

## Windsong & Requiem - "Welcomes us Home"

*A young blonde boy looked up at the man in a large coat with slick black hair and a thin mustache. A large curved sword hung at his hip. The child, wearing darkened rags and deep wounds, had a face mixed with dirt and blood. Tears had left clean streaks down his gritty face but had done nothing to take the anger from his eyes.*

*The man leaned forward. "Do you know who I am, boy?" He had a French accent to his words, something Parisian and cultured. There was a series of shines off the five rings on his left hand.*

*The child nodded. "They say ye be Robert Quebedeaux, treasure hunter, myth killer...pirate." And the last word hung in the air. The dirty and large men around Quebedeaux looked like giants to the child. Yet the boy showed no fear. His lips quivered from something far deeper and darker than terror of men - rage.*

*Quebedeaux smiled. "Oui, I am all that and more. And you are one of the last survivors of Rossio Isle. Come with me, boy. We sail for a place of safety. Calavera always welcomes us home."*

The death's head island was non-existent to most chart readers and map makers. But to those who sailed under their own flags, the small jut of rock was home and haven to pirates, privateers and their similar persuasion. To everyone who knew of the location, it was an island barely and in the right lighting, it was an island that looked like a skull. Tonight, a deep fog was rolling around the skull island's coast. And as the siege of billowing mist enshrouded the pirate cove, those who were sober and pulling in to dock made notice and news of the fog's green color. A rare event even for Calavera.

The Requiem had just pulled into the harbor and its hull finished rocking. She was a unique craft with a history and design lost on the words of myths, legends and lore. Somewhere married to a brig's design and the force of a galleon, the Requiem was a sight with her fine dark wood crafting. Nights on Calavera always seemed blacker than sailing under the moon on the open waters. The crew of the ship were making preparation for docking. Ropes hurtled between sailors. Lamp-lights were lit to fight back the night's obscurity. As the Requiem's hands prepared her for resting, a lone figure stood perched on the deck, ensuring a smooth and ease dock.

Preparations finished and the man moved down the short steps leading to the captain's cabin.

"Nabopolassar, are you sure you want to remain?" The man asking was tall. His skin darkened by a lifetime or more under the Syrian sun. A pepper gray beard came to a point. Clad in black, he was barely visible when night fell on the Requiem and his dark silks made him a shadow. The scimitar at his side had saved the crew's lives more than he could remember.

Captain Nabopolassar Defoe Travis squinted at the sound; his full first name. His hair was a dirtied blonde and his skin tanned by ocean salt and sun.

"Aye, God, Ghassan, please---!" The man walked to the edge of the Requiem's steps which extended to Calavera's dock. He wore a long coat which opened enough to show a form

fitting off-white shirt. He wore thick dark gloves and the left wrist was exposed, showcasing several rows of beads and bracelets.

“Yes Nabopolassar?”

“Jaysus and Jack Ketch, Arab, do ye need to say *that*? No one---”

Ghassan smiled but his lips were tight. “I know...only those who really know you---“

“Know not to use me full moniker,” The young captain shook with his eyes closed. The sound of his name caught many off guard most of all himself. “Go, old man, get drunk with the rest of the crew. Or meditate, pray, whatever ye do. Ye’ve all earned it.”

“Are the new designs on your sword to your liking...’Bo?” Ghassan continued.

Travis pulled the blade partially from its scabbard. “Aye, old friend. It took a while to find the right blacksmith but the stout man back at Havilland port did his art on this one.”

“You knew Quebedeaux, did you not?”

“Aye, I did.”

The man from the Middle East narrowed his eyes as if pulling wisdom from deep within. “Every man lives with versions of himself. Hearsay has it that Quebedeaux was sunk by the Crown. Some say he retired, scuttled his ship and lives with a long beard in a coastal shack. What say you, captain?”

Travis was silent. He looked at the death head island. At this angle, there was enough torchlight on the other side that the skull-like silhouette seemed to herald a mammoth skeleton under the water’s top.

“I say some truths are stranger than hearsay, Ghassan...”

