

As the waves crashed against the massive wooden vessel, the salty sea water sprayed gently against the faces of the many sailors on board. This mastercraft of a ship boasted a strong reinforced hull that deflected cannon fire like stones against a castle's ramparts and unmistakable red sails and a black jolly roger flying above the crow's nest. This ship is known throughout these waters as a force to be feared by Spanish armadas and English galleons alike. *The Red Queen* as the ship is known is often seen making port at the so called "Free ports" which act as glorified pirate dens and making merry with the many riches plundered from the many fleets making the voyage to and from Europe.

Winds began to blow stronger against the course of the ship, and the sea became harsh as it rose and fell as if it were trying to shake off whatever unfortunate souls should be upon its surface. "Hold fast ye mangy sea dogs! Neptune's fury is naught but sand on the shores to the might of this ship!" The booming voice of Captain Edward Raven filled the ears of the numerous scalawags on deck, drowning out the sound of thunder and sinking their fears to the depths. Rarely did the crew understand the many words that passed through the Captain's lips though they found themselves willing to follow him into hell and out the other end nonetheless. The storm was unlike anything these waters had seen in generations, but the Captain kept to his course, trusting his beloved ship to survive such a trifling weather phenomenon.

The captain and crew awoke feeling not the breeze of the sea on their faces but sand, sand that held the terrible heat of the rising sun in each grain. The Captain awoke as the sun pierced through his eyelids. "Must've been quite the night if I feel this horrid." seeing as he had little recollection of the night before, which is not an uncommon

occurrence when good booze is involved, Edward figured this was simply another morning hungover. "Javier! Where in the bloody blue blazes are we?" The captain shouted to his long time friend and first mate who stood at the shoreline gazing off in the distance, "I don't know Captain...but I don't think we'll be leaving soon." Javier's voice was shaky, much to Edward's confusion. "Well whatever do you mean? We rack up a crazy debt last night or summat?" "No Cap'n, look." Javier lifted his left hand and pointed a finger at a ship in the distance, and as Edward's vision cleared he saw that it was none other than the Red Queen, wrecked on the beach with a huge hole in the hull, the bow snapped like a twig, and the masts broken in half hanging off the starboard side. Edward immediately began running over to the wreckage, with Javier soon following. "NO NO NO NO this can't be happening!" Edward ran into the hull hole and began frantically searching the cluttered interior. Edward picked up a barrel and began carrying it out onto the beach. Edward smiled before pulling the lid off of the barrel and peering inside and seeing that a small hole in the bottom of the barrel had drained it of its contents. "The rum is gone! There is no hope!" Edward collapsed and laid on his back staring at the sky, feeling totally defeated. "It be the locker! We've died and gone to the Locker of Davy Jones!" a bearded sailor ran across the beach in a frenzied panic, waving his arms around like a madman. The man stopped in front of Edward and Javier, "We be in the locker Cap'n! There be devils on this island!" Javier grabbed the man's shoulder. "Calm down man, what's this talk of Devils, eh?" The captain and first mate hardly recognized the man as the crew's cook, Charles, he was covered in bruises and sand and his clothes were tattered and torn. "In the forest, past the palm trees be a cave full of nasty beasties with evil red eyes and gnashing teeth!" "Well that's certainly

different.” Edward interjected, “What of the rest of the crew? Have you found anyone else or have you been too busy with your new beastie friends?” “N-No sir, I hav’nae found anyone around ‘ere.” Charles responded with his Scottish accent coming through as his nerves began to calm. “Well what say we take a little bit to find our mates ‘fore we go see this cave of wonders then?” the Captain suggested to his crew of two. “Should we split up to cover more ground then, Captain?” Javier suggested. “You’re not making any sense at all mate. We’re stranded god knows where and there’s report of beasties and a severe deficit of rum. I say we stick together.” Edward rebuked.

The trio of miscreants then began wandering the coastline of the mysterious Island finding no trace of their missing comrades. The sun was high, and the group grew weary in the tropical heat. “Captain, how about we take a little break from searching for the likely dead crew and try to find something to keep ourselves from dying of dehydration.” Javier struggled to get the words out of his dry throat. “Awright, surely there’s coconuts around ‘ere yeah?” responded the captain, his voice nearly as dry as the sands beneath his boots. “I think I saw a wee little pond in the forest, mebbe we can grab some fish out of it?” Charles suggested. “Y’think the water is drinkable?” “That far inland I dunnae see why not.”

