty guards, Blue learned what the sixty second market was, and the story behind its name.

Boris, Gork love him, was a fidgeter. Back when he was still squishy, he just couldn't ever sit still, always moving around, shifting his weight, and never looking very comfortable. In his new, metal form, the unfortunate trait had passed over. Only now it was on a much larger scale. The sixty second market was located right in the heart of Boris' machinery. The part where everything whizzed, crunched, and clanged at even the slightest shift of the huge titan body.

When the titan was first looted, the huge machine room was one of the safest place to be. It was expansive, all the machinery was contained safely, and it was designed in a way that engineers working there weren't likely to die horrible deaths at any minute. The result of this nice, safe design was that some more enterprising grots started selling things in it. After all, there was plenty of space, and the new immigrants that kept appearing all had teef to spend. A small market formed later, eventually sprawling out into the huge metal cavern. It became one of the first true successes of Titanopolis. Safe capitalism for all. Back then, it was just known as “the market”.

A few years of ork tech changed all that. Somehow, at some point, the machinery which was nicely tucked away had come loose, and now would fly around the room, chopping and crushing all in its path. The thing was, the market was already established, and popular, so none of the merchants really wanted to move out. They were still making money, even in this more lethal state. Instead, they simply adapted. The sixty second market was born.

Boris, on average, would shift around every sixty seconds. This wasn't a hard and fast rule, it was just an average. Sometimes he would sit still for a while,

sometimes he'd hardly stop shuffling around. The trick to surviving in the sixty second market was to learn the signs. A little rumbling here, a couple of steam blasts there, the swoosh of a pendulum heading directly for your face, that sort of thing. The merchants had established a system where all of their wares were laid out on bits of cloth, with a rope woven all the way round. This let them simply pull the rope and shift their precious items into a safe place as they dived out of the way of unstoppable machinery. When everything settled down again, trading would resume. It was a well-oiled machine. A lot more well-oiled than Boris was, at least.

A few of the more successful grots had collected enough capital to build some real shops near the walls of the room. The machinery didn't reach all the way to the walls, so they could safely trade without fear of squishing. This was considered retirement by the merchants of the sixty second market. Everyone wanted a nice life where they weren't likely to die at any moment, but still able to make money. Of course, there was the Piston Plaza market, but that was for stupid gits and cowards who didn't want to make as many teef in the interest of personal health. Sure, the sixty second market was dangerous, but it was also profitable. Very, very profitable.

As the trio trudged along, Blue listened intently to the guards telling her their experiences of the market, about how Officer Large used to be a dried squig salesman before packing it all in for a job in law enforcement. "Sure, some git might stab me doin' this," he said, "but at least that's a proppa way ta go. Grot to grot. Combat. No git ever won combat against the sixty second market."

His reasoning was sound. Despite all the talk, though, Blue didn't really believe it. Grots were notorious for exaggerating and boasting, after all. Surely there's nothing *that* dangerous.

* * *

The head councillor was consulting his campaign advisors. They had a lot of valuable experience in this field. He wasn't sure of what his opponents were planning, and he needed to know.

* * *

Crunch.

Blue watched with morbid fascination as a huge piston squashed a couple of unfortunate Grots. One was a trader, the other a customer. They had been engaged in a haggling war. The market had won.

It was exactly what the guards had described to her, and then some. Words couldn't describe the sight of an entire room shifting at once, grots running around wildly, trying desperately not to get crushed, but also to protect their livelihood. Suddenly, the piston lifted up again. A swarm of grots descended on the unfortunate merchant's wares, taking anything that wasn't smashed beyond any repair. Zog it, thought Blue, and she also ran into the melee, managing to pinch a few teef from the ex-customer's body. Now this was capitalism. People described it as survival of the fittest, but nowhere was that more true than in the sixty second market.

Blue had left the guards a little while ago, agreeing to meet up with them at the entrance in about an hour. She had considered ditching them, but she knew that if she did that'd be the end of Mr Squig. Better to play along, she thought, at least this way she'd get a chance to take a look around the market. She meandered around, occasionally having to leap to avoid unpleasant death. She was agile enough that it never troubled her too much, plus she was used to playing with machines, the signs of impending movement were quite obvious to her.

She used a couple of her teef to buy a squig-on-a-stick, continuing to marvel at the peculiar market (whirr, crunch, "ARGH"). It was all so Orky. So pointlessly dangerous. It was a welcome antidote to all the mucking about she'd had to deal with up until now. She aimlessly wandered the ever-changing maze of floor-stalls for a half hour, until it all became a bit too much (whoosh, bang, "MY ZOGGIN' LEG"). She wanted to go back to somewhere that wasn't likely to chop her in half at any moment.

Getting her bearings as best she could, she headed towards one of the walls, to look for the real shops she'd heard about. A few minutes later, there they were. They looked fancy, in comparison to the chaos of the market floor. A few armour shops, a random gubbins shop called "Zizz 'n' Bitz", some knife shops claiming to be affiliated with the Choppists. She looked in the windows. Lots of fun looking weapons, but she didn't have time to browse through it all. Maybe later.

Continuing, she came across a shop claiming to contain “GUNZ x GUNZ x GUNZ”. Good, she thought. She was going to have to see the Shootists next anyway, so it couldn’t hurt to find out a bit about them. Hopefully the owner here will know something, if not at least there would be some nice guns to browse through. She opened the door, a bell tinkling overhead.

“Welcome ta’ Gunz Kyoobed, wut can I ‘elp ye’ wit’?” A grot was sitting behind a counter, flanked by rows and rows of shooters of all shapes, sizes, and calibres. More guns than Blue could count, and she could count quite high.

“Look, d’you know anythin’ about the Shootists? I’m meant to go an’ meet ‘em, but I dunno anythin’ ‘bout what they do other than that they like shootas a lot.” The grot behind the counter tensed at the name.

“I do not know anyfin’ about some grots called the Shootists, def’nitely not, not a fing at all no sir not me,” said the shop owner, robotically.

“Don’t give me that guff ya git, yer in a gun shop, you must know summat.”

“Alright, alright,” the owner looked around shiftily, “Are you workin’ fer da guvvament? You’z gotta tell me if you is.” Blue was pretty certain she didn’t.

“No,” she lied.

“Ok, good. Dem guvvament gits told me they’d take away me tradin’ lie-sense if I worked wit’ da Shootists. Course I do anyway, bizness is bizness, y’know.” Blue wasn’t sure what a trading license was, but the way he talked about it made it sound important.

“Still, I ain’t gunna say too much ‘bout ‘em. Alls I will say is dat you get a discount if yer a member, an’ dat you sign up to join ‘em in da right shoulder. Now you buyin’ or buggerin’ off?”

“Just browsing,” replied Blue. The shop owner looked a little irritated. She wandered over to one of the many gun racks, and had a look around. The trouble with places like this, she thought, was that there was too much choice. All of them looked so good you could never make a decision.

And then she saw it. The answer to everything. The solution to stopping this pointless conflict, and getting Mr Squig back in one piece. It was so simple. How had she not thought of it before?

“‘Ere, ya git,” she waved at the shopkeeper, “‘ow much for this?”

* * *

She met up with the two guards at the entrance, as promised. Sergeant Little was wearing a much more well-fitting uniform, and seemed a lot happier. They were bickering with the ease a pair gets from spending too much time together.

