

The Calamari Incident (or how Fungal joined Slieve): A gentle and well meant satire by Siddig "el Nathrach" Macfael

Twas a quiet night in the Mutilated Griffin in the port of Bunclody. The fighting men and women of Slievegall'ion were mostly several sheets to the wind. In one corner the two Halfings Jingo Merrychap and Jobo Hairyfoot were having a heated discussion as to the merits of marinating wild boar, a table down from them, Butch and Thalia were giving Skirt Boy tips on makeup. In the corner sat Naoci and Siddig, they had just finished a deal and Siddig had become the proud owner of several tons of sand. Ashlar was sat in front of a mirror polishing his scales until they gleamed. Fingers was wandering about being shifty, relieving other members of Slieve of their hard earned coinage, purely to teach them to take better care of their belongings of course. Ticeara was in the back room supervising the roaring trade that the Bimbo's Guild always did when Slieve were in town. Cormac, Xandeth or Walker nowhere to be found. Dougal who had been so fervently praising Danu he had passed out face down in his own drool, on one of the tables, his arm held out straight still clutching the Grail. Anwyn and Baru were standing over him, swaying gently.

"Watch this." Baru said to the Paladin. As the two of them watched, Dougal lowered the Grail to his mouth and drank. "He's still asleep." Said the amazed Sergeant.

"Truly his devotion is strong." Anwyn said solemnly.

"Aye, that it is, I'm not so sure about his liver."

Paddy looked around the inn at his unit and sighed. He stared down into his pint and took another drag from his pipe, which was full of a herbal mixture he'd bought from Naoci, who was considering branching out into drug dealing and very soothing it was too. There was no doubt about it he was bored, there was something missing. Siddig came over and sat down at Paddy's table, still smiling about the good deal he had got from Naoci on the sand as it would be some time before he began to wonder why exactly he had bought it.

"You seem troubled Paddy." Paddy nodded. "What's wrong?"

"I'm homesick." Siddig looked confused.

"But surely this is your home?"

"The sea, I miss the sea. I was brought up on pirate er, uhm, I mean merchant ships with a barnacle in one hand a scurvy biscuit in the other. I miss the wind in my hair, the smell of the sea air, watching the sunrise over the horizon, the gentle rise and fall of a ship on an ocean wave. All this marching up and down sand dunes..."

"Surely you mean the hills of Dalriada."

"Oh yes of course the hills of Dalriada. It's all-well and fine but I miss the sea. There's a lot less hills on a ship."

"But isn't the sea dangerous?" Siddig asked.

"Oh yes, very. There are sea serpents, giant sharks, ill-tempered crabs, kraken and now the fomorians. Yes, very dangerous indeed."

"What's a kraken."

"A huge great big rubbery creature with many tentacles."

"Like a giant calamari?"

"Yes." Said Patrick not having the slightest idea what Siddig was talking about. Siddig considered this for a while.

"You should go on a cruise. Take your ship out before the winter sets in proper, the Connacht should be quiet now until the spring. Take the ship out, enjoy yourself."

"There's too much to do, I have responsibilities." Paddy considered what he'd just said. "No sod that, I'm the king I can do whatever I want. I will go on a cruise and perhaps a spot of piracy, I mean fishing." Siddig smiled, as he seemed to have cheered Paddy up. Paddy stood up and banged his tankard on the table. Everybody looked up. From the back room Lady Ticeara shouted, "Stop that you'll damage the wood!"

"Right everyone listen to me. Fingers stop that." Fingers looked up from where he was trying to prise open Dougal's finger with his dagger to get at the grail and adopted an innocent expression.

"We're all going on a cruise,"

“Eh no that wasn’t what I meant.” Siddig said but Paddy didn’t hear him. “I want everybody kitted up and ready to go in fifteen minutes.” There was grumbling from the assembled members of Slieve.

“Come on it’ll be fun.”

“Actually what I meant,” Siddig continued although Paddy was not listening. “was that you go on a cruise.”

“Come on hurry up!” Paddy shouted, banging his tankard down again.

“Will you please stop doing that!” Ticeara shouted. Siddig wished that he had never spoken in the first place, silently he prayed to Danu that none of the others discovered it was his idea or he could expect a dagger in the ribs for his troubles.

