
Death and Salvation

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Eventually, all mortal beings must face their end. For humans, death is a grim cloud on the horizon. For elves, death is a long, distant appointment. For goblins, death is just the cost of admission. Multiple societies have independently developed idioms to this effect. Citizens of old Benalia once said that something arrived “like death to a goblin” as a way of describing a sudden, inevitable consequence of poor choices. Dwarven comedies often marked the end of the second act with the sudden death of a goblin supporting character.

In contrast, there is a single goblin idiom that pertains to death. Spoken in the wake of a loss, its many interpretations roughly translate to, “Not me. Not today.”

It wasn't that goblins wanted to die; it was just that all the things they *did* want involved a much higher than usual chance of accidental death. Goblins loved nothing more than explosions, open flames, and steep drops. A goblin that lives without risk is seen to have hardly lived at all. Given their lifestyle, Dominaria's goblin population persisted on a wave of sheer luck. And no goblin had been luckier than Squee.

Granted immortality during his time as a cabin boy aboard the skyship *Weatherlight*, Squee had helped some of Dominaria's greatest heroes repel invading Phyrexian forces nearly four hundred years ago. He'd spent the time since becoming simultaneously the oldest and most frequently killed goblin in Dominarian history. Each day he drew breath, he defied the expectations of others, and so it made sense to him that now he found himself a king.

A century ago, during his travels, Squee had come across a nearly disbanded goblin clan living in a deep cave system. They'd fallen on hard times, finding themselves far displaced from their home and under the rule of a vile warlord. Squee hated seeing his fellow goblins forced to live under such a cruel creature, so he challenged the tyrant. He used an old warrior's trick he'd picked up a few decades prior during a brief stint as an Otarian pit fighter: letting himself be repeatedly killed until his opponent fainted from exhaustion. The stress of hitting the same goblin with a hammer for two hours caused the warlord's heart to fail, and Squee was declared the new king. The years since had been, by goblin standards, a time of immeasurable peace and progress.

Squee's throne sat on the mountain's highest platform, overlooking the bustle below. He sat with an old memento in his left hand: an oddly shaped sphere with intricate red patterns painted across its pristine ivory surface. It was his only memento of his time on *Weatherlight*. He'd gone to great lengths (and many deaths) to retrieve it, and sometimes he could swear it still felt warm. He needed its luck today more than ever.



Art by: Zoltan Boros

For the first time in over a decade, the clan had gone nearly an entire week without anyone dying, himself included. He'd promised his people that when the milestone was reached, there would be a feast and celebration. A week without death in a goblin warren was cause enough to celebrate, but a week without death for Squee was particularly rare. From the moment his immortality took hold, death had become a near daily part of Squee's life.

He heard a sudden commotion behind him. Bulp reached the top of the stairs and took a moment to apologize. He'd been Squee's ward since his childhood, a bit of a misfit. Bulp's problem was that he was built with the large frame of a warrior but with the curious mind of a scholar. Squee had once seen him getting teased and, seeing a shred of himself in the young goblin, decided to take him under his wing. Bulp was smart, and with the right guidance, he could grow into the smartest goblin since Squee himself.

Bulp vomited onto the floor at the top of the stairs.

"Oh, no, King. Bulp is so sorry. Bulp had huge breakfast today and then Bulp tried to run up all the stairs to give King his important news."

"Bulp, we talked about this."

Bulp nodded as a look of embarrassment formed on his face. The goblin diet consisted mostly of slugs, grubs, and snails. Their stomachs were of course finely tuned to deal with the implications of that, but serious physical activity immediately after a big and actively wriggling meal was never advisable.

"Bulp will only have one bowl next time, Bulp needs to be ready for anything."

"So? Did we make it?"

Bulp suddenly looked nervous.

"What happened, Bulp?"

"Nothing! Nobody got squished, that's for sure!" A look of panic crossed Bulp's eyes. Bulp hated letting Squee down.

"Bulp, you gotta tell me if anybody got squished."

Bulp looked at the ground.

"Sorry, King. But Rarp "

"Show me, Bulp."

The two of them walked downstairs as Bulp explained the situation. Rarp was one of the clan's stone jockeys, working near the mountain's entrance. The idea was that several large boulders would be suspended over the cave's entrance with a rope tied to a nearby stalagmite. In the event of sudden intrusion, the ropes could be cut, and the entrance would be sealed. It was an incredible feat of goblin engineering. That was, until one of the ropes snapped.

