

CORKI

Short Story: The Bigger They Are

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“Can you conceive of a more opportune time to test it! A more suitable subject!?”

I stare into Cecil’s furry face and wonder if at last the old boy’s finally quaffed too much of his own engine cleaner.

“I’m retired, Ceec. Smackin’ down big fellas is all behind me,” I tell him.

“Where’s your daring gallantry, your famed intrepidity! And consider too the agreeable symmetry of this pending endeavor!” Cecil B. Heimerdinger chirps at me. “The bold inventor, his tools of devastation unequalled! The young and brash and significantly less mentally apt pilot . . . and, of course, the colossal villain!”

“Young?”

“Of spirit, partner!”

I cross my arms and stare up at the meganormous turret hanging from a spiderweb of chains above the workshop. It’s a brass beast, a tangle of barrels and belt feeders, a techmaturgical marvel of munitions fit to swat the gods themselves from the sky.

Or to blow up spectacularly the first time I squeeze the trigger.

“What’s wrong with the ‘ole lead sled?” I ask, and jerk my thumb at the gyro being taken apart and put back together again by Heimerdinger’s assistants.

“What’s wrong with horses, Corki? What’s the matter with a chamber pot? What’s the problem with tools of stone and dirt!” He really cranks up now, drawing a furious breath through clenched teeth. “The forward march of our most intellectual and innovative magnificence demands – “

I hold my hand up.

“I’ll do it.”

Heimerdinger bangs his spanner and against the table and hops up on one foot.

“You enjoy upsetting the applecart of my delicate melancholic temperaments, don’t you?” Heimerdinger demands.

I click a finger-gun at him and then turn to the assistants crawling over my gyro.

“Double-time it, gents,” I say as I slap my cap over my head. “We’ve got a Plod to pound.”

* * *

The gyrocopter’s blades churn the cold air, and I loose a manful squeal of delight as I send the ole bucket through a standard loop.

She’s slow on the uptake, foundering for purchase in what ought to be a chaff maneuver.

I punch the big red button on my dashboard, and the squawkbox buzzes to life:

“Corki to Cecil. This big gun of yours is draggin’ me down.”

The squawkbox hisses, and the raw sound quality squishes Heimerdinger’s voice into even more squeaky spectrums.

“Additional ballast affects both aerodynamics and engine strain – “

I punch the box again.

“I know that. But it don’t leave much room for acrobatics and evasion,” I say.

“You’ll require no such defensive duplicity. A single volley will reduce a mountain to scoops of gravel, such is the pugilitive power of the Mighty Marvelous Meg!”

“Is that the name?” I ask.

“Of course!”

“Are we positive that’s the name?”

I jerk my peepers from the squawkbox long enough to spot my quarry, not that it takes a particularly sharp eye.

A carpet of fog obscures Piltover's channel and creeps over the seaward edges of the City of Progress. The clouds hang heavy and gray, but have yet to drop their payload. It's a soup, and had no doubt grounded the majority of Piltover's fliers.

Of course, I'm not exactly the majority of Piltover's fliers.

I shed altitude, keeping a weather eye on my gauges – I'm used to the normal clearance at the bottom of my gyro, could skate across a frozen lake like an ice dancer. Unfortunately, Cecil's Mighty Marvelous Meg adds another six feet below my plane, and he'd be mighty, marvelously angry if I banged it into a sea rock.

A yellowish form rises from the fog on the banks of the channel, lumbering along the beach like a shedded sailor. My old eyeballs tell me the beast stands sixty feet high if a foot, and boasts twice the bulk to round out its horror.

Fat overlaps muscles, and the beast wears nothing but the ragged twist of an old sloop sail as a loincloth. A pair of clouded eyes dominate its face, and when it hears the buzz of my bucket those eyes find me.

The Plod raises its tree – not a club, mind you, a tree. It's brandishing an entire ironwood tree.

I take the Plod's raised tree as a salute and snap off one of my own.

The squawkbox crackles to life: "Have you found it?"

I smack the switch that kills the squawkbox and throw the gyro into a gut-wrenching dive.

I'm dropping faster than I planned to, thanks to Cecil's ridiculous turret, so I have less time to fiddle with the targeting scopes.