Outside the inn the night was cold and a constant drizzle fell, prime late summer weather in Erin. Paddy swayed slightly just beginning to realise how drunk and chemically imbalanced he actually was. Mutiny was mentioned as a grumbling Slieve formed up into an amorphous blob. Walker and Cormac were man handling a semiconscious and mumbling Dougal between them and he still had not spilt a drop. The two halflings had, had the presence of mind to liberate two kegs of ale, which they were rolling them in front of them. Baru and Anwyn both had a barrel over their shoulders also.

“I hope your going to pay for those.” Said Ticeara already unhappy about the damage done to her table by an over enthusiastic Paddy. Xandeth marched smartly up to Paddy, stamped his foot on the ground and saluted smartly. His ring mail was on backwards, his helmet was squint and his tabard was just a mess.

“All present and almost correct, sah!” He shouted.

“Thank you sergeant. Form them up into a column and march them down to the Besotted Monkey.”

“Sah, yes sah!” Xandeth turned to face Slieve. “Right you ‘orrible little lot, form into a column. Come on lets be having you! Ready! By the lef’, by the lef’, by the lef’, hef’ right, hef right!” Xandeth marched smartly down the narrow cobbled street towards the harbour. The rest of Slieve watched him as he marched into the distance, he turned a corner and disappeared from view. Paddy shook his head and used his fingers to massage his temples. Naoci clapped his hands and rubbed them together.

“Right, who’ll give me odds that he doesn’t notice until he reaches the ship.” In the distance they heard Xandeth.

“You utter and complete bastard!” Moments later he came stomping back round the corner, he held his helmet in his hand and his face was crimson in fury.

“He doesn’t look very happy does he?” Said Jobo.

“Can’t be good for you getting that upset.” Said Jingo.

“Too tall that’s the problem.” Replied Jobo.

“He’s going to shout at us now.” Thalia said. “Can’t we just do what he says?”

Twenty minutes and one extensive tantrum (which had resulted in the militia being called out) later Slieve where staggering in a column towards the harbour with a sulky sergeant in the lead. Paddy was marching at the side of the column near Skirt Boy, Butch and Thalia.

“When we get to the ship, can I be Roger the Cabin Boy?” Skirt Boy asked. Paddy turned to look at him.

“What’s wrong with you?” He asked.

“He’s being trained by Naoci.” Thalia said.

“Ah, I see.” Said Paddy as it all made sense. Butch was deep in thought as they marched into the harbour towards the jetty where the Besotted Monkey was moored.

“Paddy?” Butch asked.

“Yes?”

“Why are we going to sea?”

“Because it’ll be fun, it’ll be good for you.” Slieve came to a halt at the gangplank leading to Paddy’s flagship. At the top of the gangplank was a sailor. He had two wooden legs, both his hands ended in hooks and he had eye patches over both eyes. He leaned heavily on a pair of crutches to stay upright.

“It doesn’t look like it was very good for him.” Thalia muttered.

“Permission to come aboard Lucky?” Paddy asked.

“Who’s that then?” Lucky asked.

“It’s me Paddy.”

“Paddy who?”

“Patrick the Black.”

“I knows seven Patrick the Blacks. Which one is you?”

“The one who owns this ship.”

“Oh the admiral.”

“That’s right now can I come aboard please?”

“How do I know it’s you?”

“Danu’s beard.” Paddy cursed.

Fingers who was becoming increasingly impatient drew two of his throwing knives.

“Can we go back to the pub?” Ticeara asked.

“No!” Paddy shouted. Dougal had just woken up to discover himself being held by Cormac and Walker.

“Le’go o’me!” He shouted. Cormac and Walker happily obliged. Dougal had unfortunately overestimated his ability to walk and staggered out of control, sideways like a crab until he ran out of jetty and tumbled into the shallow part of the harbour. Hearing the splash, Lucky began shouting.

“Man overboard! Man overboard!” Walker and Cormac went over to where Dougal had fallen of the jetty and looked down into the dark water.

“Well don’t just stand there, Corporal Cormac, go and get him!” Paddy shouted.

“Why?” Cormac asked.

“He’s got the grail!”

“But I’ve got armour on.” Cormac whined.

“I’ll bet Lady Niah doesn’t have to put up with this. Paddy muttered. From the water a shining chalice broke the surface and rose into the night air held up by an arm. Cormac and Walker gasped with religious awe. A throbbing ache began in Paddy’s temples.

“Right get him out of there! Lucky we’re coming on board! Fingers if that appendagely challenged buffoon tries to stop us you have my permission to stab him.”

“This is piracy!” Lucky objected.

“It’s my ship!” Paddy screamed finally losing his temper. Cormac and Walker had finally dragged Dougal out of the water.

