

The Art of Gunge

Written by Iron-K, 2023

“Hey, Gaz!”

Ghazarat’s tall ears pricked as he heard the familiar voice of the black lab right behind him. The golden jackal stretched his neck as he looked up from the long equipment list that he had been checking as present and working in the backstage area of the studio.

“Yes, boss?” He turned around, flexing his hand, which was beginning to ache from initialling so many boxes.

“Ha, nobody calls me ‘boss’! ‘Mika’ or ‘Mick’ is fine...” The canine waved his hand, a jovial smile on his face. “How’s the equipment check going?”

“Uh, nearly done...” Gaz looked back at the sheets on the wheeled cart he was using as a writing surface. “Just one faulty cable so far, one of the large plug... sound... you know the ones. I replaced it.”

“Thanks,” Mika nodded. “Got something else for you before you finish... I gave you the worst job in the studio, so it’s fair you get the best - how are you at making gunge?”

“Uh...” Ghazarat felt a tingle in his neck at the sound of the word, but tried to keep his face straight. “I, uh, don’t know...”

“Want to find out?” Mika asked with a grin, and continued as the jackal nodded unsurely. “Okay, listen carefully, this is my magic formula...”

Gaz nodded along, trying to remember all the details as the canine explained the process to him - hot tap water in a bucket, stirred into a paste with five scoops of thickener and poster paint, then topped off and thinned with lukewarm water.

“Got it,” he nodded after he’d asked Mika to repeat the steps once again. “How much do you need?”

“Ten gallons. Let’s see...” Mika glanced at one of the schedules for the day taped onto the boards that made up the back of the show’s set. “And... they’re gonna do the snot game next, so you need to make both light and dark green. Some yellow in one batch, and a tiny bit of black in the other. Think you can do it?”

Ghazarat nodded quickly, running through the steps in his head again as he walked briskly to one of the double doors in the large studio wall, and made his way across the corridor to the storage room that Mika jokingly called his office. He had been in this room earlier in the morning to retrieve a variety of other things - wire shelving units lined the walls, straining under the

weight of the various tools, equipment and props. A painter's drop cloth was now spread out in the corner with a workbench and sink, next to an open grey plastic storage bin crudely labelled "GUNGE" with a marker pen.

The drill that Mika had mentioned was lying on its side on the workbench, its previous user had left its paint stirrer attachment hanging over the sink. Gaz approached it and stared fascinatedly at the thick blue slime slowly oozing from it for a moment before shaking his head and turning the tap on.

Looking around the nearby floor as he rinsed the stirrer off, he saw one orange mixing bucket with gooey blue residue inside, then a stack of clean ones. He picked one off the top and waited for the water to start steaming, then held the bucket under it for a few moments.

After getting a few inches of water in the bucket, Gaz turned his attention to the grey box, which held a large white plastic sack and a multitude of paint-encrusted squeezable bottles. He unfurled the scrunched top of the sack and peered inside, seeing a black scoop measure in the mass of cornstarch-like powder.

"Five scoops," he said to himself, and counted them out as he quickly transferred them to the bucket. He grabbed a bottle of green paint and squeezed half of it in as well, guessing as to the amount to use. Glancing down at the unpleasant amalgam now in the bucket, he reached to the sink to retrieve the drill and stirrer, then leaned over the bucket as he dipped the circular blade into the mixture and pulled on the trigger.

"F...!" He jumped back as an arc of powdery coloured water exploded out of the bucket, hitting him in the shins and splattering in a circle on the edges of the ground sheet. Wincing, he looked down at his trousers, and tried to brush away the stripe of green-stained powder as he felt the hot water dripping into his shoes. Looking around, he leaned the unwieldy drill and stirrer against one of the shelves, then crouched to quickly take his shoes and socks off.

He sighed as he rubbed his feet on the cloth, and put an extra splash of water and another scoop of powder into the bucket to make up for the spill. Grabbing the drill again, he hesitantly tugged the trigger, getting a feel for how much to pull it to get a slower spin, then dipped the end back in the water and breathed as he managed to get it stirring without flying skywards.

Gaz watched the mixture anxiously for a few moments, moving the whirring stirrer around the bottom of the bucket as the green water formed a whirlpool splashing lightly around inside. His eyes widened as he suddenly noticed a change in the liquid's heaviness, the well where the stirrer was poking into it getting smoother and gloopier. He stopped stirring for a moment and shook the bucket, and smiled as he watched the surface of the now-thick liquid gloop lazily back and forth.

After stirring the mixture for a few more seconds, he breathed out relievedly as the slime thickened further into the paste that he had been aiming for, and added a splash of yellow paint

then turned the tap to lukewarm as he shoved the bucket back underneath. He remembered Mika's instructions to try to make the finished product very slightly colder than he could imagine being comfortable to get poured over his head, and shuddered at the mental image as he slowly topped the bucket off, alternately stirring and dipping his fingers hesitantly into the glop to feel its temperature until the stuff returned to the heavy gloopy texture that it had gone through as it thickened.