The new equipment sticks out of my dashboard like a brass tumor. I grab a hold of the massive scope and crank it until the Plod's face fills my vision. Then, as instructed, I prime Meg's munitions feeder with three sharp yanks on the lever.

The entire gyro shudders as the huge turret cranks into place, its massive barrels facing the Plod like the broadside of a battleship.

"Incomin'!"

I jam my thumbs on the trigger sticks and grit my teeth and shutter my eyes and –
Nothin'.

Not a damn thing happens.

The Plod's face is racing up toward me like a bad dream *about* a nightmare.

I belt my filthiest curse and yank the yolk as hard as I can. My feet jam the rudders.

The gyro's engines scream.

I just shave the Plod's cheek and bolt off into the Wild Blue.

“CECIL YOU BRAVO FOXTROT WHAT IN THE SOUR HELL ARE YOU TRYIN' TO PULL?”

There's a moment of silence. Then the box chirps.

“Oops.”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN OOPS.”

“I take it the Meg misfired?”

“How do you know that, Cecil?!”

A beat.

“I just noticed the Meg's primary firing shank lying on my table here.”

I scream into the howling wind and send the gyro into a wide bank. When my throat is sore, and my face is cherry red I hit the squawkbox again.

“Going to switch to standard weapons package,” I growl.

“Oh. Hmm. Uh . . . about that.”

“About. What.”

“It was necessary to remove your weapons package for weight purposes. It's actually interesting because – “

I reach behind my seat, yank the wrench from my emergency repair kit, and bash the squawkbox until it can't squawk no more.

“Okay, Corki,” I say to myself, even though the wind eats most of it. “What now?”

The Plod's forgotten about me – one lazy swing at nothing and he goes right back to lumbering. His cloudy eyes are on Piltover's spindly towers and spanning

bridges, the ships cutting the fog and the regular folks zooming around their regular lives.

I grind my teeth.

Then, I grin.

Of course.

I point the gyro's vector toward the Plod, then I crank the altitude to angle just above its head. Then comes the tricky part – I snap on the autopilot and grab my trusty wrench.

The air whips my face as I climb out of my seat and struggle over the dashboard. I stick the wrench in my teeth and find handgrips along the fuselage of the copter, being sure to keep my head low to avoid propeller decapitation.

Below me, the Plod's getting closer. 20 seconds, maybe less, until I'm right over his head.

My mouth tastes like wrench oil.

I dig one foot into the engine compartment and lean over the side of the gyro. The sight of the channel so far below doesn't scare me, but it's beauty pulls my eyes all the same.

I loosen the first big bolt holding the Mighty Marvelous Meg to the gyro's cowling. It's not on very tight, because *Cecil*. Then, I rotate on my bum, switch legs, and lean over the starboard side of the plane.

This bolt is tighter, because now it's holding all of the tension. I set my wrench and throw every ounce of yordel strength I can muster. Sweat springs up on my face and is immediately swept away. My muscles strain. My back promises me quite a show for tomorrow.

I think of the regular folks in the Piltover market.

“BOMB'S AWAY!” I scream, and the bolt snaps under my wrench.

The gyro bobs up, suddenly, devoid of the Meg's mighty weight.

Silence, for a moment.

I know Heimerdinger. He's a genius, a truly remarkable inventor of prodigious talent and guts.

I also know that about 79% of his prototypes explode on impact.

Below me, the Plod looks up. His cloudy eyes have trouble focusing, and I can't be sure if he's looking at me, the plane, or the enormous brass turret falling right toward his upturned face.

I plug my ears and tuck my head against the gyro's fuselage and wait for the world to detonate.

BONK.

A big, metal bonking sound. No explosion. No fire.

I glance over the edge of the gyro.

The Plod staggers, an enormous welt covering the beast from forehead to mouth. It's cloudy eyes cross, and it lets out a single, rumbling word:

“MURPH?”

Its eyes roll back, and the Plod collapses like a dynamited building into the sand. A great plume rises in all directions, signaling the defeat of the enormous beast.

The Marvelous Mighty Meg clanks to the beach beside it and rolls slowly into the water. I sigh deeply and climb back into the cockpit.

On the way back to Cecil's workshop, I wonder if he'll make me another.

Taking out a Plod in one shot?

I mean, come on.

The End