

Beep, beep, beeeep! A three tone chorus rang in the air, echoing off the domed roof as another wave began.

Broken, twisted music played through the air, with sleigh bells added over the top to mock and parody an event that had happened during the Wintersday celebrations in the cities. There, Toymaster Tixx's airship, a source of joy and creative presents, had suffered a severe catastrophe, with the toys banding together and rebelling requiring the intervention of adventurers to quell them and set things back to normal.

In this recreation, hosted in an underground Inquest facility, it was not toys that attacked in waves but more of the villainous group's 'test subjects' and prisoners, thrown out into a world of artificial snow and festive decorations against Inquest constructs specifically designed to rise against them.

"Mmmhgh, ghmhffh!" Severa yelled through a hefty ball-gag into the opaque box she'd woken up in. Hearing the trio of beeps in the air once again before the door abruptly slid open. She hissed in the harsh light, pulling back and glancing down with dismayed annoyance at her own appearance. She'd felt the tight straitjacket, part of a one-piece jumpsuit, yet she'd not been aware that the exterior had been lined with a softer appearance than usual, in ugly 'festive' colours and patterns.

Sounds echoed oddly in the dome, making it hard to trace the origin as she heard frantic yells from other charr, some sounding like a muffled warcry, others like defeated grunts and overlapping chatter from the automated toys that they were ill prepared to fight.

A heavier thud snapped her attention to something closer. One of the large security golems was marching toward her cell, the only difference between the regular versions and these 'Wintersday' ones was the wreath around its neck.

Severa knew better than to risk facing that down and so she ducked out of the cell, running to the side. The golem ignored her and plodded toward the box itself, making the threat obvious; Any charr that stayed in their cells would be handled in the old fashioned way.

No sooner had she ran from its view than she wondered if she'd have been better off staying, as several smaller toys sighted her and began to chase in a pack.

Calling them toys seemed wrong, as no one in their right minds would see the minute creatures and think them even morbidly appealing. Each looked like they had been designed by someone who had only heard the concept of toys without any understanding beyond that some looked vaguely doll-like and others like toy animals or vehicles. Even worse; all of them were armed.

A nasty electric current sparked at the tips of those with more obvious weapons, the charge high enough to bring even a charr warrior in their prime to the ground. While others had more abstract devices on show, the barrels they sported spoke of a projectile nature.

Something whizzed behind her, making a disconcerting splat sound, yet she didn't turn, all around her the place had been decorated like a themed enclosure, fake mountains and trees, with one giant Wintersday tree dominating the middle, littered with presents around the base decorated with shiny thick ribbons.

There was an oddity to those gifts which caught Severa's eye, many of them were moving, as though the boxes were soft rather than firm and from several angles she could see; charr paws. Her fellow test subjects were fighting to stay free and those who were defeated were recaptured, packaged up and humiliated with only their feet on show.

Running to the presents seemed only to be a good idea if she could find some way to break her fellow charr free, first. Instead she steered away before the chasing toy pack could corral and herd her to their choosing.

*Squelch.* The sound made Severa groan into the hefty ball as her bare toes braced to walk into the snow, only to find it was not cold and frozen but thick and sticky goo. "Mhmmh!" She gasped, stepping out and wrenching her foot. In a relieving twist, the gooey mass snapped, heavy residue clinging but not leaving her rooted in place. By now the toys had almost caught up she realised she had no choice but to run into the sticky mire.

"Ghhhr bhhnhm hnngh." She growled in frustration as she ran forward, quickly turning to a mere waddle as she had to put a striding effort into trudging even a single length of her body.

Above the gooey, gurgling furrows she left, the toys ran on, most of them light enough to dance over the surface without so much as leaving footprints. The heavier ones split and started to run around the bank to cut off wherever she might try and go.

"Mhhh, hmghh..." Severa let out inarticulate groans into the gag as her exhaustion grew. More beeps chimed in the air signalling more charr joining the twisted game, yet the pack of toys on her heels weren't interested in new prey.