Charles guided the Captain and first mate to the supposed pond, but as the team trekked towards their salvation Javier’s foot got stuck in a hole in the ground, and as he tumbled the remains of a long deceased human sprang up from below the earth.

The cadaver was equipped with a tattered coat that sported a host of pockets, which kicked the crew’s pirate instincts into action, and as the searched the pockets of this skeleton, Charles pulled an old piece of paper from one of the waist pockets. “It be

a map Cap'n!" Charles excitedly proclaimed. "I think it may be of this island!" Edward stretched his right hand to the cook, "Well let me see it then."

The Captain examined the map closely, then rotated his body while pointing into the distance, as if he were tracing the horizon. He carried on for a moment before returning his attention to the crew. "It seems it is." Javier and Charles then stood behind their Captain, peering at the map over his shoulder. "Look there!" Javier pointed at a faded marking on the map that resembled an X. "You've always had a good eye mate." The captain commended his first mate. "Reckon there be treasure on this miserable spit of land Cap'n?" Charles said as the light returned to his eyes. "Well only one way to find out eh?" Edward then turned the small map over to examine the back. "Oh looky, this chap left a little note for us."

*"If thou seeketh to rule the sea as the tides themselves, offer that which is most valuable."*

"Well I for one don't believe some ol' Pirate wrote this." Edward remarked, "Must've been quite the poet that penned this nonsense." Charles began examining the map a little closer. "That be the cave full of devils!" Charles' voice became shaky as he was stricken with panic. The corners of Captain Raven's mouth curled up in a smirk. "Gentlemen, adventure is calling us." Javier began coughing as a result of the oncoming dehydration. "Can we at least find this so-called spring first Captain?" Edward and Charles snapped out of their pirate trance, realizing once again that they are still as parched as the sands of the Sahara.

The crew continued through the Palm forest and finally came across the spring Charles had spotted earlier. Edward took his leather tricorne hat and scooped the crystal

clear water and dumped it all over his face, Javier submerged his face below the water's surface, and Charles gently scooped the water with his hands and made use of the opportunity to wash the sand from his bushy beard. The spring was populated with fish large enough to eat, so the crew started a fire to allow Charles to do what he does best, as the sun began to fall toward the horizon, with their bellies full and thirst quenched, the crew fetched swords from the wreckage of their beloved ship, fastened torches from branches and foliage, and set off toward the cave.

"Are y-ye s-sure about this C-Cap'n?" Charles' voice was shaky once again, yet his feet carried him towards danger nonetheless. "Of course mate, the promise of plunder is always worth facing any number of beasties."

"B-But what if the plunder already be plundered by another band of rascalions?"

"Only one way to find out, my dear Scottish friend."

As the shadows of the cave consumed the trio, a high pitched screech echoed from deeper within. "Have no fear gentlemen, none can best us when we fight as one!" Captain Raven's confidence spread to Javier and Charles. The tunnels opened up to an open chamber, water dripping from the ceiling with an echoing sound as it hits the puddles on the floor.

A great many red beady eyes pierced through the darkness of the cavern, and a winged beast nearly the size of a human soared towards Edward with an ear-shattering screech. The Captain had no fear as he struck the beast with his sword, piercing through its face, slaying it instantly. "See that men? These Devils can be slain!" Though they are Pirates, the trio of swashbucklers do possess the ability to strategize and use

the terrain around them to their advantage, thus they stood firmly within the corridor as the beasts charged them from the front. The limited space meant the beasts were basically lining up to try to take on three skilled swordsmen alone, and though the beasts drew much blood from the scurvy sea dogs, clawing and biting and them with ferocious fervor, the Swashbucklers were victorious after a long battle.

Javier picked up his torch that he had dropped during the battle and examined the beasts closer. "They look like bats. Oversized bats rather."

"Uglier than normal bats by far." Edward remarked. "Shall we continue towards our fortune then gentlemen?"

Javier and Charles regained their composure, with their clothes torn to be tied around their wounds. The crew continued through the chamber and into another corridor, the water dripping from the ceiling seeming to sparkle and glow more and more as the further they went. At the end of the corridor was a wall of still water, water which did not fall but stood within the wall as naturally as it would in the ground. With little hesitation, The Captain put his hand in the water to check for danger, and after finding none he looked back to his crew.