“I’m tellin’ ya, I could’a got the price down by ten teef,” the short grot was saying, indignantly.

“Aye, mebbe ya’ could, an’ you’d of got squished flat fer it. That piston weren’t stopping for nuffin,” said Officer Large.

“Oh, ‘ello Blue. Buy anyfin?” said Little.

“Oh, not much,” said Blue coyly, picking at a bit of squig stuck in her teeth.

“Well, wotever, we’s off ta the right arm. Ya ready?”

“Yep, lookin’ forward to it,” Blue replied, cheerfully. The guards began to head off for one of the lifting-boxes, and she followed, with a spring in her step. She’d have to convince the Shootist git to come to the meet, but she had no doubt she’d manage. After that? Well. She had a plan.

Part IV: Firing Blind

Ildly swinging around in the right arm, there was a small grot called Tinybones. He was thinking. Thinking perhaps wasn't the right word for it. If the concept had existed in orkish society, you could say he was having an existential crisis. Tinybones was a dedicated Shootist. He loved guns. He *lived* guns. Everything about them appealed to every single one of his senses. He'd spent his whole life around guns, working with them, maintaining them, even worshipping them. If you took guns out of Tinybones' life, you might as well have taken his soul.

He stopped swinging, and sat down on one of the more horizontal wires. The thing was, Tinybones thought to himself, he wasn't like the other Shootists. They loved the guns for their effect. For the feeling of having them fire in your hand. The recoil, the noise, the smoke, the destruction. They were all about the effect of the guns. What they could do with them. This is where Tinybones was different. He couldn't care less about the effect. What he was interested in was the gun *itself*.

He had tried firing guns in the past, but he just couldn't do it very well. He was too weak, the recoil hurt him, and he would always close his eyes and flinch before pulling the trigger. It was the source of a lot of mirth for the other Shootists. Look at Tinybones, the daft git, he calls himself a Shootist and can't even shoot. It was true, Tinybones was rubbish in the application of dakka. Instead, he had attempted to carve his very own niche in Shootist society, one that wasn't as appreciated as it perhaps should have been.

When Tinybones was a younger Grot, he had learned how to read and write. If you asked him when or how, he wouldn't be able to tell you. The fact simply was that he could. Quite well, too. He also had a deft hand for drawing; give him a gun and he could create a full set of blueprints, schematics, and instructions on how to replicate it, in under an hour. He collected guns, too. Not in the same way as other Shootists, who prided themselves on who had the biggest shooter that could blast the biggest hole in something, he collected guns which were rare, unusual, or unique in some way. He didn't know it, but he even had three of Blue's prototype guns (They were filed under "Proper

Interesting”, the other sections being “You Don’t See These Much”, and “Zogging Old”).

Yes, Tinybones was an academic. Or at least, what passes as an academic in Titanopolis. He didn’t just love guns. He *analysed* guns. He critiqued them on their positive and negative points, he even wrote books about gun. Nobody had ever read them. He didn’t care. Tinybones was a connoisseur of carbines, a professor of pistols, a doctor of dakka, and many other alliterative things. He just couldn’t fire them.

With a sigh, he picked himself up from the wire, beginning the slow climb towards the shoulder, the words of the other Shootists echoing around his head.

What’s the point of a Shootist that can’t shoot?

* * *

The lifting-box was playing a tune through a small speaker. Blue couldn’t work out what it was supposed to be. The “music” she was used to usually consisted of Orks banging things and shouting a lot. This sounded like the noise you get when you blow on the top of a bottle. Eventually, much to her relief, the doors pinged opened. The lift they had ascended in took them directly to the entrance of the right shoulder, so there wasn’t as much footslogging this time. Thank Gork.

Unlike the rather Spartan entrance to the left arm, the right arm was a feast for the eyes. The neon lights had been bent and twisted to form the shape of guns, with parts flashing on and off to create the illusion of them firing. It was rather impressive. Everything was painted too, mostly Scraploota yellow, but with other colours splashed on as well. Whoever had been in charge of the paint had a lot of enthusiasm, but not very much talent. The sign read:

“THE RIGHT ARM WELCOMES ALL”

Below it, and clearly added later:

“Except Choppists”

Unlike the left arm, there appeared to be no security here. Appeared being the important word in this case. Closer inspection revealed a multitude of sentry

turrets, cleverly hidden among barrels, boxes, and a shrub. Each one was aimed in their direction, Blue noticed, though none of them looked like they were manned. It didn't matter an awful lot either way, there were so many of them that even if most of them missed they'd still be riddled with bullets.

The guards continued through the entrance, not noticing the potential death, or perhaps just not caring. A voice called out suddenly.

"Oi!" It shouted, "State ya bizness!"

Blue looked around wildly, searching for the source of the barked order.

"Y' ain't gonna find me, cos' I ain't there. Just state ya bizness or bugger off," said the disembodied voice. Blue didn't like his tone, but she didn't have much choice. She needed to get in.

"I wanna meet with th' Shootist leader, 's official council work an' all that," Blue cried out at the air.

"You wot?"

"I want to talk to th' Shootist leader," replied Blue, simply.

"Which one?"

* * *

Imagine having *two* leaders, thought Blue, as she stalked through the corridors of the right shoulder. She had been assured by the disembodied voice this was the way to the Shootist main office, but now felt she may have taken a wrong turning somewhere. It all looked the *zogging* same. She wished the guards would have come in with her, but they had refused, muttering something about explosions and being allergic to bullets.

As she rounded another corner, she finally admitted it to herself. She was lost. She had no idea where she was, what the offices looked like, or even who she was going to meet when she got there. The Choppists seemed simpler. They were all about keeping things straightforward and functional. You can't get lost when there aren't any corridors to begin with. These *zogging* Shootists seemed to make things deliberately more complicated than they had to be.

Right, she thought, picking up speed. She was going to find another grot, and that grot was going to show her the way to the office. It wasn't very orky, asking for directions, but her sticking to principles vs getting the job done scale had finally tipped in the other direction. Orkiness would have to wait. All she needed now was a Grot who actually knew where he was going.

About three point five seconds later, she found one. Found, in the sense that he stepped right in front of her from an adjacent passage. They were now both crumpled in a heap on the floor.

"Wut da zog," said Blue, more surprised than angry.

"I'm terribly sorry," came a plummy voice from underneath her left buttock. Blue clambered up to her feet (or hooves, more accurately).

"You should look where yer goin' ye daft git."

"I assure you that I usually do, I was just a little lost in thought. I can't apologise enough. Is there anything I can help you with?" He spoke in a way that reminded Blue of the councillors, only without the hidden malice. He seemed genuinely apologetic, and maybe just a little frightened.

He had clumsily righted himself, letting Blue take a good look at his unimpressive features. He looked like he had spent most of his life mucking about. He was skinny as a rake, had thick glasses that made his eyes look tiny, and wore clothes that were scuffed and worn not from fighting or working, but from simple overuse. He had on a strange, thin-brimmed hat. Blue hoped he wasn't wearing it thinking it made him look sophisticated and stylish. It didn't.

"Who're you?"

"The name is Tinybones." He tipped his hat, and Blue cringed a little.

"Who might you be?"

"Blue. Anyway, I need a guide for these zoggin' corridors, it's a maze here. D'you know the way around?"

