



Trolley Dash!

By Rowan le Fay

Too many people have been monumentally helpful with the creation of this story to list here. Nonetheless, a special thanks to you all for the inspiration you have provided. I am extremely grateful.

The rules were simple, complete your shopping list in under ten minutes and you get your shopping for free. This seemed like a good deal to most people as food was scarce since the global famine. Nearly all supermarkets had gone out of business, except for the big conglomerate that had been founded in Huddersfield.

It was the CEO-Managing-Director of this huge national chain, with over two thousand stores in the UK, who came up with the idea for the ‘Trolley Dash.’ And of course, whatever the boss of the company said, all the top-knob managers vying for his position agreed with him and worked as hard as they wanted to when enforcing his wishes.

Several months later the Trolley Dash was announced to the broad public. A trial run was to be set up in the Tilehurst store in Reading Berkshire, and anyone who wished to participate should apply online. The application questionnaire was over five hundred pages long, but before the questionnaire came the arduous health and safety survey, and then all potential applicants had to agree to the terms and conditions plus sign the agreement for the conglomerate to have full access to the applicants’ personal details. Then once that was completed, all that was left was to agree and sign the liability waiver that the conglomerate, its employees and more importantly its shareholders, were not responsible for any injury or death sustained during the Trolley Dash. Simple, right?

After a further two months, eight applicants were carefully selected to compete in the Trolley Dash. These eight people, who *allegedly* understood all the risks involved, were instructed to arrive at the Tilehurst store at 7 o clock in the morning, when the shop usually opened to be briefed and made ready for

when the contest started at 8 o'clock. However, the hopeful contestants started arriving at a quarter past 6, where they waited impatiently, in the cold rain, for the shop to open. The entire store had to be closed to the rest of the public for half a day, just to keep the competition fair. The customers weren't happy about this, but then customers never are.

The employees of the Tilehurst store, well the ones who were competent at their jobs, had worked around the clock to get things ready for the competition, having to dance around customers from the day before in the narrow aisles while they replenished stock, as well as manoeuvre their way around the T.V and camera crew setting everything up to broadcast the competition live. Because the store was understaffed, many of the colleagues had to stay on and work overtime with no thanks or support from the feckless managers.

The moment the clock struck seven, the contestants tried to force their way into the shop, the store manager and the organizer of the contest had to hurry to regain control and assemble everyone in order. The organizer did her best to explain how the event should proceed, she answered all the queries the contestants had, then repeated herself multiple times due to a failure to listen. She made sure to be clear when she informed all the contestants about the explosive devices, they seemed to understand what she was saying until the time came for the devices to be attached to their wrists, that was when the grumbling started, so the organizer explained again.

As stipulated in the small print of the tedious forms the contestants had all signed to assure their places in the contest, they would all have to have small explosive devices attached to their wrists. These devices were wirelessly connected to timers installed in their shopping trolleys and were programmed to detonate if the contestants had not completed their lists, had their shopping scanned at the checkouts and had walked through the electronic barrier before their timers ran out.

There were a few more protesting grumbles from the contestants, but they were all still sold on the prospect of a free shop. They were all confident that they could fill a shopping trolley and be out of the store in under ten minutes. It would be no problem at all, so they thought. The organizer had to remind the contestants again that as per the terms and conditions, they must have at least twenty different items in their trolleys, they could not fill their trolleys with just loaves of bread for example. Once more there was disgruntled muttering

amongst the contestants, however, they still believed they could complete the event.

The time for the Trolley Dash to begin was upon them. The explosive devices were all fitted, the cameras were live, the contestants ready and very eager to begin. The organizer began the countdown from ten, nine, eight, the store manager joined in the countdown, six, so did the filming crew, four, three, two, one!

The doors open, the timers began, and the contestants shot off into the store like fireworks. Though, much like fireworks, they started off strong but soon fizzled out dismally.

Contestant Number One was a man in his mid-seventies who fell at the first hurdle. He was a regular, who'd been coming to the store every day for years, he was lonely since his wife had died, and as such he'd gotten to know many of the employees. One employee in particular was the lady who worked on the bread section, she was very friendly and enjoyed a chat. Contestant Number One thought he'd better say hello to the bread colleague so as not to appear rude. He considered that he had enough time for a quick chat before he needed to start his shopping. Unfortunately for him, that quick chat took up a good chunk of his time, so when he'd finished telling the bread colleague about his new stairlift, he only had three minutes to fill his trolley. It wasn't enough. Time ran out and... KABLOOEY!!!

Contestant Two and Contestant Six were not regulars, though they were local and were in fact neighbours. They happened to cross paths at the end of aisle three and the connecting main aisle. Somehow, they hadn't noticed each other while waiting to get into the store, so *naturally* they were surprised at their meeting. The two ladies engaged in a long conversation about how exciting this competition was, then how amazed they were to both be selected, followed by what they had come in to get and what to do with all that free food. Their vitally important conversation meant that were blocking the aisle, preventing employees from getting in or out to do their jobs. The two ladies chatted away for so long that their timers ran out, just as Contestant Six was about to tell Contestant Two about her sister's holiday to Majorca when... KABLOOEY!!! KABLOOEY!!!