Like most goblins at any given moment, Rarp was standing in the wrong place at the wrong time and was crushed. Bulp and Squee approached the accident site just as three other goblins had managed to get the rock lifted off poor Rarp. Squee, not wanting to put anyone in additional danger, tended to the body himself.

"Is Rarp okay, King?" Bulp asked.

A quick assessment of Rarp's condition made it clear that he had been crushed by a boulder. But much to Squee's surprise, Rarp still appeared to be breathing. More confusing yet, an amount of force that should have crushed Rarp to pulp had left him mostly intact. Squee's gaze lingered on Rarp's eyes, flitting back and forth under closed green lids. He cautiously reached toward them. Rarp's eyes shot open, and Squee's stomach dropped as a thick black oil began leaking from them. Unnaturally viscous, the oil poured down Rarp's dented cheeks and began to pool under his head. The injured goblin's eyes focused on Squee, and suddenly Rarp began to scream. Then Squee began to scream. Bulp screamed, also.

Squee and Bulp carried Rarp's sheet-wrapped body back up the stairs to Squee's private chambers. Careful not to touch any of the oil that leaked from the body's head, they dropped Rarp onto the ground to examine him more closely. Each tear in his flesh that the boulder left behind revealed more of the black oil. Beneath a particularly large wound, a glistening black metal cable protruded.

Squee had seen this before a long time ago. Rarp was a sleeper agent, a creature kidnapped by Phyrexians and augmented with metal and magic. This was the first step in what the Phyrexians called completion. In their completed state, Phyrexians lost all but a passing resemblance to their former selves and embraced a life of "perfection" through the rejection of their flesh. After he was made immortal, he was left in the hands of Ertai, a completed former crewmate, whose intellect was only matched by his sociopathy. Ertai had killed Squee repeatedly out of little more than spite and curiosity. While Squee had eventually managed to incinerate him, it had only been due to a happy accident. Freeing as it had been to defeat Ertai, Squee didn't look upon those memories fondly.

"How did Rarp survive, King? Is he like you?"

Squee shook his head, "No, Bulp. Rarp is not like me. Something bad happened to him. Do you remember what I told you about the Phyrexians?"

"Yeah! King fought off an army of monsters! King sent 'em back where they came from!"

Squee had taken some liberties with the tale as payback for his omission from most Dominarian legends.

“Well, it looks like they’re going to try and take our world away again.”

Squee felt a wave of guilt as he watched fear grow in Bulp’s eyes.

“But King is gonna kick their butts again, right?”

“I’m gonna try, Bulp. But I need you to help.”

The sudden recognition that his king needed him straightened Bulp’s posture. He puffed out his chest and did everything he could to seem like he’d never known fear.

“Bulp will do whatever Bulp has gotta do!”

“That’s good, because I need you to go to the surface and find help.”

“I get to go outside?!” Bulp yelled in surprise. The excitement that filled Bulp’s face made Squee nostalgic for a time when he too knew nothing of the world outside his home.

“You do, Bulp, but you gotta move fast. I need you to find a town and tell ‘em what happened.”

“That Rarp got smushed?”

“No, Bulp. You gotta tell them that the Phyrexians are back.”

“Oh, yeah! And what will King do?”

“I needa figure out how many of them got in here and then get rid of them”

“How are you gonna do that?”

Squee looks at the still-moving eyes of Rarp. They fixed on him and twitched wildly, as though wishing that the body that held them could still move. The room’s torchlight flickered off the watery pupils, revealing just the slightest iridescent gold highlight behind them.

“I can handle that. But you have to go before any other secret Phyrexians figure out that we know.”

Bulp nodded. Squee showed him to the back of his quarters. He pulled aside what appeared to be a shelf to reveal a ladder recessed into the wall. Early in his reign, Squee had enlisted a digging crew to help him make an escape tunnel as a discreet way to occasionally reenter the outside world without alerting his subjects to his absence. All these years later, it was Squee’s secret. Now it would be Bulp’s as well. He hoped desperately that he was not sending him to his death. Squee hugged him goodbye, and Bulp returned the gesture, lifting his king ever so slightly off the ground.

“Once you’ve told them, you come straight back. No exploring! If you see something scary, be ready to run!”