While far from desirable, her situation had been going well until with a loud, comical sounding *splort* the charr felt a sharper pull of gravity. A hidden pocket in the mire had instantly plunged her from knee high to the waist. Her legs kicked, trying to find solid ground yet the thick gooey-white mire she was in held her back.

Soft slapping steps sounded behind her as a deer-like toy caught up, jabbing its antlers into the nape of Severa's neck. "Mmmh!" She grunted, feeling a jolting spark that pushed her forward making her body flail and go limp for a second, enough that any progress she'd thought she'd made was lost.

Two more toys drew up to her, humming broken and discordant versions of the Wintersday carols she had known. Her hands squirmed in the jacket as she tried to move and get out of the mire. The toys ignored the twisting torso and climbed to her shoulders, she felt

something cold and cloying over her scalp, seeing a rubbery strip when it was brought between her eyes. In bright red and green the two strips, wielded by the humming toys, were wrapped over her head, blindfolding her in the process.

The gaps between her jaws were blocked over, the wrap adding pressure to bite on the ball gag, while a third toy shoved something in over her mouth and nose. Her breath suddenly whistled as a tube caught it. The mystery of why they'd give her such a thing was revealed as more of the toys caught up, their various limbs laying on her head and shoulders with an obvious purpose; to push.

Each of them might have been light enough to traverse the sticky goo but together they could push with enough force that the Charr was sunk down, down. "Mmmph!" She grunted the caress of gooey pressure reaching her chest and then her shoulders, slurping up to her neck.

Soon, her head was the only thing she could wiggle above the surface and even that was diminished by the thick rubbery wrapping.

She sank until the sounds around her became muted, her ears covered, and soon the whole charr was submerged except for the long tube.

As soon as the push had stopped she felt more shifting, something hooked in even below that thick layer and then a *pull*. The force hauled at her, some of the toys had snuck straps into the rings of her jacket while she'd been distracted and with those the goop-coated charr was partly excavated.

Thickly coated in the gooey glue, she was weighed down to the point of seeming almost limp as they dragged her up and then along the base. The goo stuck on just enough that she couldn't kick or wiggle free of it.

Out of her sight, the heavier toys of the pack were at the other end of the straps, reeling her closer as more of the ribbon-weavers sprang forward. Severa felt a chorus of dull, splattering hits as the other toys bombarded her with stickier goo from their guns.

The ribbon weavers chased each splatter with their rubber streams, patting them down and smoothing them into position. Squirming for all she could, Severa was unable to stop the growing tightness, nor prevent them from rolling her onto her back and wrapping further.

"Mmmh! Mmmmh!" The wiggly blob that coated the charr was squeezed on, displacing some of the less sticky gunk while the more adhesive parts clung to the wrap.

As festive as it looked, there was nothing jolly or relaxed about Severa's situation. The spread even double wrapped her head with the glue ensuring it would stay in place.

Severa was finally dragged out of the fake snow-bank and she could only squirm in the tight enclosure as she felt a flat cushioned shape below her. The goo over her feet had half dripped off and the toys moved to clear the rest of it as a wedge was pushed in to keep them

raised. More plates were arranged around her forming an open-topped box. There was a pause as she was dragged away toward a station near the giant tree.

“Mmmh?! Mmhh!” she groaned in confusion, whining until she felt a sudden flood of liquid, a rubbery and stretchy mass was dumped over her. The breathing mask was stuck in place now, with the tube kept open to the air as the box-form filled to the surface. The solid layer fell away, replaced with a rubber ribbon that served a more decorative than useful function.

A short drag later and the game was over for Severa. In the hefty squirming ‘present box’ Severa thought she could dimly hear more beeps as still more subjects were subjected to the one-sided hunt and she realised that even if there were tools to help break others out, the packages were so much more than they had first seemed.

She was stuck inside with just her feet on display until the Inquest decided otherwise. With the holiday itself still weeks away, it was probably for the better that she didn’t see the ‘Do Not Open Until Wintersday’ label on her package...