“I didn’t let it touch the ground Danu.” The alcoholic priest muttered. Slieve bundled on board past the indignant wooden limbed skipper. Paddy began shouting orders.

“Cast off! Trim that sail! Shorten that jib and splice the mainbrace!” Slieve didn’t have the slightest idea of what he was talking about. Paddy shouted out some other nautical terms before he realised that they where falling on deaf ears. He sighed. If you want something doing, he thought and set to work.

The Following Morning . . . The following morning found Jingo and Jobo sat at the rail of the ship with a fishing rod. They were talking to an increasingly unhappy looking Anwyn. The Paladin was clutching hold of the Gae Bolg very tightly. Xandeth had the helm and despite his devotion to Mannaan Mac Lir had never steered a boat in his life and was currently praying for guidance. Ashlar, Siddig and Walker were leaning over the rail at the stern of the castle watching the wake of the ship. Siddig and Walker where a paler shade of green and Ashlar’s usual golden sheen looked somewhat tarnished. All of them had been violently and copiously seasick. Walker had been preying to Danu for a quick death.

“Danu why hast thou forsaken me?” He cried, accompanied by the sound of Siddig chundering.

“I think it’s just a spot of sea sickness.” Ashlar said.

“I’m going to stab myself.” Siddig announced, feeling that he had nobody to blame for this but himself.

“It’s all right for you.” Walker said. “I’m suffering from both ends.” Siddig considered this and against his better judgement decided to enquire further.

“Why?” The scribe asked.

“My arse hasn’t been right since Trollwood.” The two of them lapsed into silence.

“A healer specialised in proctology.” Ashlar said.

“What?” Walker asked.

“An arse healer.” The mage said.

“How does that differ from a normal healer?” Siddig asked.

“I miss me trees.” Walker said.

“Well you know how a healer lays hands on you to heal you?”

“Yes.” Said Siddig, grinning as the odd occasion when he had been coerced into fighting he had always tried to get injured near the prettiest healers and as often as possible.

“Well a healer specialised in proctology will actually lay their hands on, up your arse.” Siddig grimaced, Walker brightened.

“I’m just going to have a word with Ticeara.” He said and disappeared below deck.

“Wait a minute, how do you know all this?” Siddig asked the gold skinned mage. Ashlar looked uncomfortable. Just then the unmistakable sound of a very hard slap rang across the ship. Moments later Walker appeared back on deck holding the side of his face, which was an angry red colour in the rough shape of Ticeara’s hand.

“No go?” Siddig asked, Walker shook his head.

“Good idea though.” The Captain said. Ashlar shrugged and headed below deck to try and get some sleep.

“Clever man.” Walker said. Siddig nodded.

“Shame about his condition though.” Walker considered this whilst throwing up.

“What condition?” He asked, wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his tunic.

“He’s got jaundice hasn’t he?” Walker shook his head. “Well why’s he that colour?”

“Well there’s two theories on that one. The first being that he was caught in a god’s golden shower and it stained his skin.”

“Eugh.” Siddig’s face crumpled in disgust and he threw up again “And the other?”

“Well this is the one favoured by Ashlar himself. He claims that he is in fact half dragon.”

“Really? Which half?” Walker raised his eyebrows sardonically. Quite a feat considering neither Walker nor his eyebrows knew the meaning of the word. The two of them lapsed into silence, punctuated by the occasional bouts of puking. From the main deck they heard Anwyn shouting at the two halflings.

“For the last time you are not using the Gae Bolg as a fishing spear!” The Paladin screamed.

“Siddig?” Walker said.

“Yes?”

“You’ve been blessed by the goddess with the ability to heal haven’t you?” Walker asked. Siddig saw where this was going.

“Not a chance.” Walker sighed and then headed below deck.

“They’ll make a sailor out of him yet.” Siddig muttered to himself.

Paddy awoke with a hangover. Boy did I get drunk last night, he thought to himself whilst preying to Danu for respite. That’s odd, he thought, my castle appears to be bobbing up and down. He opened his eyes. I’m on a ship! He thought. Slowly the events of the following night came back to him. “For Danu’s sake.” He groaned. Slowly and in a surprising amount of pain he got up. He could hear voices up on deck, the Paladin shouting about his bloody spear.

When Paddy emerged from below deck the rest of Slieve (except for Dougal who may have actually died) were already up.

