

## Green Doom on the high seas...

We wait under the decks as the pirate ship comes alongside and hooks clatter against the hull, pulling us close. The first mate unlocks the cage I'm in and points towards the stairs. "Get up there and see what that is," he says, one hand on his sword

*He's killed too many of the other slaves in the last year for me to have any illusions about what he'll do if I don't...*

I walk to the bottom of the steps and there's the sound of tiny feet upon the deck above me. A thin voice with a reedy tone to it echoes down the steps.

"I have no intentions to harm you if you come quietly and bring me that which I desire." The accent is Spanish, but Spanish as delivered by someone trying to imitate the accent, not a native, "You have the word of the Dread Pirate Froggerson."

I glance around the side of steps and see a frog stood on the top step dressed in a long (*at least six inches*) cape and wielding a sword that looks like a needle with a hilt. I lean back around the corner and look at the rest of the crew.

"It's a frog..." I say

"A Frog!" The first mate looks at me like I've gone mad and I glance back around the steps just to make sure that I haven't, then nod at him. He barges past me and draws his sword.

"I warn you," the frog leans back and presents a lean profile "I will not stand for physical violence against my person."

The first mate goes charging up the stairs, there's a thin clink, as of a sword against a needle, then a gasp and a thud as the mate's body falls to the floor.

"I have no desire for further bloodshed," the frog speaks again, sheathing its needle, "Please, come upstairs where we can parley."

I walk up the stairs to the deck, the mate's body is on the floor having been pierced through the throat by a needle. The frog is now stood on the quarter deck, it walks down the stairs by the banister and perches on the end of the rail, the tiny frog feet clad in black boots the size of my little finger.

"He underestimated me," The Frog looks up at me from under the brim of its wide hat "You would do well not to follow his mistake."

"Who are you?" I look over to the ship where the crew of the ship, all human, watch impassively

"I am the Dread Pirate Froggerson," The Frog doffs its hat and bows at the waist "I am here to take your goods for my prize."

"But you're..."

"A Frog?" It looks at me and places one hand on its sword hilt "Oh I'm more than a Frog, I'm a Pirate queen and the best spellcaster on the high seas."

"A spellcasting pirate queen frog?" I look at the flamboyantly clad Amphibian stood on the deck of the ship in disbelief. "Well for one, there aren't any pirate queens, only pirate kings."

"Ah, and there you would be almost correct," It hops across to the rail and walks along "Until a short while ago, there were only pirate kings, and none of them were frogs."

I look around the rigging for a second to see if any of the other pirates have made their way on board, but they're all resting their arms against the deck of their own ship

"Now," the frog hops lightly over the hook to the next part of the deck "About your cargo."

“We’re not carrying anything of value,” I gesture below decks “Only a load of wheat and a few boxes of metals for a private charter.”

“It is the metals that I desire,” The Frog gestures “They hold the solution to my present condition.”

*The look on my face must be obvious*

“Have the others bring the metal up,” It looks at me “and I’ll *entertain* you with the story of how this came to be.”

“Bring the metal up,” I call down the stairs “All of it.”

The frog hops across from the deck to the top of the stairs, the distance more than ten feet but it clears it effortlessly.

“So,” it says “A month ago I was raiding out past the Dansyrian shoals and I came across a ship manned by the sorcerers of Nyraton. I despatched their guard and engaged their commander in a battle of spells, skilled he was, but not so skilled as I...”

“And that’s why you’re a frog now...” I say quietly

“Careful...” It pauses and raises one tiny hand to point at me “You do not want to risk my wrath.”

“No” I raise my hands in surrender as I look at the rest of the pirates “I don’t, please go on.”

“As it happens, the spell that caused my current misfortune was cast by me, but I was unprepared for the physical defences that he’d put in place.” The Frog shrugs “He was wearing a coat of Mesgan silver under his robes, a cheat for any true mage, but then he wasn’t a true mage.”

“Mesgan silver isn’t any good against weapons,” I say “It’s too soft for anything except jewellery.”

“But...” the frog pauses as the sound of the crew coming up the stairs echoes up “It is perfect at reflecting spells cast at those wearing it.”

“So you turned yourself into a frog?”

“I’m the greatest spellcaster on the waves today,” It resumes walking “Only a spell cast by me would have any chance of affecting me.”

“So it turned you into a frog?”

The frog nods slightly as the box is brought up on deck

“How does that explain you going from being a pirate king to being a pirate queen?”

“Well...” The frog sighs “When I cast the spell, I didn’t give any thought to the type of frog I was turning someone into...”

“And...?”

“This particular species of frog is one of the ones that changes gender if it finds itself in completely the same gender company, and here I am surrounded by men.”

“Unfortunate.” I look at the box “Is that all you need?”

“Almost,” The frog says “I need for a volunteer to hold the metal while I cast the spell again, now I leave it to you to decide who that will be.”

*I don’t like where this is going*

“And if we refuse?” I ask

“You know very little of spells, do you?” It pauses for a second and gestures at the box “It is not possible to cast spells upon yourself, the laws of magic prevent you from affecting yourself, otherwise we mages would all be immortal and beautiful.”

“So we’re just going to put the metal between us and you?”

“You have to be carrying it, the spell will not work against a non living target,” The frog’s tone turns strict, as if explaining to a child “No harm will come to you, it is merely a restorative spell.”

“And we believe you because?”

“If I had wanted you dead,” The frog points down to the body of the first mate “You would be dead.”

“Alright,” I open the box and pull out a thin sheet of very light metal and hold it in front of myself

The frog mutters a few words in a language I don’t understand and the skies darken for a second. There’s an incandescent flash and the frog is replaced by a woman in her early thirties with the remains of the frog outfit at her feet. She looks down and picks up some rigging cloth from the side, winding it around her shoulders.

“Something went wrong?” I put the metal down and look at her.

“Curious,” The woman speaks, her voice still carrying the same accent “The spell should have returned me to my true state.”

“And yet you’re still...”

“Indeed.” She looks up at me with curiosity

“Well, you have spent your whole life dressing up in frilly costumes and surrounding yourself with men...” I muse

“Careful...” She looks over at the rest of her crew “Bring the box and the metals on board”

The pirates take the box back to the other ship and the woman pauses to look back at me.

“Of course, I could always use another crew member,” she says “Particularly one brave enough to stand in front of me and not flinch.”

I look at her and then back to the ship where I’ve been captive for more than a year, then back to her again. She nods.

*Why not...*