“Why yes, it’s your lucky day! In fact, I wrote a guidebook on that very subject!” He shuffled a knapsack off of his back, rummaged around inside it, and handed her a scruffy pamphlet.

“There’s a map on the back, as well as the description of a few points of interest and good viewpoints. It’s not my usual sort of work, but I felt that it would be of use to somegrot at some point. Admittedly, you’re the first.” Blue looked at the pamphlet. Although she could read, she wasn’t about to admit it. Plus, this had a section labelled “fun facts”. That sounded dangerously close to learning.

“Zog that. Look, can y’ just show me ‘ow to get to th’ Shootist main offices? Offishul council bizness or summat.” She wasn’t in the mood for mucking about, and Tinybones looked like he had a lot of potential for it.

“Why yes, I can indeed. Would you like to take the quick route, or the scenic route? If we take the scenic route I would be able to tell you all about the many events that have happened in these halls in the past. Or, if that doesn’t interest you, I could read you a few excerpts from my new book “Adventures with a Bolter”, or even tell you some of the highlights from the recent “Shootafest”. I went as dressed as a railgun this year!” He seemed enthusiastic.

“The quick way. An’ all I want to know is summat about the Shootist boss. Er, bosses.” Tinybones deflated a little, but still seemed to know enough about the subject to talk the hind legs off a squiggoth. They set off, and he began to tell the tale of the Shootist leaders.

“Shootist leaders come and go. When you spend all of your time around weaponry, it really doesn’t do much good for life expectancy. So, with the unfortunate demise of the previous leader in what has become known as “Look-it’s-not-even-loaded-gate”, we were left with a power vacuum. The previous leader had two trusted advisors, both of whom were tipped for the job when he was gone. Their names were Dak, and Ka. I’m sure you can recognise the reference. They were friends, you see. Rare in this society, but it actually worked quite well for them.

“They were the real rulers of the Shootists even when the old boss was still around, Mork rest his soul. They knew who did what, how to get a job done, and who to krump when it wasn’t done properly. They kept the entire Shootist enterprise afloat. So, when main grot copped it, they were left in a bit of a pickle. Both of them had equal claim to the throne, but they didn’t want to

krump the other to get it. Plus, they didn't think they'd be able to do it on their own. So they took the next logical step, and decided to do it together.

"Both claim to be the brawn, and both claim to be the brains. The fact is, they're just a great team. Use their names as an example. Dak, and Ka. Dakka. It's onomatopoeia. Oh, yes, sorry. That basically means it's a word which describes the *noise* that a gun makes. Guns firing make the full sound, DAKKADAKKADAKKADAKKA!" Blue jumped as the diminutive Grot suddenly shouted at the top of his lungs.

"You can't have half a dakka. It just doesn't make sense. Ergo, you can't have Dak without Ka, or Ka without Dak. Ah, here we are." They had arrived at faceless door in a nondescript corridor.

"You sure? it don't look fancy or nuffin," said Blue.

"Ah, well, that was Mr Ka's doing. It used to be rather garish, but that made it very difficult to rebuild when it would get blown up, a regular occurrence. In the interest of speeding life along, it was decided to make everything simple to rebuild. Well, apart from the main entrance. We're all quite proud of that. It sends the right message, much better than those Choppists and their uninspired attempt at making a sign. Savages."

"Right, I'm goin' in. You're gunna wait here for me, or else." The threat was not made lightly, Blue had krumped gits for less, even ones with glasses on. She opened the door and stepped inside, leaving the nerdy grot standing outside awkwardly.

* * *

In the head council offices, the election campaign was about to get underway. It was going to be particularly hard fought this time, according to commentators.

* * *

Blue stared right down the barrel of a gun. One of four. They pointed directly at her, mounted on the wall like moose heads. They were quite large, but didn't look like they had been fired in a long time. The way they were aimed appeared almost as if they had been designed to obliterate anything sitting in the chair

facing the Shootist leader's desk. The phrase "don't shoot the messenger" had probably been used a lot back when they were still working.

"So, you'z means to tells us dat allz we gotta do is meet up with da Choppist main grot? Ok. Might get a chance to shoot 'im a few times too if we'z lucky."

Thwack.

"Zog it Ka you stoopid git, dis is why you ain't da brains. We'z got dis git by da balls, we can get 'em to do summat for us first!"

"You wot? I'm brainy as anyfin', I was just testin' -"

"Ere, git," said Dak, ignoring his partner, "What 'appens if we'z say no?"

Blue sighed. Nothing was ever easy.

"You can't. Or at least, I can't go without you agreein'."

"Ah, I gets it now," said Ka, a little late to the party, "You's gotta do what we tells ya!"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Dak, "An' we gots a problem needs fixin'."

Of course they did. Blue was beginning to wonder if there was any grot inside Boris that *didn't* need her help. Still, they were right. They had her by the balls, even if the metaphor wasn't entirely appropriate. She had to play along, Mr Squig was depending on it.

"Zog it. Alright, go ahead. Don't go muckin' about though, just tell me what it is an' I'll go sort it." She wasn't in the mood for games.

"Well, we'z Shootists, right?" began Ka.

"Right, an' a Shootist knows his shootin', o' course," interrupted Dak.

"Only, we'z got a probl'm wit' da main Shootas."

"Dey don't zoggin shoot straight!"

"Sactly. We'z shoot 'em, but Gork knows what they's gonna hit when we do."

“Now, every git knows aimin’ ain’t orky. We just gots ta thinkin’, it ain’t unorky if da guns aim demselves!”

“So, you’z gonna go an’ make da Shootas shoot straight, an’ den we do what ya want’.”

“Easy as dat.”

Blue rubbed her temples. For a group claiming to be dedicated to the pursuit of dakkaness, they knew zog all about guns. Especially big ones like those on Boris. This should be a quick fix.

“So, you’re havin’ a problem with the control room?” The pair looked puzzled.

“The wot?”

* * *

The door to the Shootist offices opened with a crash. Blue was furious. The morons had been running Boris’ guns without even having the targeting computer online. No wonder they never hit anything. Plus they didn’t even know where the zogging control room was! So now she had to find it, *and* get the damn thing running again, *and* find some git who could use it.

“YOU,” she thundered at a quaking Tinybones.

“M-me?” He stammered.

“You know the way around this zoggin’ place, right?”

“Well, I did make that pamphlet. I won’t claim to know the details of every nook and cranny, but-”

“Shut it,” interrupted Blue, “I need to find a room.”

“Well, there are quite a number of them in these halls. If you could be a little more specific perhaps I could be more helpful.”

“The *control room*,” clarified Blue, moodily.

“Ah, in that case, I can’t help you. I’ve never heard of it!” Blue noticed this seemed to be relieving to him, as if he was being saved from further responsibilities. She tried a different approach.

“What do you know about guns?” She asked. Tinybones looked offended.

“I am a Shootist! I know everything about them! For example, did you know that the average Shoota round travels at around three-hundred and fifteen metres-per-second, and consists of three parts; slug, casing, and explosive? As I wrote in my book “Shootas and You: 101 Facts you might not know about your favourite weapon”, most people think that the-

“Ok, wotever. So, you know that if ya’ want a gun ta fire prop’ly, it needs some git controlling it, right?”