“Morning sah!” Xandeth shouted, causing Paddy to wince. Paddy had a look around the main deck. Jingo and Jobo where fishing, fine. The sails where full, good. Xandeth had the helm, a bit worrying but okay. Something began to nag at the back of his mind. There’s something wrong here, he thought but he couldn’t quite put his finger on it. Then it hit him.

“Lucky!” The dextrously challenged sailor hobbled over on his collection of wooden limbs.

“Aye, aye admiral.”

“Lucky,” Said Paddy sounding a lot more reasonable than he felt. “Where’s the crew?” Lucky considered this as if it was a startlingly original concept before he answered.

“Shore leave admiral.” Paddy nodded. Despite the fact that he could have cheerfully disembowelled Lucky at that moment, it made perfect sense the way things were going at the moment.

“Did you not think it would have been a good idea to tell me that before we set sail last night?”

“Well begging the admiral’s pardon, I thought I was being hijacked last night.” By now the other members of Slieve were beginning to drift over to where Paddy and Lucky were talking. “Besides I thought I heard you refer to a Captain Walker last night, is he not a sea faring man?”

“Nope he’s a tree hugger.” Said Cormac trying to help.

“Captain Walker is an infantry captain you brain dead cricket stump!” Paddy screamed his face turning a dangerously red colour. He forced himself to calm down. Then another thought struck him.

“Lucky?”

“Aye, aye admiral.”

“Do you know where we are?”

“Did you happen to bring a navigator on board with you admiral?”

“No.”

“Then no sir I don’t know where we are.” Well it couldn’t get much worse he thought.

“I wouldn’t worry too much about that admiral as we have a more pressing problem.” Lucky said. Oh this should be good, Paddy thought. What now? A hole in the boat? Balor? A thousand naked sea sprites riding sea horses galloping over the waves to assault the ship? Actually that would be quite good Paddy thought.

“What?” He asked Lucky.

“I need to go to the toilet.” Lucky answered. Paddy was speechless.

“So?” He managed to choke out.

“Well it’s the nature of the business I have to do.” Paddy just stared at Lucky in utter confusion.

“I think I understand.” Baru said.

“Well please share it with us by all means.” Paddy said.

“He can’t wipe his arse with those hooks, he needs somebody else to do it for him.” The big sergeant said.

“Aye master Baru just about has the size of it.” Lucky confirmed. Paddy groaned and wished he was back on dry land, cleaning out a cesspool, being tortured to death by Medb anything but this.

“What would you usually do if nobody was here?” Naoci said.

“I’d rather not say master Naoci.”

“Right, fine.” Paddy said wearily. “I need one volunteer!” Slieve dispersed with remarkable speed, all of them finding things to do. Skirt Boy who was now insisting on being called Roger was left standing there. That boy is weird, Paddy thought.

“Will Roger do?” Paddy asked Lucky. Lucky very gently scratched his chin.

“I don’t know my lord. Does he have a woman’s...” A throwing dagger flew between his legs and imbedded, quivering in the wood just behind Lucky.

“Not another word.” Fingers said. “Or it’ll be more than wooden legs you’ll be needing.” “Right we’ve got that sorted out, now nothing else can go wrong.” Paddy said to himself on the edge of hysteria.

“What’s all this racket about? I’m trying to sleep don’t you know.” Paddy groaned wishing he’d never said anything. “In my day youngsters had respect for their elders, none of this shouting and screaming at unholy times of night. Why is my house bobbing up and down. What are you all doing in my house.?” Callaby asked as he emerged from below deck.

“Callaby what are you doing here?” Ashlar asked.

“What am I doing here? What am I doing here? It’s my house what are you doing here? What’s all this water doing here? Have we been flooded?”

“A stowaway!” Lucky shouted. “Keel haul him!”

“Don’t be ridiculous you strange nautical type, you can’t keel haul somebody in a house, you need a keel, which implies having a ship. I don’t know much about the sea but I know that.”

“Callaby,” Said Ticeara patiently. “You’re not in your house, you’re on board the Besotted Monkey.”

“A teapot and flunky. What are you talking about? And what’s wrong with your ears, I’d get that seen to if I was you.” The doddering old spell caster said.

“I’m an elf and I said the Besotted Monkey, Paddy’s ship.” Ticeara said raising her voice and then adding, “You decrepit old fart.” Under her breath.

“Paddy’s in love with a monkey ay? Well I can’t say it surprises me.”

“I’m going to get my mace.” Paddy said and disappeared below deck.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Naoci shouted.

“Paddy saying he was going to get his mace and don’t shout at me boy I can hear perfectly well.”

