

**THE BATTLE IN THE ISLE BAY**  
*As told by Rodin Rae Bellock, Captain*

Captain Rodin Rae Bellock watched the early morning sun sparkle off the waters of the Westron Sea. She sniffed the air and then noted how the waves capped. The Sea Sylph had had clear and easy sailing since leaving port after the May festival. According to her navigational charts and the speed of the current wind, they should reach the Isle of Long with plenty of time to rest and relax before the next clan-gather.

She turned to Arenek, who was puzzling over the navigational charts. For the past three weeks he had been aboard the Sylph, learning the position of Navigator while doubling as the ship's Quartermaster.

"You see the way the waters are capping like that? We've got a strong head wind. We'll sail further West to make the most of it and then, as we approach the Isle of Long, we'll head in."

"Let's hope the weather holds," said Arenek. Rodin Rae had noticed early on that he had a good sense for predicting the weather.

"It'll hold," she said, with more optimism than she felt. "You'd better go wake those drunken fools and tell them we'll be making port by afternoon."

"Yes, my lady."

"That's Captain, to you," Rodin Rae retorted, then smiled sideways.

Arenek headed below deck, running directly into Jade, the First Mate, as she came above. She was rubbing her bleary eyes and scowling at the early morning sunlight reflecting off the water.

"Rough night?" asked Arenek.

Jade growled. "Granarinth's snoring kept me up."

"Gee, I thought maybe it was the fact that you were sick all night."

"That, too."

Loquitor and Jade had had a drinking contest to "Good Companion" last night. Jade had been the loser.

"Rodin Rae is going to kill me," Jade mumbled and finished her ascent above deck to find out what her punishment would be for sleeping through her duties this morning. Arenek did not envy Jade. He had seen Rodin Rae angry and it was not a pretty sight.

Down below, in the hull of the ship, the Sea Sylph's passengers were just beginning to stir. Most were struggling out of their hammock beds, unused to the motions needed to get in and out safely. Elam nearly fell on his backside, and only avoided stepping onto Loquitor's hand by cleverly hopping to one side. Loquitor had passed out on the floor.

"Get up, get up, sleepy, sleepies!" sang Amethya, materializing out of the air. Loquitor groaned. Amethya had once been caged by the previous owner of the Sea Sylph. When Rodin Rae "acquired" the ship, she gained a life long companion by setting the water fairy free. However, the year in the cage had made Amethya a bit eccentric, even for a fairy. Her favorite pass time was to ask silly questions, and often, to answer them herself. "What's a matter, elfie? Sun burnt, elfie?" She flitted over to Loquitor, her wings brushing his eye lids and blistered ears.

"Watch out, Amethya, he'll swat you," chuckled Arenek, knowing how sensitive Loquitor's ears still were from being burnt in the Celebar desert.

"Nice, sleepie elfie," she twittered and magicked him back to sleep. Elam and Arenek spent the next ten minutes trying to catch her and convince her to reverse the sleep spell so that Loquitor could get up and move out of the way of the cabin door. Kittarina and Granarinth slept through the entire scene, oblivious to the commotion.

Above deck, Jade was busy scrubbing the planks with a five bristle brush, and Rodin Rae was giving orders to the cook as to what she wanted served for her friends' breakfast. They had just picked up supplies yesterday, along with a hefty load of silks and precious materials that Rodin Rae hoped would boost her income and make up for all the money she was losing while Indigo dallied with The Eastern Star, or Chocolate Monkey, as he was now calling it.

"Serve breakfast in the Captain's cabin once Willow wakes up and tell those land elves to get their asses in gear. Sun's up almost an hour!" It never ceased to amaze her how late into the day her friends could sleep.

After breakfast, when Granarinth and Kittarina slowly emerged from the hull of the ship, everyone gathered around to listen to Arenek play his drum. Once Amethya was coaxed into giving Granarinth back his dulcimer hammers, he played for everyone, too. Kittarina danced on the deck of the Sylph and succeeded in getting everyone to tap their feet and clap. Willow would have danced, but she was having a hard time just trying to keep her balance with the sway of the ship. Sea life did not suit a soon-to-be mother.

