

The Broommaker

By RoweGuy

“A broom of quality craft could carry a man through life by its lonesome, and every broom created by a guildmember’s hand was a broom of quality craft.”

Such was included in the history of the Broommaker’s Guild that Dr. Margaret Kane imparted upon Jayo during his training. Once he had graduated from her tutorship, he was glad to have become a member of the prestigious society.

Jayo *was* glad of his membership until one morning when received an anonymous letter outlining the particularities of a broom that he was to be commissioned to create. The letter listed the materials to be used, detailed the mechanisms it must contain, and referenced a later delivery of necessary exotic components. Upon reading the letter, Jayo was filled with dread that was quickly dashed away with the realization that the proposition could be a practical joke made by a friend. His worries fading, Jayo gave a half-hearted chuckle. His fear returned the next morning when an anonymous parcel appeared on his doorstep, containing the exotic components referenced by the letter and payment substantial enough to nullify the chances of the order being a joke. After the arrival of this parcel Jayo worked in a restless fervor to summon the commissioned object from the instructions in the letter.

Most of the broom’s specifications were run-of-the-mill. The plans called for a generic metal alloy casing, a mechanical unfolding steam-distributor, air moisture intake vents, an (unusually large) nuclear heat source, and other standard features, all of which brought a semblance of normalcy to the project. Dr. Kine was not present to guide Jayo’s hand, but he worked with all the expertise she had blessed him with. In his workshop, Jayo carved the inside of the alloy rod to create just enough space for

each component, implanted cera-rubber lining to keep the appliance solid and insulated, and precisely inserted each part, making sure the steam chain was airtight to the atomic level. This broom would bear the craftsmanship of a guildmember and would be expected to function continually for at least a century before needing to be recharged, refilled, or replaced.

As per the plans of the letter, the broom became subverted when Jayo sawed off the last half foot of the rod, usually reserved to be the handle that would spin to unlock the steam distributor and power on the device. Taking the length of metal, he sawed it again in half, this time lengthwise. One half he reattached to the broom, the other he carved out and fitted with a hinge system that would allow the half to swing down, revealing a firearm stock and a trigger.

Once the broom was assembled, it resembled a common steam broom. Twisting the end of the handle clockwise would start the system, unfolding the steam distributor, filling and compressing the internal water reservoir, and heating the steam train. This application of the device Jayo would have been proud of, as it represented some of his best work, if his loathing of the other application were not so monolithic. Twisting the end of the handle counterclockwise unlocked the weapon stock and overclocked the heat source to beyond what Jayo thought possible. What would normally be scalding steam would become superheated matter, ejected at blistering speeds for up to 100 yards before cooling to nonlethal temperatures.

Jayo had constructed a deadly plasma rifle.

The military applications of the fourth state of matter were not widely proven, but inspired controversy, nonetheless. Years ago, an anonymous soul, said to be from within the City Department of Defense, had begun horrific rumors of extensive and extensively inhumane experiments. At the time this leak prompted protests for transparency and the scuttling of the supposed technology. Years later,

though, the stories were denied, exaggerated, laughed at, and regarded as nothing more than the fruit of the population's general distrust in the City Government.

Even having the untested prototype safely locked in a crate to be shipped to his anonymous patron, Jayo was sick with dread. Jayo rubbed his hands. They were ice cold, soaking wet, and shaking. At this moment, one wouldn't be able to tell that the appendages were conduits for talent enough to create an unheard-of weapon. If he were discovered to have manufactured the weapon, and that he had done so at the behest of an unknown criminal, he would be ejected from the Broommaker's Guild and sent to the City Penitentiary for the longest time allowed by the law. As he submitted the unassuming cargo to the hands of the postal service, he imagined its destination to be an infinitely terrible place in the depths of the city. He had never seen such a place, but his imagination was inspired by his equivalently evil actions. In his mind, it also became the location of his damnation.

Jayo flew, spiraling, into an infinite void of guilt, yet one thought kept him from the basement of depravity. The advice of his infallible mentor, Dr. Kine, had been to take, and be infinitely thankful for, any commission he could upon becoming a guildmember. This advice had thus far kept the fires of his conscience dormant, but Jayo was now being immolated. In self-preservation, he turned the flames outwards towards Dr. Kine. Despite her elderly appearance, she possessed a professional ruthlessness, the influence of which had undermined Jayo's morality during the construction of the broom. It was her fault the weapon's existence.

His hatred of Kine was growing, but it was frustrated by the late hour of the night. He resolved, upon getting home, to confront Kine the next day.

Jayo's passion cooled during the night, leaving him to reckon with the ill-placed blame of the previous evening. After some deliberation, he renewed his intentions to visit the doctor, though no

longer with accusation as the goal. Her stoicism had invariably been a foil to Jayo's obsession for perfection during his training, and so she would become his anchor yet again.

Kine's office was on the 24th floor of the Guildcentre, an imposing, utilitarian structure in which resided many societies dedicated to the art of crafts. He was familiar with the journey to her office, for he had made it many times during his tutorship. Various past scenarios entered Jayo's mind as he made the trek. The first journey was when he was forced to ask a janitor for directions. The second was when he was jubilant with the news that Kine had accepted his request for tutorship. The seventh he had made slowly out of childish dread of repercussions for a missed deadline. The eighth he had made with pride as he knew the doctor would be impressed with his renewed efforts. The fifteenth was one he made purely of his volition, for he had graduated from her guidance the previous morning. This journey would be the sixteenth.

"Ah, Jayo. How can I help you?"

Dr. Kine's greeting was polite, but not gentle, leaving Jayo's fragile will nearly defeated before it had been exposed. He nearly resolved to make small talk and leave before glancing upon Kine's own broom, whose traditional, innocuous design was identical to thousands of other brooms, including the weaponized one that had recently come into existence by Jayo's hands.

"Hello Dr. Kine. I need your advice pertaining to a broom I was recently commissioned to manufacture."

"A commission! How exciting. You'll have to tell me who your patron was, and how they had heard about you. I hope you didn't let them talk their way into a discount, like I told you some would."

Kine's ravenous curiosity proved to be a brutal spur that would inspire a full confession. He admitted that he knew not the patron nor their history, and that he *had* been compensated

substantially, though for discretion more than prestige. He said frankly that he had constructed a weapon for an anonymous buyer. Kine sat in attentive silence as he spoke, her hard features not betraying her emotions. Upon the conclusion of Jayo's outpouring, she took up her broom, placed her hands on the top of the handle, and rested her chin there. She sat with her eyes closed for a few minutes, seeming to be asleep, until suddenly rising with her broom, carrying it like a cane in her hands. Standing before Jayo, she pointed to him with the broom, at last ready to impart her wisdom.

"Jayo, I understand that you have made a mistake. I know that it will be hard to deal with, but it has already been done, and there's nothing that you or I can do now."

Kine had always revealed her thoughts sparingly, as though they were precious. In this encounter she had let on as little as usual, and with her final regards Jayo departed, his heart instantly eviscerated by a discharge of superheated plasma.

Kine twisted the handle of her weapon clockwise. She had some cleaning to do before meeting with representatives from the City Department of Defense later. Jayo had shit the bed, but at least he had done it in a manageable way.

Jayo solved her prototype problem. The prototype solved her Jayo problem. Money and power would solve the future investigation into her former student's death. Her books were balanced. With no further need to dwell on the subject, but much more blood to mop up, Kine took the opportunity to further conceptualize her corporate empire.

"Kine Dynamics, LLC. That's what I'll call it."