Bulp nodded, “Bulp will come back, King. Bulp’s gonna make it, just like King.”

The ladder’s rungs creaked in protest as Bulp clambered upwards. Fighting off concern, Squee moved the shelf back into place and took a torch off the wall. He held it to Rarp’s body until it began to burn. It was time to get to work.

After extinguishing the small fire he’d accidentally started in his quarters, Squee made his way back to his throne room to address his people. He stepped out onto the throne platform and whistled as loud as he could, and the room began to fall silent.

“Goblins, young and old! Your king comes to you with news!” He always tried to take on a kingly tone while addressing his subjects.

"I'm sure some of you heard about Rarp getting smashed up real bad. And it's true, Rarp looks terrible. But Rarp's alive!"

This caused chatter to break out.

"Do not ask any more questions about Rarp! Tonight, we get to celebrate a week of nobody dyin' in our mountain!"

There was an expectant silence.

"And also, I'm gonna make my Hot Slug Porridge!"

The room erupted into cheers.

Squee sent for Spurna, head of the embermages. Their task was to maintain the mana lamps that provided light inside the mountain. He hoped he could convince her to extinguish them during the celebration, leaving only torchlight for the celebrating goblins. Usually, this would be a terrible idea. The anonymity of darkness gave goblins a predilection toward bad behavior somehow more intense than their normal predilection toward bad behavior. However, Squee had a plan. In Squee's quarters, just as he held a torch to Rarp's body, he'd noticed an almost imperceptible outline of gold along the edge of Rarp's pupils. Squee hoped that a sudden influx of torchlight would allow him to see exactly how many gold-eyed sleeper agents he was dealing with. Once he knew the extent of the infiltration, he'd get help from the goblins that he could trust.

Spurna joined Squee in the throne room. From the outset, she was gruff and to the point.

"Spurna hear King want to turn off mana lamps for celebration. Why King want this?"

Squee was prepared for resistance.

"The mana lamps are a real big achievement, but the light is too bright. The goblins wanna have a good time. The goblins wanna dance."

"Goblins can dance in bright room. It better that way. Darkness means funny business."

"Isn't that good though, Spurna?"

"Listen, King. Lamps go out means lamps have to go back on. If too much mana get channeled through the lamps, or it get channeled too quickly, lamps explode, whole mountain explode. It not worth the risk."

Squee made a mental note that, if he got through this, he should revisit the fact that the entire mountain was lit with high-powered explosives.

"I get that! Nobody likes when a mountain explodes! But as king, I have to order you to extinguish the lamps."

Spurna shook her head.

"Well King, remember, you asked for this."

She held out her hands, closed her eyes, and focused. Squee looked toward the main atrium to see if the light had dimmed, but it remained the same. Confused, he turned back to Spurna and felt a hot jolt of pain in his gut. Spurna's arm had twisted and reformed into a heated metallic spike. With an unnatural strength, Spurna hoisted him into the air. He felt his blood pouring out of him as she walked him across the throne room to the overlook. She smiled an unnatural smile as she thrust him forward, sending him plummeting to the mountain's stone floor.

Squee strode through death's halls like he owned the place. Each time he died, it was the same. He found himself in a large, ornate, empty palace with black granite floors so dark that it felt like he was walking through the night sky. The whole place glowed with a soft red light. As he hurried through the halls, he saw the last thing he always saw before resurrecting: a stunning feasting table arranged with all his favorite foods. For the many thousands of times that Squee had been here, he'd never once tasted the bugs. This time was no different. As he approached the table, he felt the gentle caress of spectral fingers around his shoulders before he was harshly yanked back into his physical form. His eyes shot open.

He was covered in his own blood. He saw other goblins beginning to gather for the party. They seemed unbothered by Squee's sudden public death, but he didn't blame them. As an immortal being, Squee died a lot. He occasionally jumped off that platform when he didn't feel like taking the stairs. He'd usually burst on impact, and everyone always got a big kick out of it.

Squee did his best to get their attention, not knowing where Spurna had fled. He cried out, "Help your king! Prepare to fight!" just as Spurna landed next to him with a metallic thud. She thrust her spike through the back of his head.