“Well of course.”

“So imagine you didn’t have anyone holdin’ it and the trigger was pulled. What’d happen then?”

“Well, it’d be completely out of control, firing wildly and probably doing more damage to your allies than your target. I’m not quite sure where you’re going with this. Perhaps it would make a good topic for a new novel though; a society where guns turn on their owners. I had been thinking of branching out into fiction, and...” He trailed off under Blue’s glare. She continued.

“Up until now, Boris has been pullin’ the trigger, but not holdin’ the gun. We need the control room. That way we can prop’ly point an’ shoot, ‘stead of just shootin.” Blue waited to see if Tinybones would understand. He stood thoughtfully, considering her words.

“I still don’t know what you’re getting at.”

“Zog it! I don’t care! You’re gunna find the zoggin’ control room for me, or get a good krumpin’, mebbe both if you keep opening your zoggin’ gob,” said Blue, with absolute conviction.

“Er. Well, there are a few unidentified rooms in my map which were either sealed, marked “keep out”, or, er, scary looking. We could start with those.”

“Wunnerful. Just remember, it’s your arse on th’ line if we don’t find it.”

“Duly noted. My bottom is very much hoping it won’t come to that.” He pulled out his map, and studied it intently. After a few seconds, he pointed a finger down one of the corridors.

“This way! I am ninety-five per cent sure it’s this way!”

* * *

“We’re getting word that the independent candidate for the Snotling Awareness League has come crashing out of the campaign. An unfortunate end, but it shows how much of a political heavyweight you have to be to stand any chance in these modern times.”

* * *

It wasn’t that way. Or the other way, or the way after that. They had so far interrupted three krumpings, five naps, a bath, and a game of Russian Roulette (the last one interrupted in the sense that Blue saw they had a gun, and instinctively attacked. They didn’t put up much of a fight, as they’d forgotten to load a bullet in the first place).

“Alright, so it’s not here either. Ah, in that case it must be this way, I am ninety-nine point nine-nine-nine-seven per cent sure of it.” He wasn’t. He was also running out of per cent.

“It had better be,” said an exasperated Blue. She was absolutely sick of this smart-arsed grot, but recognised she was relying on him. She had absolutely no idea where she was, and wouldn’t be able to find her way back to the office if she tried. She followed Tinybones down yet another corridor. They stopped at another door, and opened it. It was to a broom cupboard. This was getting ridiculous.

“Look you stupid git, we ain’t gettin’ nowhere doin’ this.” She turned around, and pointed at a random door. “Alright,” she said, “what’s in there?”

“That would be, let’s see, ah, that’s the Shoota workshop. Quite fascinating, I could give you a tour if you would like.” Ignoring the offer, Blue pointed at another door.

“In there?”

“Oh, that’s easy, that’s the office of the chief of bullets. An enviable position,” said Tinybones, with a tinge of jealousy.

“Wotever. And that one?” She pointed at another.

“Oh, that’s not really relevant. It’s full of humie things. Nobody has been in for ages. Now, if you were to ask me about the door to the right of it-”

“Wot sort of humie things?”

“What? In there? It’s just the usual humie nonsense. Boxes full of paper. Random wires. A few screens. Some control panels. That sort of thing. It looked rather unorky so we all just left it alone. Anyway, as I was saying, the door to the right contains-” Blue grabbed Tinybones roughly by the lapels.

“Wires? Screens? CONTROL PANELS?” YOU MEAN THE EXACT ZOGGIN’ THINGS YOU’D FIND IN A CONTROL ROOM?” She bawled, right into his terrified face. He looked about to cry.

“W-well, when you say it like *that*...”

“THIS ENTIRE ZOGGIN’ TITAN IS FULLA ABSOLUTE ZOGGIN’ IDIOTS!” With a furious scream, Blue ran towards the door and gave it a hefty kick. The hinges snapped clean off, and it fell to the ground in a cloud of dust and paper.

Inside, there was darkness. Blue peered into the gloom. She could make out the silhouette of a skeleton, sitting in an office chair. It was dressed in a uniform. Tinybones peeked his head around the door, tentatively.

“Dark. Good thing I came prepared for this very eventuality.” He rummaged around in his knapsack again, and pulled out a torch.

“Let there be light!” He flicked it on, and they both looked around at the contents of the room. It was a control room alright. In fact, it was remarkably well preserved, there wasn’t a hint of orkiness anywhere. None of the panels had been ripped apart, the metal was dulled and dirty, but not buckled or scratched,

and the screens weren't cracked at all. It reminded Blue of what things had been like when she was younger. She repressed the memory.

"There's gotta be a zoggin' light switch here or summat," she said, fumbling around on the wall. There was a click. Suddenly, everything came to life.

"Oh my..."

Tinybones had never seen anything like it before. The walls were covered in screens, all booting up simultaneously. Fans in the computer system were whirring painfully, clogged by dust. Lights were flashing everywhere on the panels, replete with countless buttons, switches and dials. It was triggering something inside him. Then he saw the filing cabinets. He ran over to them like a child in a sweet shop. Could it be, he thought, could they contain what he hoped? He opened a drawer. They did!

"Schematics!" He cried out in ecstasy, "Schematics for the entire titan! Every single gun kept on board! Even the giant railgun! Oh I don't know where to begin!"

While Tinybones was obsessing over bits of paper, Blue was trying to get her head around the computer. It had been *years* since she had last used one. Long before she was a Scraploota. She had shifted the skeleton out of the chair, reasoning he didn't have much use for it any more. There were buttons everywhere, and she really didn't want to press the wrong one. If she did, the Loot-havva may find itself with an unexpected giant hole in its bulkhead. She pressed a small one at random, reasoning that a small button wasn't likely to shoot one of the big guns. The computer made a sound like a bell, and started to speak.

"Welcome, new user," it intoned robotically, "Please identify yourself."

"Er, this is Blue, an' that's Tinybones."

"Welcome, Erthisisblooanthatstinybones. I detect you have not been properly acquainted with this system. Switching to training mode. Please stand by for interface." Zog, thought Blue. She jumped out of the chair, ran over to Tinybones, and dragged him over to it.

"Oi," he protested, "I was reading about the oil manifold pressure in- ARGH!"

Two metal tendrils had appeared from the panel, and were now embedded into his hands.

“Neural connection established,” said the computer. A loading screen appeared.

“Preparing training simulation alpha three. Objective: Kill as many tyranid as possible. You have three shots.” Tinybones squeaked in terror.

“What do I do? What do I do? Oh gork!” he tried to pull the wires out, but they were stuck fast in his flesh.

“Wot the computa sez, I suppose,” said Blue, glad she wasn’t in the same position. Machines definitely belonged on the outside of bodies. They also aren’t supposed to talk to you.

“I can’t!” He was panicking.

“Why the zog not? You’re a Shootist, it’s just a big shoota.”

“Because I’m rubbish at shooting!” He began to sob.

“The last time I tried it I broke my arm in three places, and that was just a tiny pistol! I’m just not built to fire guns, I’m too weak and feeble... Go on, laugh. It’s all I deserve.” This sudden outburst of emotion took Blue by surprise. She’d never seen a grot cry before. It was a bit pathetic.

“Well, it ain’t your bones now,” she said, matter-of-factly.

“What?”