*Robert Quebedeaux and two of his crewmen swung swords against hissing and clawing at the door’s frame. The blonde boy he had found once was now older and handled a blade of his own.*

*“What are these THINGS?” the boy yelled out over the sounds of unnatural battle.*

*“KEEP FIGHTING, BO! WE HOLD ON UNTIL DAWN AND THESE BASTARDS AND THEIR TROUBLE WILL BE LONG GONE!” With every swing of his swords, the left hand of Quebedeaux shined with the five gold and jeweled rings on his fingers. There was blood in-between the gems.*

*“Ye be injured, captain!” Travis yelled as he looked at the blood pooling on Quebedeaux’s shirt.*

*“I’ll be fine, lad,” Robert said equally silent, “We’ll sail for Calavera at dawn. The skull island always lets me rest.”*

“And what of you, Captain?” The question woke Bo from his memories. The inquiry’s owner stood behind Ghassan. She had green eyes that were sharper than the cutlass at his side. Full lips pulled back on one side in a sneer and the woman they belonged to waited for her

captain's response. She had a mane of hair that should have been red like the women of her green clover fields but instead, her hair was silver from birth. It earned her a name unlike the Mary's and the Katherine's of her town.

Bo waved slightly. "Ms. Winter Burke," the silver haired woman swayed up. She bowed in mock and placed a hand on her sword hilt.

"At ye service, captain."

Travis smiled and squinted his eyes. "Doubtful. Ye and Ghassan take the whole crew, especially Glover, he needs time ashore. I'll be fine here on the ship. I be expecting to cross paths with an old friend."

Winter nodded. "I'll get the little wily cur. We could all shake the sights of the last sail. All those teeth...all those eyes on that...that thing. Plus, everyone needs to see this green fog. Ports from Ocracoke Inlet all the way to De Havilland Cove have reported the emerald haze moving across the seas. Can't say I've ever seen the likes of it."

Travis looked over the side of the Requiem. The sun setting landscape answered his gaze back with silence and an emerald approach.

"Aye, Ms. Burke - green fog. I've only heard of it," Bo said to himself.

Winter clapped hands. "Then it's decided! We all could use a drink. Raise one for ol' Robert Q!"

"Very well," Ghassan said, standing to his full and imposing stature. "We will go and toast the legend of Captain Quebedeaux."

Bo nodded. "Aye and I means to do the same."

###

The Requiem rocked slightly. Her sails were rolled up tightly and her three masts rose like mighty spires into the night sky. She groaned a bit as ships her size did. Enough battles, enough blow to her hull and the old girl often let out sounds that echoed her battles. They were either bold proclamations of her continued defiance or early cries of her death song.

Captain Travis stood on the deck and watched the torches of the mammoth skull island flicker and fight against the night. The flames danced in his eyes and against the wood and rope of the dock. The sailor held a fiddle, letting it spin in one hand as he prepared to strum its strings with the other.

Suddenly, a scream broke the calm night air. Travis heard screams bounding off the skull's coastline before but this was different. It was not the usual cries of Calavera which were wild yells into a night of drink and debauchery. Nor was this a scream that the island released from its reportedly ghostly foundations.

This was a plea for help. And it was a woman's cry at that.

Bo was down the plank in an eye's blink and heading towards the origin of the scream. He ran past toasting pockets of drunken sods. He cut through taverns and alleys until finally reaching the source of the sounds. Bo slid into a stilled stance.

There were two men accosting a young woman. One held her by a torn collar while the other man held a short knife to her face. Whatever sinister smiles and mouthy grins they duo had were quickly lost as they turned their gaze from the tear-soaked woman to the captain at the alley's end.

The first man, slid away from the woman with a dirty beard and one good eye. He ran a short blade across his own face. "Good evenin' sailor..." the man said. His smile and swagger getting him closer to Travis.

Bo nodded and bowed. "Evenin'," he returned, "Not readin' her mind at all but me thinks the lady wants better company."

The second man still clutched the girl by her ripped clothing. He sneered with a mouthful of metal teeth. "This ain't none a' ya concern, boy..."

"Aye," answered Travis, "Right ye be but I was bored. So...I be making it mine."

The two men charged Travis and a sword fight began. He parried the first strikes and caught the metal-mouth man with a fist to the nose. The first man threw a kick which caught part of Bo's side. The captain blocked another attack and slid free the dagger that he held in his waistband.

The first attacker fell from the sudden blade now piercing his abdomen. The metal-mouth man rushed as Travis side-stepped him. The second man dropped as Bo sliced his sword across the men's spine. With both assailants down, Captain Travis sheathed his swords.

"---oh my God---those men---" the woman wept, she pulled her clothing over her exposed flesh.