“I meant before you went to sleep.” Naoci said irritably.

“What? Don’t mutter boy, I can’t hear a word you’re saying.”

"I'm going to get my sword." Naoci said and started to follow Paddy below the deck. Anwyn stopped him.

"Have you got any money?" The Paladin asked the sleazy merchant.

"Why?"

"Fingers said he'll do him for the right price. Make it look like an accident." Naoci was trying to work out if the Paladin was serious, then he tried to work out if it was a good idea and finally he tried to work out if he had enough money to hire Fingers.

"What! Is! The! Last! Thing! You! Remember! Before! You! Went! To! Sleep!" Baru shouted.

Callaby gave him an irritated glare.

"Going to bed you impudent tyke." The insane old mage answered.

"I'm going to get my mace." Baru said and headed below the deck.

"By my power I befriend you." Ashlar said. Callaby turned to face the ill looking half dragon.

"Yes my lad." The old mage asked in a friendly fashion.

"Callaby when was the last time you were on Paddy's ship?" Callaby considered this.

"When we all went to Lord Arcane's birthday party." Callaby answered. "I don't trust that man you know, I think he harbours ambitions of ruling Cum Jar, tried to teach me necromancy once would you believe?" Ashlar considered this, Arcane's birthday party had been several months ago.

"What do you remember since then?" Ashlar asked.

"What do you mean since then? Are you mad? Come to think of it you don't look that well? That was last night. And why is that man wearing a tea towel on his head?" Callaby asked, pointing at Siddig.

"I'm going to get my scimitars." Siddig said and headed below deck.

"It would appear," Said Ashlar intelligently. "that Callaby has been in some kind of enchanted sleep for several months."

"Ahh." Lucky said thoughtfully.

"What?" Cormac said.

"That would explain why part of the ship was snoring when I dusted."

"Danu save us." Anwyn muttered.

"You didn't notice a mage sound asleep below deck?" Butch asked.

"Well I don't see too good mistress Butch." The old pirate said.

"You dust the ship?" Thalia asked.

"That I do mistress Thalia. Once a year whether it needs it or not."

What the Halflings Are Doing At This Moment . . .

Jingo and Jobo were sat in deck chairs by the starboard rail, between them a fishing rod, both of them sipping mead spritzers.

"What's going on?" Jobo wondered out loud.

"Well it appears that Callaby has been in some kind of enchanted sleep for an undefined period of time in the hull of the ship." Jingo answered.

"Why do you suppose that happened?" Jobo asked.

"Plot device I shouldn't wonder." Just then the fishing rod began to strain.

"We've got a bite!" Jobo shouted and both the halflings jumped to their feet excitedly and made a grab for the rod.

Paddy and Siddig emerged from below deck. Paddy had a mace in each hand and was determined to use them to relieve some stress,

"Right where is he?" He asked.

"Paddy! Paddy!" Jingo and Jobo cried as they ran across the deck towards him. Trailing behind them, a hook lodged in its mouth was a small pathetic, scrawny, ugly, green humanoid. The two halflings came sliding to a halt by Paddy.

"We caught a fomorian." Jobo announced proudly. The rest of Slieve looked at the pathetic and wretched creature on the end of the halflings line.

"It's a bit small isn't it?" Paddy said. The two halflings seemed to wilt in front of him, crestfallen.

"Balor?" The fomorian said weakly.

"We could stuff it and mount it." Jingo suggested. The fomorian looked aghast at this suggestion.

"I think he's kind of sweet." Ticeara said. The rest of them turned to look at her. "What?" As he was trying to decide what to do with his latest unwanted guest Baru appeared back on the deck. In one hand he held a struggling figure. The creature was about three foot eight, wearing a brown robe and a floppy, pointed, leather hat, of the type that had been popular amongst wizards in the 1070s. He had enormous, grey, fluffy, curly, sideburns, a large to the point of preposterous moustache and a thick, bushy beard. He was struggling and writhing trying to break free of Baru's grip.

"What's that?" Paddy asked in a resigned tone of voice.

"I think it's a leprechaun sir." Baru said.

"That's not a leprechaun lad." Xandeth said from the helm.

"How do you know?" Baru asked his fellow sergeant.

"Because he's not wearing green, he's not smoking a pipe and he's not dancing a jig and singing fi-diddle-de-dee-diddle-de-dee-diddle-de-doe." Xandeth said. The rest of Slieve stared at Xandeth as if he was mad. Xandeth looked a bit sheepish before he remembered that he hadn't checked to see if there were any Cymrians on board.