“You’re sayin’ yer’ too weak to shoot a shoota. Boris ain’t though.” Tinybones looked at Blue with a snuffle, and wiped his nose with his sleeve. “Sounds t’ me like you can shoot dem shootas as much as ya’ like an’ not be sore at all. Proppa big guns too. ‘Nuff to krump a whole city.” The simulation had finished loading. There were a few clusters of tyranid in the distance, in a ruined city.

“I suppose I could try,” said Tinybones meekly. He looked at the wires, and then at the panel in front of him. Thinking intently, he made a complicated motion with his hands, culminating in pulling an imaginary trigger three times. Two of the enemy clusters exploded in a massive fireball, as did a skyscraper.

“Not bad,” said Blue, genuinely impressed. “Two outta three’s pretty good for a first...” She trailed off as the huge building began to topple over. It crashed to the ground, right on top of three more groups of tyranid.

“New high score,” chirped the computer. Tinybones was smiling again.

“Well,” said Blue, “Beginner’s luck, mebbe. Run it again.”

Tinybones did so, and aced it again. Then he switched to a different training mission, which contained a bunch of orks to kill. This one he took even more pleasure in.

“THAT’S FOR SAYING I’M WEAK! AND THAT’S FOR SAYIN’ I’M NOT A TRUE SHOOTIST! AND THAT’S FOR, FOR, ER, FOR SAYING MY SHOOTA COLLECTION WASN’T BIG ENOUGH, YEAH!” When the simulation was over, he had decimated an entire warband of orks and grots, with pinpoint accuracy. He was a fast learner.

He sat back, giddy with excitement and power. The things he could do. All those guns, and a direct line to the most powerful weapons on the entire titan, nobody would muck him about ever again. Alright, so Boris would be the ones pointing them, but that didn’t matter. It was Tinybones who had *control*. He was the one who could tell the colossal guns what to blow up. Him. No Shootist had ever fired a gun as big as he was able to now. Little Tinybones. Not so little any more.

Suddenly, Blue grabbed him by the nose and turned him round, snapping him out of his happy daze.

“I need ta know three things right now,” she said.

“First: Are you dedicated to th’ Shootist and Scraploota cause?”

“Yes,” replied Tinybones.

“Second, are you goin’ to use your new guns to blow the livin’ zog outta all our enemies?”

“Yes!” He replied again.

“Third, are you the best zoggin’ Shootist what ever existed?” He swelled with pride.

“YES!” He cried, at the top of his lungs.

Blue took off his hat, and replaced it with a fancy three-pronged number the skeleton had been wearing.

“Then congrachulashuns on ya new promotion, Gunnery Sergeant Tinybones.”

He beamed. He had finally found his purpose.

* * *

The minister of the exterior was out of the running. There were only two candidates left. Things were getting interesting.

* * *

Blue left Tinybones alone with his new responsibilities, making her way back to the Shootist offices (she had made sure to get extensive directions before leaving). This helping people lark didn’t seem so hard really, she thought. The politicians must just be daft gits not to be able to do it properly. Turns out all you need to do is say the right things, with a few threats and a bit of violence along the way.

She clattered her way through the door to the Shootist office, barging in on Dak and Ka comparing gun sizes.

“IT’S NOT WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE!” Exclaimed Dak, trying to hide the pistol behind his back.

“Wot? Actually zog it, I don’t care. I fixed yer problem,” said Blue, “and now I want you both to agree to the zoggin’ meet. Yes or zoggin’ no?”

“An’ howz exactly did ya fixes it, den?” Asked Ka, with an accusing squint.

“Do you really want to know? Cos’ if I told ya, then you’d be responsible f’r any unorky beehaveyur that might have been involved, an’ that’d make you look pretty zoggin’ bad,” said Blue. “If I *don’t* tell ya though, then you can say some

strange git set it up an' there's nowt you can do. Whatever *it* is." The two Shootists gave her words a little thought.

"This git's gots a point, Dak."

"Hm. Da guns'll shoot proppa good now though?"

"Yes," confirmed Blue.

"Well, good enuff den. We'll do the zoggin' meet."

"Yes, you will. One hour, at the door o' the centre liftin'-box. Right in the middle of Boris." Blue had reasoned that if things were done on as neutral and safe a ground as possible, then she'd at least be able to get out of the way if a things turned nasty. Which they wouldn't. Her plan was foolproof.

"Gotz it. Seez ya there."

Part V: Peacemaker

She left the right arm, unaware of how confusing that sounds when written down. It wasn't long until she could put her plan into action. She had a feeling it was going to ruffle a few feathers, and sort out this stupid conflict once and for all.

There was a grot snoozing on the floor. She gave him a kick, and he woke with a start.

"Wut ya do that fer ye git?" He burbled, presumably drunk from too much squig whisky. The bottles strewn around were a good indication.

"Bag o' teef for you if you go an' tell Stabwound from the Choppists to meet at the centre lift in an hour."

"Con- consid- consider it, hic, done." He staggered off. Good, thought Blue. That's another thing done. She made her way back to where she had left the guards earlier, they were still bickering.

"Whoever heard of a tall grot? Skinny too! Yew, my friend, are a freak. Now me, I am the correct size, and amply muscled in the correct departments."

"No you ain't, yer a short arse an' a fat un too. 'Sides, if bein' a freak means I can reach 'igh shelves I'm 'appy with it."

"If Gork and Mork had want us to reach things, they'd put 'em at grabbing height. Anyfing higher is practically blassfummy."

"You're a zoggin' idio- Oh, hullo Blue. Wuts 'appenin?"

She gave the pair a grin.

"We're back in bizness. You still got that box I gave ya?"

"I certainly do," replied Little, "And I'd like to know wot's in it. Yew gonna tell us yet?"

"Nope. Now we play the waitin' game."

* * *

“And it’s confirmed, we have a new head councillor! The Minister for Applied Resources has done it! So, what will the new head bring to the table? We’ll be here with all the latest reaction and comment, so stay tuned!”

* * *

The waiting game was, as usual, boring. Eventually though, two crowds began to form. Evidently, word had gotten out to the rest of the Choppist and Shootist members, and they had turned up armed to the teeth. Blue wasn’t worried. If war was to break out she could just escape in the lifting-box, and besides, it wasn’t. She was absolutely sure of her plan.

The crowds kept getting bigger, and rowdier. Fortunately, both seemed to be following a crude ceasefire, not wanting to make any moves before their leaders appeared. Which would be any moment now. Blue’s guards were beginning to get a little restless.

““Ere, Blue, d’ya fink they’s gonna turn up soon? Only I ain’t gonna be able to stop a war if one starts,” said Officer Large, “An’ Little’d get trampled without dem even realisin’ ‘e’s there.”

Sergeant Little looked offended.

“I ree-sent the imp-lick-a-shun yew are makin’! I am more than...” He trailed off. Stabwound had arrived.

Stabwound, for all his roughness, was a leader. He liked that he was the top dog, and liked to make sure all of his followers knew it. So, what’s the best way to get a bunch of knife-obsessed lunatics to like you? Simple. Have the biggest knives. He had taken two of his favourites with him for the meeting; massive cutlasses, mean and sharp, with some spatters of red on them to show he meant business (the spatters were not actually blood, as real dried blood never looks quite the right colour, and paint doesn’t smell as bad). The illusion of danger was shattered somewhat by the way he struggled to carry the massive choppers, as well as the way he winced every time he took a step. His rear end still still smarted.