Squee awoke once again. His vision was blurry, being fed through newly healed eyes to a newly reformed brain. As it came into focus, he saw the entire clan standing in a perfect circle around the two of them, watching silently as Spurna stalked him like prey. Enjoying the audience, she slowly pressed her spiked arm toward his chest, pinning him to the floor. With a sickly, unnatural smile, she snapped her fingers. The mana lamps went out. Only distant torchlight flickered now, and with horror, Squee saw that every set of eyes that surrounded him was ringed with a pale gold. He choked on a scream. Spurna wound up to stab him again when suddenly she was knocked wildly off her feet. She spun and landed on the ground, looking angrily at her assailant: Bulp.

"Bulp!" Squee yelled, never happier to have been disobeyed. Bulp turned and offered a hand to help him off the ground.

"We have to get out of here, Bulp! It's not safe, can't you see they're—"

Squee felt a horrible burning sensation. As he looked at his hand, he saw that his flesh was rotting away. The rot spread from his fingers down to his wrists. He fell back to the ground as his arm tore free from his body. The flesh-eating necrotic spell did its vile work, and he watched in horror as Bulp's body flickered. The glamour that had been concealing his true form faded and standing where Bulp had once been was a tall and unnaturally pale man with pale blonde hair. His eyes wept oil and black cable was intricately woven into the flesh of his face. Each of his arms split at the elbow, giving him two additional three-fingered hands. Ertai's spiked Phyrexian armor gleamed in the torchlight as the rot reached Squee's chest. Squee tried to yell, but instead tasted only the grime of his own decay before once again seeing darkness.

When his body reformed, Ertai was there waiting for him. Squee was surrounded by his own former subjects. They sat completely still in a complacent silence. Ertai paced toward him.

"It's been a long time, Squee."

"I thought I killed you."

Ertai laughed.

"You of all people should know that death can be a temporary state. But it's true, Squee. You got the jump on me and for several hundred years, I went into the dark. That might've been the end of it if Sheoldred hadn't found me."

"She old who?"

Ertai shook his head with a smirk.

"You know, with Dominaria on the verge of compleation, I have a lot more patience for your stupidity. Plus, you're much more eloquent than when we last spoke. You could nearly pass for a child."

The totality of the situation started to dawn on Squee. His clan was gone. His people were now just heavily augmented shells, built to torment him. He couldn't even begin to think of what Ertai had done with Bulp.

"Why do all of this? I don't understand."

Ertai leaned down to meet Squee's eyes with an icy gaze.

"Maybe I just don't like you. Maybe I got jealous watching those *Weatherlight* buffoons fawn over your idiotic antics. Or maybe it's because *you killed me*."

Ertai's smile returned.

"Or maybe, I came here to make an unkillable goblin beg for death. To teach you of true pain so that when I relieve you of it, you'll greet me with worship."

Ertai reached into his robes. "But as far as the official logs are concerned, I was tasked with retrieving and safely concealing this." Squee patted his robes in disbelief as Ertai pulled out his toy.

"You love this bauble so much, and yet I'd wager you know as little about it as we do. There's startlingly little to be read about the Salvation Sphere. All I've managed to discern is that it's older than the plane itself. But I know two things for sure. First, it was part of the Legacy Weapon, which means it must be dealt with. Second, it seems to always find its way back to you, which means *you* must be dealt with."

Squee sighed.

"You said it yourself, Ertai. You can't kill me."

Ertai playfully tossed the toy from one hand to another. He motioned to the goblin sleeper agents and pointed toward Squee. They started to advance on him.

"Oh, Squee, I don't need to kill you. I just need to remind your flesh of its potential."

Goblins grabbed hold of Squee's arms to restrain him. Their bodies split open and revealed metal and black cable. They began to change in shape, contorting wildly. Several of them connected to each other, their new forms joining together to create a machine unlike anything Squee had ever seen. One's hand split open to reveal a needle. Before Squee could scream, it pierced his flesh, and his limbs grew heavy. One of the goblins had become a table, and Squee was shifted onto it. As he drifted off to sleep, he hoped that they weren't making him into a table, too.

When Squee's eyes opened, he felt more alert than he'd been in years. Fatigue as a concept had been removed from his body and mind. He felt a newfound strength in his muscle tissue. His eyes could see everything in the room clearly, no matter how far away. He'd been placed in a fresh set of his orange king's robes and left on the table. He sat up and removed a needle from each of his arms. As he did, a

machine near the table began to emit an uncomfortable sound. No sooner than Squee had registered discomfort, the sound seemed quieter.