"Hold on." Said Jobo. "Isn't that a racial stereotype? It's like saying all halflings are short, portly, have furry feet and are obsessed with food." Now the rest of Slieve turned to stare at Jobo. "Oh yes I see what you mean." Baru looked confused.

"What's a halfling?" He asked. Jingo looked non-plussed.

"We are." The diminutive warrior said.

"Oh I thought you were hobbits." Jingo and Jobo looked furious.

"We are not fucking hobbits!" Jingo screamed drawing his mace. "Pardon my Anglo-Saxon." He added remembering there were ladies present before he flew at a surprised looking Baru in a rage. Cormac and Naoci jumped on the furious vertically challenged warrior and between the two of them they wrestled the frenzying little chef to the ground. Paddy just shook his head in despair.

"Fine so what is this creature." Pointing at the small struggling captive that Baru still had a hold of.

"It's a gnome." Said the pathetic fomorian. This seemed to fit with what little Paddy new about peoples that were substantially shorter than him.

"Thank you, eh..?"

"Kevin." Kevin the pathetic fomorian said.

"Thank you Kevin." Paddy said.

"Can I go home now?" Kevin asked.

"No you can't, you're a prisoner, or bait or something." Kevin lapsed back into a depressed silence.

"Right so we know it's a gnome but what are we going to do with him?"

"Let's keep him." Ticeara said.

"He be a stowaway!" Lucky shouted. "Keel haul him! Keel haul him I say!"

"Is it me?" Naoci said to Cormac as they where struggling with Jingo. "Or is that man obsessed with keel hauling?" Cormac nodded.

"Keel haul him!" Lucky shouted again, in case people hadn't got the idea the first time around. The gnome muttered something in a squeaky voice, unfortunately his ridiculous beard muffled the words, it may however have been:- "By my power I shatter that wooden leg." Lucky's left wooden leg exploded into splinters and the old pirate toppled over.

"Oh good we've not only got another stowaway but he's a mage as well. Anybody else I should know about? Perhaps Lord Arcane's in the bilges, Floris Brand in the scuppers? Could someone perhaps check to see if General Gulgromoth is in the galley making us breakfast." Hearing the word breakfast Jingo began to calm down. Paddy turned to the captive gnome. "Right you are going to the brig, that was just mean what you did to Lucky. Amusing but mean." The Gnome muttered something through his beard again which may have been:- "By my power fear me." Paddy considered this and then said.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" Dropped his maces and began sprinting away from the defiant gnome. Unfortunately half way through his sprint he ran out of ship. There was a splash. The rest of Slieve moved over to the rail, Paddy was in the water and with strong bold strokes swimming away from the ship. Several seconds later he stopped, turned in the water and began swimming back, his face a crimson mask of fury.

Twenty Minutes Or So Later . . .

Paddy was shivering, wrapped in a blanket and sat on a chair, which Kevin the pathetic fomorian in an attempt to make himself useful had brought up from below deck. Slieve were crowded around him and watching as the Gnome, who's name they had since discovered was Fungal Sparkey was marched out on a plank. Fungal did not look pleased, as he reached the end of the plank he adopted his fiercest expression and turned to face the assembled men and women of Slievegall'ion. He saw the fear to the point of abject terror in their eyes. Now Fungal knew he was a scary gnome but he was surprised and pleased with himself with just how scared they did look. The one with the tea towel on his head pointed at him, his hand shaking.

"Calamari!" Siddig screamed and turned and ran away as fast as he could. (Later he would tell the others that he had just gone to get his armour.) Slieve watched as out of the water behind the gnome on the plank rose a huge rubbery mound of flesh, it had an enormous beak, huge, saucer shaped, inhuman eyes and many suckered tentacles whipped around it.

"Oh bollocks." Paddy said. The kraken roared for want of a better thing to do, as it's tentacles began to wrap around the Besotted Monkey in preparation for pulling the whole ship under.

"Battle stations!" Paddy shouted.

"Prepare to repel boarders!" Lucky shouted. Slieve scattered to grab weapons. Baru who had his mace to hand aimed a mighty blow at the kraken. The head of the mace hit the squid but it's rubbery skin caused the blow to bounce off it. Baru lost his grip on the mace as it bounced back and it caught Ashlar who had forgotten he was a mage and was running to attack the squid with a sword full in the face. Ashlar went down like a sack of potatoes. Baru looked at his empty hand wondering where on earth his mace had gone, he shrugged and tried to wrestle one of the kraken's tentacles.