“So da zoggin’ Shootist gits didn’t even bovva turnin’ up!” Stabwound observed loudly, more to all the amassed Choppists than to Blue.

“I fink we all knows who da better clan are now, wot wit’ us bein’ the only real ‘ard gits here.” It was cheeky and he knew it, he was trying his best to antagonise the Shootists opposite him.

“Give ‘em a minute you stoopid git,” hissed Blue, “you wantin’ t’ start a zoggin’ bloodbath?”

“O’ course I am, that’s all I’m here f-“

“YOU TRYIN’ TO CALL SHOOTISTS SOFT?”

Dak and Ka made their entrance with style. They were being wheeled in on what seemed to be a mobile flak-cannon, smoke belching from a coal furnace in its centre. It appeared to just be for show, as the huge gun’s only method of propulsion was the group of disgruntled Grots pushing it from behind. As it trundled to a halt in front of Blue, the pair of Shootists hopped down. Ka was armed with two pistols in holsters at his side, and Dak was carrying a preposterously large rifle that he couldn’t possibly fire without being sent flying in the other direction.

“‘s been a long time, *Stabwound*,” said Ka, pronouncing the name as if it was the worst insult imaginable.

“Yer, it has. Nice ta see ye again, Ka. Or is it Dak? Y’ both look th’ same ta me.” He smirked evilly.

“Ye zoggin’ git, I oughtta krump ya good fer that,” said Dak, clumsily trying to aim his massive gun at Stabwound’s head. He lifted it up to crotch level, then gave up. Blue stepped between the feuding bosses.

“Shut it, all of you. There’s gunna be no krumpin’ today, by any git. This is a peaceful meetin’.”

“Wot? We never agreed t’ that!” Exclaimed Ka.

“Yer, ‘sactly,” agreed Stabwound, “we’z only here for th’ krumpin,’ right boyz?”

The ranks of Choppists cheered in agreement.

“Well afore y’ do, just listen to me fer a minnit,” said Blue. It was time to put her plan in action. “Sergeant Little, give me the box.” Little stood to attention.

“Yes sah!” He picked up a box from the floor in front of him, and handed it to Blue. She held it out in front of her, showing it to both of the crowds.

“Inside this box,” she announced loudly, “Is somethin’ which’ll finally stop this daft rivalry! All of you gits will realise how stupid you’vebeen, and will bugger off back to work with a new understandin’ of the fyoo-tilitty of fightin’ amongst yerselves! BEHOLD!”

Blue pulled at the fancy ribbon on the top of the box (she hadn’t heard of “gift wrapping”, but was intrigued enough to agree to it), letting it slip off and onto the floor. The entire crowd hushed in anticipation, leaving only the steady thrum of Boris’ engine. She opened the box reverently, and allowed the faction leaders to peer inside.

“It’s a shoota,” said Dak.

“‘S a choppa,” said Stabwound.

Both were correct. The box contained two items; a rather plain rifle with a small rack underneath its barrel, and a rusty knife with a strange handle. Blue took each in a hand, and held them up in the air.

“Exactly,” she shouted, “but watch what ‘appens now!”

Blue had them. She felt proud of herself, in a strange way. She grinned, and brought the two weapons together. With a click, the knife clipped neatly onto the gun. Except it wasn’t a knife. No. It was a bayonet, and it was genius.

There was silence. You could have heard a pin drop. Blue held it out to both of the groups of grots. Every single grot was staring at it.

“D’ you unnerstand now?” Blue glanced from side to side, hoping some git would catch on soon. It really wasn’t a very complicated concept, even for grots as stupid as these. Eventually, Stabwound slowly lifted a finger, pointing it at Blue.

“Y-you...”

“Yes?” said Blue, pleased her message was finally getting through, “I what?”

“YOU RUINED A GOOD CHOPPA!”

“Wot.”

“NO, YE RUINED A GOOD SHOOTA!” shouted Dak. Angry voices could be heard in the crowd.

“Oh for Gork’s sake.”

Blue’s plan was perfect. It was well thought out, logically sound, and showed each side the error of their ways. It was a perfect metaphor for how Shootists and Choppists were basically two sides of the same coin, and that fighting against each other was stupid. Any creature with half a brain would have understood it. The trouble was, she had underestimated the wilful stupidity of the average grot.

“No, look,” she tried, yelling over the cacophony of furious shouting, “yer supposed to see this an’ realise ‘ow zoggin’ stupid you’ve all been with all this fightin’ when you’re all the same really!”

“THE SAME? THIS GIT IS SAYIN’ WE’RE THE ZOGGIN’ SAME!” cried a voice.

“I AIN’T DA SAME AS NO ZOGGIN’ CHOPPIST!”

“GET EM!”

And so, the war began.

It would be difficult to say who shot first, or who cut off the first ear, but it happened, and that’s all that matters. Everything descended into chaos. Guns were blasting all over the place, blades were slicing, and a few enterprising grots on the sidelines had already started placing bets on the winner. Dak and Ka were gleefully mowing down Choppists with their flak cannon, and Stabwound had found the strength to actually use his cutlasses, cutting grots in half left and right.

No, thought Blue, not after all the zogging effort I went to trying to get these idiots to work together. Mr Squig would not die because of some gits too thick-headed to understand basic cooperation. She was going to stop them fighting, by any means nec- A bullet ricocheted off her helmet. She suddenly realised that stopping them fighting may end up getting her killed instead.

She turned and ran as fast as she could for the lifting-box doors, which Little and Large were holding open, doing their best to avoid the flying bullets, blades, and bodies. An explosion went off behind her. She was lifted off her feet and sent flying by the blast.

Everything went black.

* * *

“As the new head councillor, what is your first priority? When you announced your candidacy, you claimed to seek freedom for all, and a cleaning up of the corruption in the financial and industrial sectors. Ambitious words, but will you continue to stand by them now you have real power?”

“Let me answer that question with another question: What makes a grot truly free?”

* * *

“Blue...”

“Go ‘way, leave me ‘lone, ‘m an ork now...”

“Blue.”

“I told you, I ain’t gonna take it, I don’t care about no castes any more...”

“BLUE!” She was roughly slapped, knocking her to back to her senses.

“Wot da zog?”

“I’m sorry, yew were dreaming. Took a nasty knock.” Little was knelt over her, his belly squashing her face slightly.

“Was sure you was a goner,” added Large. He looked genuinely concerned. Blue wasn’t sure if it was for her health, or his job security. Someone you were told to protect getting blown up doesn’t look very good on a CV.

“Wot ‘appened?” She sat up, then winced. “Urgh, feels like that time Snekkkit sat on me by accident.” The source of the pain suddenly dawned on her, and she went into a panic.

“Oh zog, the war! I need to stop the zogging war! ‘Ow am I gonna do that though? I bugged it all up, an’ now Mr Squig’s gonna get made into zoggin’ refreshments!”

She didn’t know what to do. She hadn’t felt like this in a long, long time. She was completely helpless. A lump formed in her throat. She buried her head in her hands so that the two guards wouldn’t see her like this, a vulnerable child who was way out of her depth. This wasn’t orky. This was pathetic. To think she had called herself a part of the Scraplootas, and now she was about to break down crying. Maybe they’d let her go if-

“Ahem,” coughed Little, “There may be something yew could do.”