Everything was as he remembered it, but all the things that had worried him suddenly seemed small now. He saw his people moving about the mountain, some looking like goblins and others looking like a beautiful symphony of flesh and metal. Ertai appeared in a teleportation circle before him, attending to the sound.



Art by: Ryan Pancoast

“Oh, good. You’ve awakened. How do you feel?”

“Powerful.”

“Perfection has that effect. Your body may feel unfamiliar to you at first. I recommend taking a moment to examine your new functions before we leave for the Mana Rig.”

Squee stood and looked at his body, seeing faint white lines along his arms. No sooner than he’d thought about them, his arms opened, revealing machine parts beneath. He closed them again. Everything moved at the speed of his own thoughts. Squee removed his robes with a desire to see what else he was capable of. Ertai seemed concerned.

“Actually, Squee, even in our perfect forms we still elect to wear our clothing—”

“I thought perhaps you had given me armor”

“I had assumed we’d get you some upon our—”

Fully nude, Squee looked at his chest and saw more faint scars. At a thought, a panel opened to reveal the interior of his own chest cavity, including the ever-spinning Salvation Sphere in the place his heart once was. He looked at a bucket in the corner of the room brimming with meat. Presumably, his own. Resting on top of it was his crown.

“You won’t be a king in New Phyrexia. In fact, I’d imagine they’ll be doing some quite invasive research once I deliver you.” Ertai said, visibly pleased with himself, but this smugness no longer offended

Squee. They both served Phyrexia. Squee's immortality would be useful to the cause and so learning to understand it made sense.

Ertai continued, averting his eyes from Squee's nude form. "But you have to admit, it feels better on this side, doesn't it?"

Squee once again commanded his arms to open. One contained a hooked blade, and the other contained a small cannon. He stared at it as it charged. Then he looked at the blade and tried to extend it further. Instead, it spun forth as a projectile, sticking into a stone wall. He turned toward Ertai.

"I feel " Squee opened his other arm, charging his new cannon. He summoned the blade back to him, a magnet in his arm pulling it free from the wall, " compleat."

The blade flung back at Squee at high speed, easily severing through the exposed rope that blocked its path, the very same rope that steadied the boulders the rock jockeys had resuspended above the mountain's entrance after that morning's accident. Squee found himself standing, as goblins so often were, in the wrong place at the wrong time. The cut line slipped loose, and the boulders dropped in an instant. Squee was crushed mid-word and pulverized against the cavern floor in an explosion of viscera and Phyrexian oil. As the stone smashed through his body, the charged cannon on Squee's arm fired into the air, hitting and overcharging one of the mana lamps lining the cave wall. The explosion was bright as the sun and gave the mountain's denizens no time to react as it cascaded from lamp to lamp, save for Ertai who instinctively shielded himself. The few small cities that had reestablished themselves in Otaria would long wonder what happened in the mountains that night, as to any observer it appeared that at one moment there was a mountain, and at the next, there was a smoldering crater of stone.

Death had never felt like this before. The palace in which Squee had spent so much time was gone, and instead he found himself floating in a sea of white light. Was he dreaming? If he was dead, where was the palace? Where was the feast?

Squee. It's time we talked.

Squee heard the voice all around him. Suddenly, an astral shape floated free from his chest and bobbed just in front of his face, floating in the light. It was his toy, but not as he'd ever seen it before. At first, it seemed to be floating in the light just as he was, but its clean white surface, so similar in shade to the light itself, faded away, leaving only the ornate markings. They glowed, suspended in the air, and expanded to fill the space, leaving Squee overwhelmed by his own lack of comprehension. His toy's markings had always resembled a face, not unlike that of an owl or imp, but now as it sat filling the extradimensional space, it only brought him fear.

There is no need to panic, old friend. Allow me to put you at ease.

Suddenly, the floating markings contorted, spinning around Squee until their blurred motion was all he could see. When they dissipated, Squee was once again standing in the palace he remembered. The feast looked delicious as ever, but this time, the table had a guest. In the chair nearest to him sat a young Zhalfirin woman with a single braid in her dark hair who he recognized in an instant as his dear friend and *Weatherlight* captain, Sisay. Excitement overtook Squee, but the closer he looked, the more he grew suspicious. This Sisay lacked something essential. She was missing the wry confidence that made her such a natural leader.