Paddy watched as the kraken wrapped one of it's big tentacles around Baru and lifted him off the ship, Baru disappeared out of view. Skirt Boy who was still insisting on being called Roger came up the steps from below deck carrying Paddy's armour as best he could.

"Come on boy! Help me get it on!" Paddy shouted as Roger started to help him on with his armour. Xandeth came running up to him and saluted very smartly.

"What are your orders, sah?"

"Get that great big mound of tentacles off my boat!" Paddy screamed.

"Sah, yes sah!" Xandeth then saluted so smartly he knocked himself out. Paddy looked down at the unconscious form of the sergeant and tried to remember what he'd done in his life to warrant being this cursed.

Siddig having been forced almost at spear point into the fray by Anwyn took a vicious blow from a tentacle in the chest whilst performing his patented close eyes and wave scimitars wildly combat manoeuvre. His ribs crushed he went sliding across the deck to come to a stop by Thalia. Thalia sighed and leant down to heal him. Siddig slowly came to.

"Can I go somewhere and lie down?" He asked weakly.

"No you can't." Thalia admonished him. "You can get in there and fight like everyone else." And to prove her point she threw her javelin at the kraken.

Roger and Paddy were still struggling to get Paddy's armour on. Both of them had to duck as Anwyn went flying over head and thumped into the castle. Muttering ancient curses the paladin got up and stomped past them back into the fray.

Callaby was searching through his pouches as a tentacle whipped by dangerously close over head. "I'm sure I've got a scroll here that can help." He muttered to himself moving slightly to the left to get more light. One of the Kraken's tentacles slammed into the deck splintering some of the planking, where he had just been standing. "Something Naoci sold me, must be in here somewhere. Ah! Here we go." He pulled the scroll out of the pouch but dropped it. As he leaned down to get it another tentacle whipped by overhead narrowly missing the doddering old mage. Callaby straightened up and unrolled the scroll, he cleared his throat.

"Now let me see, where are we? Ah yes, here we go. By my awesome dark power I repel fish!" He intoned. The square root of nothing happened. Callaby checked the wording of the scroll to ensure he'd read it properly, he had.

"Naoci! Where are you lad? I want to talk about this scroll you sold me."

Paddy was watching Naoci fighting the squid. From somewhere the squid had got a sword and shield and was using them with two of his tentacles, fencing with Naoci, matching him poncey move for poncey move. That big squid's a fair fencer, Paddy thought as he struggled to get his armour on. Hold on a second, where did he get the sword and shield from? Then he saw Cormac shuffling towards him looking sheepish (fortunately there was no Cymrians on board) and suspiciously under-armed. "Corporal where is your enchanted sword and your mithril shield that cost us so much to get for you?" Cormac pointed miserably at where the squid was fencing with Naoci. That's it, Paddy thought, I'm going to nail him to a tree when I get back.

Siddig came sliding across the deck, this time his head caved in. Thalia tutted and reach down to heal the wound. Siddig opened his eyes. He pointed weakly towards the fight. Thalia nodded. Siddig sighed and headed towards the combat.

Fingers drew his new toy from it's holster. It was a metal tube, with a wooden grip and a little hammer like device sticking out of it. He aimed carefully at the squid and pulled the trigger.

There was an almighty bang, even the squid jumped as the tip of one of his tentacles exploded. The squid put his wounded tentacle into his mouth and began to suck it. Where Fingers had been standing there was only a cloud of black smoke.

"Danu's beard! Fingers has exploded!" Thalia shouted. Everybody froze (including the very sporting Kraken). There was a cough from inside the cloud of smoke, which slowly cleared to reveal a grinning Fingers with a black powder burned face and a smoking pistol.

"Less powder next time." He said. The fight continued.

Paddy had to duck as Anwyn went flying overhead again. The Paladin got up and muttering language that would make a Viper blush he headed back into the fray. Still trying to get his armour on Paddy watched as the two halflings ran past carrying a two-man tree saw above their heads.

Siddig slid to a halt at Thalia's feet.

"Oh for Danu's sake." Thalia said as she healed him again. "Right, that's the last time I'm healing you in this fight." Shoulders slumped, Siddig wandered dejectedly back into the fight.

Jobo grabbed one of the kraken's tentacles and wrestled it to the ground where Jingo pounded it into submission with his mace. Jingo held up his mace and inspected it.

"I think I'll use this the next time we have steak instead of the tenderiser." He said.