Blue didn’t even bother looking up.

“There’s nuffin. Just go away. I failed, an’ that’s all there is to it.” Little ignored her.

“I ‘appen to know that two floors above ‘ere there’s a security room, with a direct line to the interior systems for the entire Titan. The PA, the power output, everythin’,” he said.

“Yeah. Ya could TALK dem all outta it,” suggested Large.

“Talk? TALK?” She looked up at them with tears in her eyes.

“I done nuffin’ but talk since I came into this zoggin’ place and look where it’s got me! ZOGGIN’ NOWHERE!”

“Oh, no, yew don’t understand.” Sergeant Little smirked coyly.

“Not talk. TALK. T-A-L-K. Turret assisted localised killing. It’s one of the safety systems. Got to defend the inside of the titan, yew know...”

Blue flung open the door to the systems room. Inside, a security-grot was sleeping, with his feet up on the desktop. The screens showed utter carnage. Bodies were everywhere, but Blue noticed the numbers seemed to have increased. She wondered how many new members each side had gained since the war started, just for the chance of getting into a good old fashioned fight. She hurried inside, shoving the security-grot off his chair. He landed heavily, and was about to protest when he received a blue fist to the face.

“If you even *START* t’ make a fuss I’ll krump ya so good the squigs won’t even want yer bones.” Large and Little had followed her inside.

“S true, this un’ don’t mess about,” confirmed Officer Large.

There were a few buttons on the desk in front of her. Unlike the complex gunnery control room, this was a lot easier to understand. One was labelled “*SPEAK*”, with a dial underneath to choose the deck. Alongside, there was a switch was labelled “*TALK*”. It also had a dial below it. She pulled the speaky stick towards her, and set it to the correct deck. She’d try speaking to them first, she thought, but that *TALK* button looked very enticing.

“Oi, you lot,” she said into the wire mesh of the microphone. On the screen, she could see the fighting calm a little, with grots looking left and right for the source of the voice. “You can’t see me you daft gits. Cos’ I ain’t there. But youse are gonna listen to what I got to say, or we’re gonna have a good *TALK*.” She switched the *TALK* system to “prime”.

Suddenly, previously hidden turret-guns appeared everywhere, rising out from panels in the walls, from the ceiling, and even from the floor, sending a few unfortunate grots tumbling over. They flicked menacingly between targets. The fighting had completely stopped, most of the grots had even dropped their weapons. Blue noticed that Stabwound, Dak, and Ka, were all still alive, if a little bloodied. Good, she thought, that would make her job easier. Plus, if they didn’t comply this way she’d get to blast them to bits herself.

“You gits are all absolute zoggin’ idiots,” she began.

“Thing is, so was I fer thinkin’ I could win this battle without havin’ to use some good old-fashioned threatenin’. So this is my threat: Either you all go back to your arms, or I will turn y’ into grot mince.

“Y’ see, you just don’t unnerstand the full picture. Supposin’ you all kept fightin’ this daft zoggin’ war. What then? Well, you’d all end up dead. Neither of you would actually *win*. It ain’t even possible. Y’ve got the same number of gits, an’ neither of you fight any harder than the other. It’s a stayul-mate.

“So you’d all be dead. Thing is, the rest of us need you stoopid gits. If you all died, who would run Boris’s arms? Eh? No git knows more ‘bout guns than a Shootist, right?” There was a cheer.

“An’ no git knows more ‘bout blades than a Choppist.” Another cheer erupted.

“But you’d of had a war. An’ you’d all be zoggin’ dead. So some other gits would have to take yer place. Some git from, I dunno, Piston Plaza, or one o’ the legs, or even the zoggin’ council. Imagine. What would they do if they were there? Zog all, that’s what, they’d let everythin’ rust an’ stop workin’. You want all yer fav’rit guns an’ blades in the hands of a zoggin’ POLITICIAN?”

“No!” came an emphatic response.

“An’ are you any use dead?”

“No!”

“So, are you gonna quit this stupid zoggin’ war?”

There was a murmur.

“WELL?” Blue fired a couple of rounds from one of the TALK. It had the desired effect.

“No...”

“Well good. Now, Stabwound, you are gonna shake hands with Dak ‘n’ Ka. An’ if you don’t, you’ll be shakin’ hands with Gork an’ Mork.”

Reluctantly, Stabwound trudged over to the Shootist bosses. He held out a hand. They glared at him.

“Shake.”

Dak and Ka sighed, defeated. They held out their hands too, and Stabwound shook both.

“There, was that so ‘ard? Now all of you BUGGER OFF afore I decide this “kill everythin’ that moves” button looks too appealin’.”

Slowly, all the grots on the battlefield started to shuffle back to their respective arms. Blue reclined in the chair. She had done it. She had stopped the war. Ok, so she had also started it, but who cares now? She had done it. Mr Squig was safe after all.

Little patted her on the shoulder, respectfully.

“Yew did it. Yew stopped the war. Gettin’ a war underway, an’ then stopping it again. What yew did today might of been the craziest thing any grot has ever done.”

“Yer,” agreed Large, “an’ I’z seen da runnin’ of da squigs four times.”

Blue let out a contented sigh. It was over. What a terrible zoggging day.

Part VI: Out With The Old

The journey back to the head council was simple, and fast. It was just a lifting-box ride away, short enough that Blue barely noticed the tinny music and slight smell of urine. Sergeant Little and Officer Large had gone to make sure the Choppists and Shootists all returned to their arms without any trouble, leaving her alone to make her way to the head office.

The doors slid open, onto the pristine corridors. If she ever had to see this place again it'd be too soon, she thought. Considering there had been a war only a few floors below them, nobody seemed particularly bothered. They were talking and laughing around the water-bubblers, bumping into each other and apologising, and generally mucking about like nothing had changed. Blue wondered what it would take to actually shake them out of their field of self-importance, but she didn't really care that much.

As she continued through the offices, she heard a distorted voice coming from a badly-tuned radio in one of the bureaucrat's cubicles. She paused for a moment to listen.

“-top stories today are: -BOM BOM- Civil war breaks out in Titanopolis, Shootist and Choppist tensions peaking in a bloody confrontation. -BOM BOM- New head councillor elected, promising to usher in a new era of profitability for all. -BOM BOM- And could squig tea be giving you cancer? Our news team investigates.” A short jingle played.

“Shootists, and Choppists. Two of the largest factions in Titanopolis, often thought of as harmless savants of their chosen weaponry, with an unhealthy dislike for their opposite number. Today, however, opinions may have changed. Armed conflict erupted during an unexplained meeting of the leaders of both sides, a massive escalation from what used to be simply mild skirmishes and the occasional murder. We now go live to our reporter on the scene of the brutal battle. What's it like down there, Mushroom?”

“...you don't stop muckin' about with that zoggin' speaky stick I'll ram it-

“Mushmouth?”

“Oh, er, yes, it’s an absolute mess here. There are bodies everywhere, as far as the eye can see. Blood has been splattered all over the walls, limbs are strewn about the place, it’s like, er, well, it’s a lot like a war zone.”

“So the fighting is going on as we speak?”

“Excuse me?”