Turning the drill off, he let the bright green stuff on the stirring blade gloop and drizzle back into the bucket for a few seconds before setting it aside. He stared down at the full bucket in the sink with a smile, and hesitated as he hovered his hand over the surface. With a glance at the door, he breathed in and dipped his hand into the glop.

"Oh, whoa..." He felt his fur bristle as the gunge surrounded his hand and forearm, thick and heavy as he stirred it around underneath the surface. It felt cool but not unpleasantly cold, and its heavy stickiness seemed to suck at his arm as he moved it around. Withdrawing his arm, he shuddered as the stuff formed a long dripping green glove, spilling in a gloopy web between his outstretched fingers before it dropped back into the bucket in heavy dollops and strings.

He scraped his other hand along his arm a couple of times to get some of the gunge off before nudging the bucket aside and putting his arms under the tap, rinsing them off quickly as he became aware of how much time he was taking. He worked on the remaining three buckets quickly, one with another yellow splash and two with black.

As he was grinning down at the last batch of dark green stuff being stirred, he jumped at the sound of the door opening. He straightened up quickly, his finger moving off the drill's trigger.

"Oh, hi!" A curly-haired brown mouse came in, two heavy-duty extension cords around her shoulders - Ghazarat had seen her that morning among the crew on the studio floor. "I see Mika gave you gunge duty..."

"Um... yeah." Ghazarat twitched and felt his face heat up as the mouse casually moved to the other end of the room and hung up the cables.

"Heh, I know - it's not exactly the glamorous TV producer life on your first day," she laughed. "It means he trusts you, though - he takes pride in that stuff. You're like the... slime wizard's apprentice, or something..." She stopped suddenly in place with a gasp and Gaz's heart skipped a beat, his mind racing, wondering if she'd somehow seen he was enjoying himself...

"No! The Snot-ceror's Apprentice!" she beamed, clapping her hands together and pointing as she laughed at her own pun. "How did I not think of that before..."

Ghazarat rearranged his face into a smile, breathing out and realizing that he didn't even know why he was embarrassed. "Hah..." he managed, turning away to haul the last bucketful from the sink to join the cluster on the floor. "Do you think it looks okay?"

“Looks great to me! We’ll see if it passes Mika’s inspection,” the mouse grinned, dunting her foot against one of the buckets and watching the lazy slosh of the opaque dark glop inside. “That’s a lot of it, too - need a hand taking it through?”

“Oh - sure, please. Thanks.” Gaz took two of the mixing buckets as the mouse grabbed the others, and they carried the heavy loads back around the corner to the studio. He continued to follow her across the dark backstage area, and set the buckets down with hers as they reached a wooden platform mounted on scaffolding at about head height, nestled against the back of the set wall.

“All right! That’s its last stop,” the mouse said, and Gaz craned his neck up to follow her pointing finger. There were two oval holes in the set wall a couple of feet apart, with pieces of plastic pipe nailed just below them to form chutes. “Have you seen the giant nose they use to gunge people?”

“Heh - I have...” Gaz said, trying to force himself to reply with anything more than two syllables. “It’s, uh, an impressive sight...” He’d seen the huge prop early in the morning on the way in, a massive green canine muzzle poking down into a booth set against the wall, its nostrils hovering ominously over a plastic chair.

He was saved by a buzz from the mouse girl’s pocket, and she looked down as she pulled her phone out. “Okay, I’d better go,” she said quickly. “I’ll get Mika to come over, have fun!”

“Bye...” Gaz said vaguely to the mouse’s back as she dashed away, then looked behind him at the platform. Curiously, he moved around to the other side and climbed the stepladder to get on to it.

He approached one of the holes cut into the wall, leaned against the plywood surface and put his head slightly into the gap. By looking down at an angle, he could just see the player who had been put inside the booth on the other side of the wall - a plump white dragoness who looked about his age, her low-angled white horns poking through a mop of bright blue hair.

“Wow, Gaz - thought you needed some backup gunge?”

“What?” Ghazarat asked, quickly withdrawing from the opening and turning to see Mika looking up at him. “Uh, I mean...” he fumbled as he looked down at the four buckets, “you said ten gallons light, ten gallons dark, didn’t you?”

“Oh - no, man, I meant five each...” Mika replied, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Agh! Um.” Ghazarat glanced at the group of buckets, feeling his face heating up again. “Should, I, uh, move two out the way for later?”

Mika shook his head. "No way - we've got all this, we're using it!" he grinned. "It's a good colour, too..."

Trying to forget his embarrassment, Gaz followed Mika's instructions as they swapped positions, and he handed the heavy buckets up to him to haul on to the raised surface. After some straining, they had lifted all four of them, and Gaz climbed the short ladder up to join Mika, who was staring down one of the openings in the wall.

"That girl's not gonna know what hit her," he cackled as he shook his head.

