



It's a strange thing, stepping up to your first duel. Lopo had tightened the cracked leather straps to his forearm as far as they'd go though fearing they'd snap, and still the weapon seemed loose. You wear a ball lightning carbine like a shield, because that's what it is, or at least it's part of it. Even now though, staring down a pissed-off stranger looking to burn Lopo's head off, the little guy was just thinking how heavy this was.

Let's back up a bit. This isn't really what you might think.

Lopo had known this carbine on his arm for a very long time. In an alley behind a flophouse, piled among the farago of an old drunk who told fascinating stories, he'd run his fingers across its plating and ask questions about the worlds outside town. Its owner had been a sailor in the War Of The Rupture, serving in a fleet that filled an entire sea. He'd seen terrible and mighty things, and the poor man's nightmares and fever dreams proved it. But he very much loved to have Lopo hear his tales.

The carbine didn't work then. They played drums on it and scraped a rock across its jagged shielding as they sang naughty sailor songs. 'That plating takes a charge, dissipates the lightning, but it makes a great washboard dudn'it?'

He returned to one story often. A bad one. The old sailor many years before had fallen in with a revolution. A powerful lady boss, a Judge, made promises and painted pictures of what the world could look like. It seemed fair and bright and just. But when the old order was gone and she sat in the big palace, the lady Judge changed her promises. She'd explain what she'd never said, and how complex these problems could be. And the old sailor lost his spark and his soul in the fight to pull her down.

Now there's another one making promises on the steps of the big palace. And this fellow here glaring at Lopo in this dusty street, he works for that one. There are many like him. This one will be the first.

Lopo inhales deeply, gently gripping the clutch trigger and thinking about stories he's been told. The dead ones panicked and flailed about, firing lightning all over the place and drawing attention with their movements. When you're shooting and being shot at, movement catches your eye. So stand still, he thinks to himself. Breathe and just shoot like that guy's a tin can on a fence.

Nothing to it.