"Shhh," Travis began, helping her regain her footing. "I'll take ye back to my ship." Bo picked her up and cradled her. Waves of her honey-brown hair fell onto his leather coat. Each sway of her locks sent a smell of mead into the air. He looked into her equally enchanting eyes.

"What be ye name, love?" Captain Travis asked.

"My name is Molly," she said. And her words were music, windchimes over the roar and ruckus of Calaveras' population.

"Pleased to make ye acquaintance, Molly," the pirate returned, "My name is Bo."

###

The sounds of Calavera's nights were legendary. This night tonight they held up to expectations. Torchlight crowned the skull-shaped jut of rock and bands of pirates danced and

sang and drank to their fill. The Requiem rocked with the waves that seemed to pound her sides more frequently since her captain's return. Her black sails held tightly in their bound rolls.

Travis' cabin was a mixture of elegance and second-hand. It blended ancient wisdom, modern science and esoteric machinations bordering on the unnatural. Its depth was impressive and it was filled on its sides with candelabras and statues from across the globe. Vibrant and colorful curtains wove through the beams in the ceiling. Past the unmade bed and rumpled sheets set Travis' desk and it was covered in maps, hand-written notes and arcane devices of the sea and the unexplainable.

Captain Travis carried a small cup with a halo of steam. He handed it to the young woman. "Here ye go. How're ye' fairing?"

"Much better, thanks to you," Molly took the cup in her soft, small hands. A blanket surrounded the recently distressed damsel. The flickering candlelight of the cabin put a glow around her waves of curls and a glint in her eyes. "I'd be dead or worse, good sir, if it weren't for you. And how lucky for me - to be rescued by the captain of the legendary Requiem? Captain Travis and his crew: not pirates of the murderous sort but brave warriors on the world's waters against things that no government would admit or sailor recall. Ship and swords against pagan gods, returning dead and soulless voyagers spreading horror."

Travis nodded. "Some of that be true. Some of it...well...So, what brings you to a place like this, Molly? Ye' don't strike me as the pirate type."

"I was traveling. Caught on with a merchant ship that left me here. So...what is it that has the island all a' roar tonight?"

"Tis a pirate holiday of sorts. They be toasting Robert Quebedeaux – pirate legend."

Molly cocked her head to the left. Hair fell over one side of her face. Her eyebrows arched. "Who is this Robert Quebedeaux?"

Nabopollasar Defoe Travis leaned back into his chair. "One of the greatest pirates to ever live. A rogue and a gentleman. A wise man and a fool. He was a taskmaster. He was a friend. Robert's been gone for too long."

"Oh," Molly replied with a shift in her posture. The blanket slid away. She placed her tea cup down on a nearby stool and began swaying over to Travis.

"Good captain," the recently rescued lovely began, "Should you not be repaid for your bravery and true heart?" The chestnut-haired woman moved in and ran her hand inside Bo's coat. He looked into her face; she was pretty in the alley, beautiful at her rescue but now, this close, with her breath on his unshaven face - she was desirable. With the perspective of her plunging neckline and heaving bosom, Molly was no longer the victim needing rescue but a wanton woman. Her lips full and glistening. Enough of her skin showed from the ragged clothing that Bo knew she was a fit woman with curve and shape. Her eyes fluttered as she leaned in for more contact.

“Aye, Molly, I’d like nothing more than a pretty lass for the night. And the dawn,” Travis said, “I wake up frisky. But ye not be my type.”

She smiled and paused. “I am not?”

“No, lass, I try not to fornicate with witches.”

Molly pulled back. There was silence between the two people. One eyebrow raised. Travis stood without any indication of emotion or feeling.

“Hmph,” she said and with that, the cabin’s air shifted violently and suddenly. Bo held onto the large wooden table behind him. It would have been and often was a proper place for lovemaking but for now, it was an anchor against unnatural winds in a small room.

The woman’s skin slid from her peach coloring to green, with a hint of a life on the sea. Her hair went from honey waves of curls to dark emerald tresses similar to trails of seaweed. Just around her neck and the edge of her hairline, scales flecked out of her skin. Her lips darkened as did her eyes which turned completely black like ink and ocean’s end. Whatever the girl was, she was no longer.

As Molly’s transformation ended, she inhaled deeply. “Ah,” she began, “Much better.”

“Tis a trap,” said Bo. His hands on his sword and flintlock.

Molly, now a sea-witch, smiled and her teeth were dark and moist, “More like an introduction. Welcome to my growing army, Captain Bo Travis.”