“The fighting. From the war. Is it going on right now? Can you let us listen in to the sound of battle?”

“Er, not as such, no.”

“Not as such?”

“There’s not much to hear really.”

“You said it was like a war zone!”

“Yeah, it is, there’s just no fighting. Everyone sort of packed up and went home. There are a few looters, I could talk to them if you-”

“Mushmouth, thank you. Well, there you have it listeners, we have peace in our time. What were your favourite moments of the war? Call in and tell us on 1800-GROT-TALK, calls cost three teef per minute. Now we have a few words from our sponsors, but after the break we have an exclusive interview with a grot who claims he found Mork in a rust patch, plus a way to clean a bloody gun using only grease and a squig’s spleen. Stay tuned!” The jingle played again.

“‘Ow many times ‘ave you found yerself tryin’ ta pick bits o’ squig outta yer teef with a toofpick, only fer it ta break in yer fingers? My name’s Grotface, an’ I’m ‘ere ta int-row-deuce my new kreeashun: the patented nyoomatic toofpick. Simply plug it-”

Zog this, she thought, time to get my squig back, and maybe deal out a good krumping to that posh git for mucking me about so much. She started to make her way down towards the main office again, shoving a couple of grots out of the way and sending papers flying.

The secgrotary hadn’t moved from his/her/it’s position. The crossword had been replaced with a bunch of red and black cards, laid out in columns. He/she/it

drew some from a pile, and placed two of them onto a column. The level of mucking about in this place was off the chart, reflected Blue. It didn't matter now though. It was all over.

"You'll have to come back later, the councillor's very busy", said the secretary, again.

"On account of all the politics and stuff that he's doing. Now bugger off. Oh, it's you."

"Yeah, 's me. You finish that daft puzzle thing?"

"No, I got stuck. Bloody cryptic questions. Five letters. "You can start a war with them, fight a war with them, and even end a war with them." Guns doesn't fit."

"Words?" suggested Blue.

"Don't be daft. Whoever heard of a war of words? Anyway, you can go in now."

The doors began to open again, and Blue stepped once more into the squashed-circle office.

Sitting behind the desk was a smiling, smartly dressed grot. Not the same one as before though. Something was going on. Blue pointed a finger accusingly.

"You ain't the same git as last time!"

"An astute observation!" The new head councillor held his arms out triumphantly.

"I am the new head councillor. Maybe you've heard of me, I'm the former--"

"I don't zoggin' care about that! Where's the old git?" Blue was confused, and angry.

"Ah, well, we had an election you see," he said, with a friendly smile, "an election which I won."

"You wot?"

“I see you aren’t well versed in politics. An election is a-“

“Just tell me where the zoggin’ old git is!”

“I’m not sure I follow you, my friend.” Blue cried out in exasperation.

“You won th’ elecshun, right? I want to know where the git who lost is!”

“Oh, you needn’t worry about him. He had a bad election campaign; his days of power are all over now. I’m sure I can help you with whatever your problem may be-“

“JUST TELL ME EXACTLY WHERE HE ZOGGIN’ IS RIGHT ZOGGIN’ NOW!”

The head councillor sighed.

“Well, you’d be better asking Gork and Mork that, I’m afraid.”

“Wot.”

“He’s *dead*. The election campaign is a fight to the death.”

There was a long pause.

“What did you *think* it was?”

Blue stared at him.

“Oh,” the head councillor smacked his forehead, “you must be here about the squig. I’m terribly sorry, my memory had escaped me for a moment.” He opened a drawer, and pulled a disgruntled Mr Squig from it. He placed the little squig on the desk, and it scurried over to its master with a happy squeak.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a lot of work to be doing. It was very nice to meet you. Toodle-oo!” The doors opened, allowing a dazed Blue to finally walk away from her crash course in politics.

And that, as they say, was that.

Epilogue

Blue knocked on the heavy doors separating the bridge from rest of the titan. They didn't look like they were opened very often, though there was a small sliding box next to them, presumably for food. Even a titan has to eat.

"Oi, Boris, open up," said Blue to the door.

"Whozzit?" Came a reply.

"Blue. 'Ere to fix yer noggin tubes." She couldn't be bothered to explain what "neural cables" were.

"Oh, in dat case come on in." The doors unlocked with a clunk, and opened with a rush of steam.

Inside, was Boris. Or at least, what was left of his ork body. He was covered in cables, sticking into every part of him. He wore thick goggles, linked to the eye-cams outside, and on his ears were two massive sets of headphones. Full sensory deprivation, thought Blue, he was more machine than ork. He looked almost fused to his chair, and a greenish slime covered every part of him that wasn't a cable. His muscles had completely wasted away too, he was the thinnest ork Blue had ever seen, apart from maybe Threegrot. To complete the picture, there was a feeding tube that went up his nose, pumping a steady stream of mushed squig directly into his digestive system.

One of the wires stuck to his head was leaking a white fluid. Blue wandered over to a small cabinet, opened it, and pulled out a replacement. She clambered onto the former ork, making sure not to slip on the slime, and yanked out the broken connector. In its place, she roughly prodded in the new cable, right into his brain. Job done. Finally. She climbed down again, then slumped onto the floor, sitting cross-legged and staring pensively at nothing in particular.

"Boris?"

"Wut?" His voice sounded metallic and raspy.

“You ever think about yer body?”

“We’z been over dis Blue. My body’s big, an’ metal, an proppa ‘ard. I ain’t no squishy git anymore.”

“Nah, I get that. I’m talkin’ about yer titan body.” She picked at a bit of rust on the floor.

“Wut about it?”

“S just that, wot if summat went wrong inside it? Yer insides are all bein’ run by other gits, an’ if they stopped workin’ so would you. Doesn’t that bother you?”

There was a pause. Blue could hear the clicks and whirring of Boris’ life support system. Eventually, he spoke.

“I suppose I fink of it like dis: Y’know when sometimes ya get a thumpin’ ‘eadache when you ain’t been doin any fightin’? Or when ya tummy ‘urts but you ain’t been eatin’ anyfing bad? Ya’d not even feel like fighting or owt.” Blue did know what that was like. Living with orks didn’t do your health much good.

“Ya get to thinkin’ there’s only proppa bad stuff inside o’ ya, tryin’ to muck ya ‘bout. So ya lie down an’ sleep. An’ when ya wake up, ya feel like fightin’ an’ winnin’ just like normal. Cos’ even when dere’s loadsa proppa muckin about goin on inside ya from all dem bad gits, dere’s loadsa good gits too. An’ give da good gits inside a bit o’ time, dey’ll fix ya up right good. Like da painboys, only dey don’t try ta saw ya legs off. One o’ dem smart gits tried splainin’ it ta me once. Said it ‘ad a name. Summat like da im-yoon system.”

Blue lay back on the floor, resting her head on her hands, Mr Squig by her side.


“You gettin’ all smart on us now Boris?”

She smiled, and closed her eyes.

“Don’t bet on it, ya daft blue git.”

On the bridge of a massive steel titan, capable of razing cities and sending entire armies fleeing in terror, a little tau girl named Blue fell fast asleep.

THE END



If you have enjoyed this, but haven't read anything about the Scraplootas before, make sure to check out their page at:

<http://www.1d4chan.org/wiki/Scraplootas>

Thanks for reading!