Gaz leaned over to look down the chute on his side again, glimpsing the dragon girl's nervous pose, her hands clasping and unclasping on the arms of the seat. He ducked back as she twisted and glanced upwards.

"What's the matter - you feeling guilty about pouring all this slime onto her?" Mika asked with a grin as he put his hand on Gaz's shoulder.

"I..." Gaz hesitated, then nodded. "Yes, kinda, yeah...!" he stammered. "It's, um, a new thing for me..."

"Oh, you'll get over it soon," the black lab smirked. "The kids love it - even the ones who aren't in school any more..."

The two of them quietened as they listened to the game being announced, and Gaz's heart thumped as he imagined being in the dragon girl's position. After she and the host exchanged some introductions, the game got underway, and Gaz's nerves were set even more on edge by the ticking of a timer as the dragoness tried to encourage a hesitant phone contestant in her attempt to save her.

"What do we do if she wins?" Gaz whispered across to the canine.

"She won't!" Mika replied with a smile. "They make these games impossible, even though they seem easy... they want to see 'em gunged but leave that tiny thrill of escape..."

Gaz smiled weakly, and looked down the gunge chute again. The ticking of the timer was getting more insistent - and as the host congratulated the phone contestant on achieving just her second step, the dragoness flinched at the noise of a rasping buzzer.

"Yup - not even close!" Mika smirked. "Okay, the big moment - are you ready?" The canine pulled the two buckets of darker-colored gunge towards him, lifted one and balanced it against the opening on the wall. Lightheadedly, Gaz quickly looked around and grabbed the remaining two buckets, stooping to drag them over to himself.

“When you hear the sound guy ring the alarm, that’s our cue,” Mika said as Gaz lifted his first bucket. He had just got it into position when his stomach jumped as the blare of a siren sounded around the studio.

“Go!”

Gaz held his breath and levered the heavy bucket up on the lip of the opening, the thick slime inside sloshing as it poured down the chute. A second later his ears twitched as a feminine shriek came from the other side of the wall amid a wet, heavy splattering noise. His heart thumped as the cheering from the audience intensified, doing his best to concentrate on matching the angle of the bucket with the canine next to him.

After several seconds, Mika withdrew the bucket, dropped it to the floor and grabbed the second one, hauling it up and pouring it in place of the first. Pouring the rest of his down quickly, Gaz reached for his second one as well, spilling some gunge down the wall as he fumbled it into position. Gradually, he felt the bucket getting lighter as the alarm faded out, leaving the cheering of the audience and the squelching, splattering noise of the gunge dripping down on the other side of the wall.

“Beautifully delivered,” Mika grinned at him as Gaz wearily lifted the bucket off the lip of the chute, dropping it to the floor. The canine leaned slightly to look down the opening on his side, and Gaz noticed his eyes widening.

“Holy...” he managed, then collapsed into a laugh as he stepped back. Gaz looked to the chute on his own side and put his hand on the lip, twitching as the spilled gunge on its surface slithered under his fingers.

He carefully leaned into the slimy opening and gasped as he saw the scene beneath - the dragoness was now the centrepiece of a huge splatter shape that covered the base and walls of the booth, barely recognizable with her whole body utterly painted in oozing dark and light greens. He shuddered as he watched the thick slime continuing to drizzle down onto her from the edges of the opening, splutting onto her head and shoulders then mingling into the folds of dark and light green slowly sliding down her.

“Oh my god, the poor kid...!” the canine laughed hysterically behind him. “That was perfect - you got the thickness just right...”

“Th... thanks... Gaz nodded vaguely, still staring at the scene below.

“Okay.” Mika cleared his throat, laughing one more time before being able to speak again. “That was amazing - I’ll go down and rescue her, I’ll be back in a second...”

Gaz half-listened to him making his way back to the floor, still mesmerized by the gunge-covered dragon girl as she dazedly responded to a question from one of the presenters.

Finally pulling himself away from the spectacle, he descended the ladder as well. With his heart still thumping, he breathed out and slowly wandered towards the corner where the bright stage lights spilled out from the set.

“Gunged kid coming through!”

He jumped back as he heard Mika’s call, and the canine reappeared wheeling a plastic laundry cart with a green dripping mass sitting inside - the dragon girl’s embarrassed grin was just visible under the wobbling globs of slime hanging from her hair and face. Mika leaned back to stop the cart as he drew up alongside him.

“Hey Gaz, there’s a break now - could you grab her friend Madison and meet up with us in dressing room one?” Mika asked. “Squirrel, bright red all over - you can’t miss her.”

“Sure.” Gaz nodded, still staring as the dragon girl wiped at her face. She blinked and he met eyes with her for just a fraction of a second, his heart jumping as he felt her tired, happy energy radiating even through the gunge dripping all over her face. He smiled, then shuddered as Mika pushed her forwards again, and after staring after her for a moment, he turned to go back to his equipment checklist.

“And one more thing...” He jumped as he heard the canine call again, and looked back over his shoulder.

“You’re definitely making the gunge again next week!”