There was a thump.

Travis and Molly turned towards the door of the cabin. Another thump. Then another. Then another until the door of Bo’s quarters creaked opened. Two shadowed figures stood, leaning in the doorway. Before they entered, their smell, their odor preceded them. It was the ocean’s rank but only when some mass of water weed or flotsam had given up all life and filled with rot and stink. It was the ocean’s smell when something large that swam and lived floated dead to the surface

Molly smiled. Her two would-be-attackers shambled in, barely able to walk in a straight line. Their faces had a sick greenish hue. The skin was sliding off their skulls, exposing bone and shadow. Their limbs and fingers had shrunken tight to the joints and their clothing appeared large and baggy. Their eyes were white covered in membrane and Travis knew they did not need to see. Puppets needed no sight, they had a master.

“Ye know, girlie,” the pirate began, without crack of surprise or fear in his voice, “Ye could have saved me the trouble of killing these two earlier...”

“Oh no, my Captain,” Molly said, her eyes now squinting, “I had to see you, feel you brave and true. Kind and noble. Any bilge rat can be pulled into my sway in this life and the next, but for a real, powerful servant...I need a real man, a good man. I need a fighter.”

“I was thinking the same thing.” Bo leapt up with his swords drawn. He swung at Molly and a blade blocked his attack, inches from her green face. Her two puppet ghouls moved in front of her with weapons ready. Travis pulled his cutlass back and spun. The fight ensued with the sea-witch’s minions.

Blades clashed. Travis ducked and parried. For every slash and thrust of his weapon, the water-logged creatures felt nothing and showed even less of pain and injury. Bo’s fight was a lost cause. All he could do was protect himself. Captain Travis ran his main sword into the first attacker’s abdomen and drove his short dagger into the skull of the second. They halted for a moment and then shook off the attack. Travis’ weapons remained embedded in the revenant seamen.

“Oh my sailor boy...” Molly slid up behind Bo who, in turn, spun and drove his remaining sword into her stomach. They both looked down at the cutlass sticking from her abdomen. The sea-witch looked the pirate in the eyes.

She began to laugh. The green woman waved her hand and sent Bo Travis flying across his cabin. The impact was hard. Wooden chairs bit into Travis’ back. Trinkets and items hard won or harder stolen crashed about him. The pirate’s world went sideways for a moment and then came back in a haze.

“Is this---“ he began, wiping a trickle of blood from his mouth, “Is this how ye repay a man who comes to ye’ aid? Ye be turning me into one of these mindless lackeys?”

“No, no, not you,” Molly answered, “Vermin like these two have little to offer me. No strength. No conviction. They end as little more than mindless drones. But men like you...*oooh*, men of legend become so much more.” She smiled wider and looked towards the door of the captain’s cabin.

Another set of thumps and sloshes made it clear that another visitor’s arrival. A tall figure cast a shadow in the door frame. The two water-logged ghouls moved aside. Thudding footfall after thudding footfall, the damned thing entered into the light of Travis’ cabin.

Molly ran her hands down the sides of her body. Her green palms lingered suggestively around the hilt of Captain Travis’ sword still embedded in her stomach. “Let me bring about a reunion.”

Bo’s eyes went wide for a moment and then cut into slits. He saw the shine of familiar rings although dulled by drudge and ocean filth. “Like I said, I need men like you...I need men of legend,” finished Molly. What stood before Travis was once a man, a great pirate and an even better mentor. He had saved a young boy searching for revenge. He taught a young boy about becoming a man.

What was once Robert Quebedeaux now looked at Bo Travis with white eyes, green skin and ocean floor growths spreading across his body. The bewitched ghoul of a captain watched the young pirate in the corner.

Molly smiled, talking to Bo while studying the depth-ascended Quebedeaux. She picked at his green and wet flesh. She ran her hand over his sag-flesh mustache. “I have just begun to

build my forces. And this one, this sailor, was strong, brave. He came to my rescue here not too long ago and, well, like you said, it was a trap. And he fell. And now this Captain Quebedeaux has been mine.” Molly smiled and played with a spiny thing protruding from the still and green deadman.

She snapped her attention to the downed but living pirate. “The places I come from,” the sea-witch began, “They are full of things that talk about you. The famed Bo Travis, thorn of the Crown, scourge pirate, hunter of shadows, killer of legends. Little boy whose home got blown to smoke and bone? Bogie-man and Jennie Greenteeth come and take your family under tow?”