"Good idea." Jingo agreed. The two of them set to work sawing off the kraken's subdued tentacle with the two-man tree saw.

Dougal staggered onto the deck. The morning light hurting his head. He was drinking his breakfast beer from the grail. As he put the silver chalice to his mouth one of the kraken's tentacles just nudged him. He watched in horror as a drop of beer spilled out of the grail and travelled in slow motion or so it seemed to him towards the deck.

"NOOOOOOOO!" He cried. The drop of beer hit the deck. Dougal necked the rest of the grail. His eyes the eyes of a berserker, his mouth and chin covered in the froth from the beer. "Death to the causer of spillage!" He screamed and charged the kraken panelling him liberally with the grail.

Roger and Paddy were still struggling to get Paddy's armour on. The two halflings ran by carrying a severed tentacle over their heads.

"Squid in a cream and chestnut sauce!" Jobo shouted as they ran by. Finally he managed to get his armour sorted out.

"Right!" Paddy shouted, holding his maces out. "Start me up!" Roger grabbed one of the outstretched arms and pushed down on it. The arm swung round as did his other one in a different position, then he seemed to stall.

"Again!" Shouted Paddy. Once more Roger pushed down on the arm causing it and the other one to spin but once more he stalled. Paddy gritted his teeth in frustration.

"Right once more lad!" He shouted. Roger pushed the arm down again and this time they both caught and Paddy built up to speed on his patented windmill of death manoeuvre. Paddy charged into combat maces flailing looking for all the world like an angry lawnmower (despite the fact they hadn't been invented yet).

Fungal watched the foolish human fighting the equally foolish, big, squid, thing and shook his head. The one he'd made jump off the ship shot past him maces flailing like he was trying to take off and began beating the squid with his weapons, he seemed quite upset. Fungal decided to find a quiet place to

sit down until it was all over. As he made his way towards the castle, one of the kraken's tentacles whipped by overhead and knocked his hat off. Fungal swung round to face the kraken, furious now. He muttered, muffled spell words through his beard, which may have been:- "By my power I fumble that ship." With a look of squid like surprise on it's face the kraken slid back into the sea, it's tentacles scrabbling wildly for purchase. Fungal stormed over to the rail and looked over. The kraken was heading back towards the ship and it did not look happy. The Gnome muttered some more spell words which may have been:- "By my power fear me!" The kraken turned tail and sped away. A quiet came over the deck of the Besotted Monkey. Moments later the quiet was broken by Xandeth coming to, jumping to his feet swords drawn.

"Where is it? Let me at it!" Paddy surveyed the wreckage of the Besotted Monkey.

"Siddig that is the last time I listen to your advice." He said. Siddig gulped. Some of the others turned to look at the scribe.

"What did he mean by that?" Butch asked. Siddig shrugged and tried to look innocent, from the corner of his eye he could see Fingers sharpening one of his daggers and glaring at him. Butch healed Ashlar's face, where Baru's rogue mace had caught him and helped the half dragon to his feet.

"The gnome saved us!" Thalia shouted.

"Can we keep him? Can we? Can we? Can we?" Ticeara asked. Paddy sighed.

"All right." He said giving in. "However as punishment for using an offensive spell on me he has toilet duty. He can help Lucky wipe his arse."

"With his beard." Cormac suggested.

"That's disgusting." Butch said.

"Where's Baru?" Naoci asked. A shocked silence settled over the unit.

"Last I saw the kraken had him." Paddy said. This took a couple of seconds to sink in.

"Oh my goddess." Ticeara said as she began to mist up. "Baru's gone." They all lowered their heads many of them with tears in their eyes as they thought on their lost comrade.

"Incoming!" Ashlar screamed. Slieve dived for cover as a Baru went flying overhead like a guided ballista. The sergeant hit the sail and slid down it onto the deck. He was wet through, covered in seaweed and white with fear.

"Sergeant!" Paddy barked. "Did you have permission to leave the ship?" Baru stood up and ineffectually brushed himself down.

"No Paddy, sorry Paddy."

"I need a drink." Dougal announced, to no ones particular surprise.

"I need a holiday." Paddy announced. "Somewhere quiet like Ulster." And so the Besotted Monkey drifted quietly back towards Erin, carried on a current sent by Mannan Mac Lir himself. And here endeth our tale.

How did Slieve get back to Connaught? What did happen to Kevin the pathetic fomorian? How did Slieve manage to get through an entire adventure without Naoci flashing anybody? And what is wrong with Skirt Boy? That is another story.

The End.

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