I've taken on a form that you would find more palatable. You always viewed Sisay as a comforting and authoritative presence.

Finally, Squee spoke. "So you're not her?"

No, Squee. Sisay has passed. Her soul returned to the aether.

"So, who are you?"

I am Salvation. I was once a primal force in a world that came before this one. I was—

Squee was bored. He'd never been dead for this long. "How did I get here?"

That is more complicated. Yawgmoth's spell was intended to endlessly rebuild your body with little regard for its effect on your soul. However, long before your immortality, I'd chosen you as a worthy recipient of my boon. I protected you from all that would threaten the purity of your soul. The resulting mixture placed you in a loop. Each time you died, your body would be repaired as Yawgmoth willed. Your soul was trapped in this extradimensional space and returned to your new body before it ever had a chance to move on. Even after—"

"Sorry, I gotta be more clear when I'm asking big questions. How did I get here specifically?"

Salvation smiled.

Pure as ever. Phyrexian corruption removed your soul from your body while it still lived, releasing it from the loop.

"So it's over. I finally got killed for real?"

On the far side of the room, a gilded wooden door creaked open, pushed by unseen hands. The space beyond the threshold was too bright to see.

That depends, Squee. I accept the role I've played in your unexpected fate, and I'd like to offer you one final boon: a choice. At this moment, in the realm of the living, your body has just been destroyed. The spell that reanimates it is reaching out for your soul as it always has. It will fizzle if it does not find you soon. I could place your soul back into the loop. You would awaken once again in a new body. You remain immortal and free of Phyrexian meddling.

Another door on the opposite side of the room swung open.

Or you can walk through this threshold, and your soul will finally be returned to the aether. You'll be reunited with all those you've lost and free to rest.

Squee looked at the two doors nervously. He approached the feast and pulled up a chair, reaching across the table for a particularly alluring maggot pastry. He sat back down, took a bite, and smiled. He spoke through his full mouth, "How's about you and me talk about a third door, Sally?"

Bulp had done everything right. He'd used the king's secret passageway and made sure that nobody saw him leave the mountain. He'd traveled quickly and quietly. He found the first human town he could and gave them the news that Phyrexia was back. Sure, they said that everybody's known that for months, but people will say anything to make a goblin sound dumb. The news was delivered so he made his way back.

Bulp had seen the explosion the night before but didn't truly believe it until he got close. *King's gotta be around here somewhere*, he thought to himself.

He came across an odd clearing in the wreckage. It appeared to be the center of the explosion that blew the place sky-high. There was a single, neat little circle without even a pebble's worth of rubble on it. When he got close, he smelled the stench of an unfamiliar magic in the air, so he kept his distance. He

got worried for his king. *Sure, King can't die*, Bulp thought, *but if King gets buried real deep, does he just stay under the rocks?*

Before he could start digging, he heard a much welcomed voice from above him.

"Bulp! You're alive!"

Perched a few feet above him on a large bit of broken stone was King Squee.

What do you have in mind? Salvation asked Squee.

Squee took another bite of his maggot turnover.

"I don't wanna sound ungrateful, but before I became immortal, I never died once. Then ever since it happened, I can't seem to stop. I was one of the smartest goblins in the whole world before I got changed. I went on a big adventure and helped save everybody. No matter what anybody says, I was important. But the only part of me that anybody cares about now is the thing I got by accident. Well, I'm nobody's accident. I'm my own accident."

Squee swallowed his bite of pastry.

"I wanna go back, Sally, but I only want one more. I want a chance to last as long as I can, a chance to blow somethin' up, think I'm dead for a minute, realize I'm not, and then cry laughing."

Salvation nodded.

Bulp had never been so happy to see his king.

"King!! King, you're okay!"

"You're okay! I thought they got you!"

"So, everybody else " Bulp trailed off, unable to articulate the loss.

"I know. But not us! Not today!"

"But what are we gonna do, King? Where are we gonna go?"

"If Phyrexia's back, then it's up to smart goblins like us to kick their butts and settle the score."

Bulp's eyes went wide.

"Do you think we can?"

Squee clapped his hand onto Bulp's shoulder in a gesture that would've seemed fatherly were Bulp not a full head taller than him.

"Between you and me, Bulp? Things always got a way of workin' out for ol' Squee."