Bo’s lips went thin in tightened grimace. Quebedeaux or whatever he was now merely shifted in his stance and reeked of the sea’s grasp. The regal look of a pirate captain was now lost under layers of dark growth, sloughing skin and green hue. Robert’s eyes were frosted over and Travis looked hard for something within them.

The sea-witch moved past her stilled drones. Her dark dress clung to her curves and moved with her every bare footstep. “Ol’ Molly has a home for you, Nabopolassar. This will just take a kiss.” She leaned in with a wide smile. Her eyes flashed over green. Her hair dripped onto Bo’s leather coat. He smelled salt and moisture. The sea-witch reached out with talons clicking eagerly.

Then the Captain smiled. His eyes squinted. “Ye know those things in those places ye come from?” he whispered to his female predator.

Molly paused and turned her head slightly. “Hmmm-mmm...”

Bo reached the sword in her stomach. A subtle and quick manipulation by his hand and the hilt came loose. A stub of metal, dark and clump covered, showed. The blacksmith had done good work.

“They also say how iron kills a witch.” The captain shoved the knob of metal higher up into Molly’s chest.

The sea-witch gasped. The only sound that came from her mouth was a futile series of exhalations and huffs. Molly slumped to one side and water began to pour from her snapping maw. Suddenly, the air in the cabin plunged to arctic cold and a small gale ravaged the quarters. Bo held himself against the wall and let the death throes run their course. Over the sound of the whipping force and the bone-shearing winds, Travis heard Molly’s screams and the shrieks that were more animal than human. She clutched clumsily at the iron stuck in her form. It looked as if to burn and a noxious green smoke shot billowed from her wound.

As quickly as it came, the raging and frigid hurricane ended. Papers fluttered to the ship’s floor. Items completed their crashings.

Travis knelt at the sea-witch’s dying body. Her fluttering green eyes fell on his face. Bo smiled.

“Like I said before, girlie - tis a trap. But it was mine.”

“...how...how did you know...?”



Bo stood. “Green fog. Every time it’s come in, folk disappear from Calavera. A good hunting ground of the drunk and the lost. But the green fog gives ye away. I’ve played plenty of Liar’s Dice, hag. And even the best cheat and trickster has a tell. Ye do too. There was green fog the night Quebedeaux disappeared. Only I knew he had come home to Calavera. To the arms of this place. After enough inquisition and bribery into the underworld, I heard there was a woman of the waters, a sea-witch with anxious designs and assembling forces.”

Travis looked at the servants.

They shook and trembled. Their skin glistened heavily and their bones cracked with the clutching of their heads. The two watery ghouls slumped and fell. Water logged and bloated, their bodies began to liquefy. Legs and arms disassembled from torso. Heads spasmed and pulled free. Flesh sloughed loose and bone creaked and cracked. Everything that bound together the tide-turned tortured now came apart and slid out of the cabin and back into the sea.

Travis returned his gaze to the dying she-creature.

“I had to put up with the charade long enough, darlin’, to be sure ye were the one...and that Robert would be with ye.”

The green woman bared her gritted teeth. Her jaws creaked open and a mix of dank fluid and Calavera water seeped from her rupturing flesh.

“...does...it...keep you awake...Captain Travis?” Molly found strength to cackle. Her cheekbones began to show as her skull seemed to push out while her face pulled in.

Bo looked on, watching the sea-witch fade.

“...The fear that after all your travels...all your hunting of the Rossio beastie that did your home... What...what if you did not...get the right monster?” With her last word, Molly smiled and her lips tightened. Her face pulled back onto a flesh covered skull and her body went limp. Bo left her form and moved to what was once Quebedeaux.

Captain Travis reached out and held, barely, the ringed hand of his old friend. Bo leaned in, speaking to a sagging ear and bloated head. The resurrected pirate captain looked ahead with no reaction.

“Go, me captain,” Bo whispered, a glister in his eyes. “Sail for a place of safety. Calavera always welcomes us home.”

There was nothing. A breath, maybe two passed by and Travis waited.

What was once Robert turned its head slowly and looked at its former protégé.

The moment held. Bo smiled with glistening eyes and nodded.

Then the resurrected pirate collapsed. His remains slid out into nothingness.

The green fog lifted. Calavera, in all its death’s head beauty, sat clear on the ocean’s surface.

Captain Travis knelt down in his cabin and waited for his crew's return.

THE END

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