Contestant Three was disqualified at nine and a half minutes into the competition. She had brought her squalling two-year-old son along with her and

was letting him run up and down the aisles, being a hinderance to all the nearby colleagues. She had managed to slip her brat of a son past the store manager and the organizer, though luckily for her and her sprog someone had noticed, but it took the adjudicators right until the eleventh hour to decide on disqualifying Contestant Three. Her timer was stopped, and the detonator deactivated half a minute before she and her awful kid could go KABLOOEY!!! She wouldn't have made it to the checkout anyway, because she wasted too much time chasing after her son and dragging him back to the trolley.

Contestant Four got his trolley all the way to the checkouts with minutes to spare. He would have made it away unscathed with his free shopping had he not made the mistake of taking his trolley to the checkout of the store's gloomiest employee. She went at a snail's pace scanning all of Four's shopping. He tried to hurry her along, but this only put her into a tizzy causing her to make more mistakes, making her more miserable and slower if such a thing were possible. She got stuck trying to scan a head of lettuce, it had no barcode, so she had to call for a supervisor to fetch a new one. Four couldn't believe what was happening, he didn't understand why the shopping had to be scanned if he was getting it for free. The gloomy colleague explained, ever so slowly, in a melancholy voice, that she had to scan all his shopping so the store system could process the loss of merchandise. Four knew that he wouldn't make it out in time now, the only satisfaction he took from this dreadful experience was that the gloomy checkout colleague would go KABLOOEY with him.

Contestant Five was taking full advantage of getting a potentially free shop. She was struggling to manoeuvre her way around the store hoicking two extremely heavy trollies. But her downfall came by way of the cooking oil, she wanted a big ten litre drum of it, but the shelf was empty. She sent a grocery colleague to check out back in the storeroom, but as the shelf label already stated, the employee returned to tell Five that the drums of oil were out of stock. Annoyed, Contestant Five had to make do with a couple of five litre bottles, she picked them up and threw them into one of the trollies, without noticing one of the bottles had a small hole in it. Oil dripped out of the puncture, leaking onto the floor. Five slipped on the trail of oil she'd caused and got crushed underneath both her heavy trollies that fell with her, and by the time she managed to get back up on her feet... KABLOOEY!!!

Contestant Seven, whose name coincidentally was Karen, had started off strong, but couldn't help herself when she spotted an employee working in the

fridges of the chilled section. Karen just had to go up to the chilled food colleague and start complaining about how cold it was in this part of the store, as if the employee had any control over this, as if she could turn the fridges off just for her. Karen wasted ages shrieking at the employee that the cold store was impeding her from winning the Trolley Dash. The employee’s supervisor had to come over and placate Karen, however, it didn’t have the desired effect. After explaining to Karen that she didn’t have much time left to complete the event, Karen took her claws off the employee, turning her ire onto the unfortunate supervisor, demanding more time to do her shopping. Karen spent so much time chastising the supervisor that her time *did* run out. The supervisor and employee managed to dive out of the way and were unharmed when Karen went...
KABLOOEY!!!

The final contestant, Number Eight, was another regular who frequented the Tilehurst store. He was a cantankerous old sod who could walk perfectly fine, but he always took advantage of the mobility scooters the store had reserved for the customers who genuinely did have difficulty walking. What’s more, Number Eight demanded that he had an employee push his trolley around for him. The adjudicators could not decide if this was cheating, but as there were no rules against it, and providing that Number Eight fill his own trolley with no assistance from the employee other than pushing the cart, they saw no problem with it.

Although Number Eight could only go as fast as the mobility scooter allowed, he was making good time filling his trolley. The unlucky employee assigned to push the cart around, not only had to endure Number Eight’s foul odour, but he had to put up with the old man griping at him to move the trolley faster - “Put your back into it! People had to work for a living in my day!” was his favourite catchphrase.

But then when his trolley was almost full, Number Eight’s mobility scooter conked out, ran out of juice, empty, battery dead. He was furious, snapping at the employee to get help. The employee set the trolley to one side before going to look for a manager as fast as he wanted to, leaving Number Eight to sit grumbling in the immobility scooter.

What the grouchy old man didn’t know was that another employee whom he had belittled, harassed and annoyed the day before, heard that Number Eight would be a contestant. So, the night before, this disgruntled employee had purposefully forgotten to plug the mobility scooters into the charger, how

careless of him. And because of the appalling way Number Eight spoke to and treated colleagues in the store, no one came to help him. Time was quickly running out. Number Eight got out of the scooter, moving faster than a man of his age or weight should have been able to. He got to his trolley and ran like a speeding train around the store to get his last few items, puffing and wheezing all the way. But it did him no good, his time ran out... KABLOOEY!!!

Thus, it came to pass that not a single contestant won the Trolley Dash, just as the CEO-Managing-Director had planned. He was never going to just give away a free shop, but he foolishly believed that all the publicity and excitement of the Trolley Dash would get people buying more of his merchandise.

However, it had completely the opposite effect. It cost the company a fortune to rent out the T.V and Film crew, to pay workers to repair all the damage and clean up the contestant's messy remains, and the Tilehurst store was boycotted out of respect for everyone who had gone KABLOOEY!!!

A mass protest broke out from all the angry viewers who had watched the disgusting display on television, which essentially was the entire country. The top knobs all turned on each other, passing the blame to the next back-stabbing manager above them in the vicious hierarchy. The conglomerate was in turmoil! The CEO-Managing-Director was forced to make a public apology on live television. Though, unbeknownst to him, someone had rigged an explosive device to his microphone. No-one ever found out who this person was, but they had programmed the microphone to explode the moment the CEO-Managing-Director began his speech. Millions of people watched as he went... KABLOOEY!!!