"See you on the other side." as he took in a big breath of air and charged through the liquid wall. Soft blue light penetrated the water on the other end, and as Edward neared it he felt himself being pulled towards it as if he were falling, then before long he actually was falling, and upon leaving the water's embrace he fell straight into a chamber full of plants emitting various colors of lights, and a ring of shining water flowing around the room. Edward marveled at the sights before him, the orange, pink, blue, and purple colors were the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his 37 years

of life. Shortly after, his first mate and favorite chef fell through the ceiling, landing directly behind him.

“Gentlemen, I have spotted our treasure.” Edward spoke excitedly to his crew as he pointed to a brilliant gold Trident on a pedestal in the center of the chamber. Javier and Charles gazed at the magical ecosystem around them while Edward stepped towards the Trident. The crew turned their attention to their Captain, and as soon as he grasped the Trident, bright green lights shot from his eyes.

Edward’s vision went dark, and as he reopened his eyes, a massive sea serpent was before him in a space that resembled the heavens of the night sky. *“Mortal.”* The serpent spoke without opening its jaw, and its booming voice filled Edward’s mind.

*“Fate has led you here. I offer you godhood, dominion over the seas.”*

“I came here for treasure mate.”

*“What I offer you is far beyond the value of gold and silver. I offer you freedom from your mortal coil, eternal life, and divinity.”*

“I quite like my mortal coil.”

*“You will become one with the sea, dictating the tide, delivering storms of your wrath, and drowning the souls of the unworthy in your depths.”*

“Sounds like a lot of work, mate.” Edwards disinterest began to show itself in his voice.

*“You would forgo such a divine destiny?”*

“Living eternally as the sea itself sounds like it would entail never tasting rum again, or feeling the wind in my hair and the cool splash of the sea on my face. I’d sooner accept my inevitable death than deny myself those wonderful pleasures.”

*“Foolish mortal, it is your fate.”*

“Tell the fates I’m busy, or to find some other bloke.”

*“Very well. You have made your choice, but you cannot escape that which has been ordained for you by powers beyond the understanding of your feeble mind.”*

“Keep calling me names like that and I’ll start to think you don’t like me or summat.”

*“If you will refuse your destiny, then as holy regent, I cannot allow you to leave. The sea must have a god.”*

“Is that so? What happened to the last bloke which held that title then?”

The serpent did not respond.

“Silent treatment then eh? Tell ye what, I’ll make you a deal.”

*“What could you possibly offer me, mortal?”*

“You let me sail the seas on me ship with me crew again, then I solemnly promise to come back later on, yeah?”

The serpent closed its eyes.

*“Very well. The mercy you seek shall be granted. Though your crew cannot be raised from the dead, your vessel will be seaworthy once again.”*

“That’s good enough I suppose.”

*“Do not forget your end of the deal.”*

Edward’s vision went black again, and when he awoke he saw his crew crouched over him as he lay flat on the ground.

“What happened Captain?” Javier said with great concern. “Soon as you grabbed the Trident it turned to ash and you passed out!”

“It’s nothing important I don’t think.” Edward said as he stood up. “Look Cap’n ye’ve been marked!” Charles pointed to the Trident-shaped marking that had appeared on the back of Edward’s right hand. “What matters now is that we leave this dingy old cave. The treasure awaits us outside.” Edward pointed to the water in the ceiling which began to fall, filling the chamber.

Javier and Charles awoke the same sand that scorched their faces in the morning, now cool as night had fallen. Captain Raven stood on the shore, and in the moonlight was their beloved ship, floating once again.

“The Red Queen! She sails again!” Charles exclaimed excitedly.

“How is this possible?” Javier asked his captain in disbelief.

“Do not lose faith in my abilities gentlemen. Let us go aboard!” Captain Raven showed his crew to the rowboat that had appeared on the beach.

The crew returned to their ship, and as they climbed aboard Javier asked yet another question, “How are we supposed to crew the ship with just the three of us, Captain?”

“We’ll just go with the flow, savvy?” The Captain said reassuredly.

Captain Raven took the wheel, and the crew of two took their posts as the Red Queen sailed off toward the horizon.