It was a leisurely morning. It appeared that they would have no problem making port in the Isle of Long by afternoon. All they had to do was relax and enjoy the gentle motion of the Sea Sylph, gliding North across the Westron Sea.

Jade was reprieved of her deck duty in the early afternoon and allowed to join the festivities with the others. Rodin Rae's friends had most of the Sea Sylph to themselves, as they were down to a skeleton crew following the last big journey to the Mayfest. Most of the buying and trading on the High Sea lulled during the summer months. Now was a time for quiet relaxation, to spend with friends, and to make preparations for upcoming quests, including a trip to PENNSIC at the summer's end.

It was over a discussion of how they would journey there this year that a disagreement ensued. Rodin Rae, watching the main sail instead of listening to the argument, heard only that Loquitor wanted to have first dibs on Arenek's mead. Men. If it wasn't their swords they talked about, it was their mead.

"I'm tired of this," Willow echoed Rodin Rae's sentiment and the two of them retreated to a far corner of the deck where they could discuss the much anticipated birth of Duncan. Kittarina saw them escape from the men's boasting and joined them.

"I don't know anything about mid-wiving and neither does Jade," warned Rodin Rae, "so don't even think of going into labor on this ship! There is nothing around here for miles, and I doubt Kittarina would want to help deliver that boy!"

Kittarina smiled, and shook her head. "I don't know anything about mid-wiving, either!"

"Don't worry, he's not due for a few weeks yet. Kit?"

Suddenly Kittarina was squinting, leaning half way over the side of the Sylph.

"What is it?" asked Rodin Rae, and followed Kittarina's gaze.

It was another ship. Rodin Rae barked orders, "Willow, go get Jade, quick! Tell her to bring the far-see lens. And get the men, too, while you're at it."

Two minutes later, everyone was leaning over the side, passing the far-see glass.

"What is it?" asked Elam.

"Pirate ship," answered Granarinth, folding his arms across his chest.

"Can we out sail them?" asked Jade.

"I don't know, we've got a good lead on them. They may not have even spotted us yet. If we can make harbor before they catch up to us we might be able to dock before they attack."

"What can we do?" asked Loquitor.

"Everyone grab their weapons, just to be safe. Arenek, tell the crew to stand ready in case

we need them to row us into the bay. Jade, help me with the coordinates. Oh, and someone find Amethya. Maybe she can flit over to the ship and give us a report.” Everyone ran to make ready for a possible attack.

Amethya flew to the other ship and Rodin Rae had a tense time waiting for her to fly back. The news wasn't good.

"Bad men, very bad men!"

"Pirates?"

"Thieves, cut-throats! Lot's of steal, very bad," her little crystal fairy wings quivered in fear.

"Ok. Don't worry. We'll make the Isle of Long before they catch us. Stay up in the crow's nest. If anything should happen to the Sea Sylph, go find Lady Angelica and have her rally everyone to our aide, okay?"

Amethya nodded her little fairy head, so that her curly hair bounced furiously, and she flitted up to the top of the main sail where she hid in the crow's nest. Rodin Rae went to go change into her armor, just in case there should be trouble.

Down below, Rodin Rae lent Kittarina a rapier and Elam gave Kitta his old armor. So much for giving up weapons, thought Rodin Rae. It had been a heartfelt vow when she had made it. She had spent much of her time killing as a member of the Assassin's Guild in Sheldon. Once she betrayed them and was free of their claim to her, she swore never to pick up a weapon again. Funny how that all changed once she found herself here in the FALO lands. But in a way it was different. Then she had killed for political reasons, and under orders from the Guild. Now she would be defending herself, her friends, and her ship. At least the warriors here lived by a code of honor, and no one killed senselessly.

She just hoped she remembered how to use her blade. She picked up Quicksilver, her cutlass, and strapped it to her side. She opened her trunk and pulled out two of her Assassin's blades, sliding them into the sheaths in her bracers. Better to err on the side of caution. "Ready?" she said to Kittarina.

"Ready as I'll ever be," responded Kittarina. They went and found Arenek, who had also donned his armor.

"I spotted land," he said. The news made Rodin Rae's heart lift. If they could just make it there before the Pirate ship over took them.

"The Isle of Long?"

"No," Arenek said, and Rodin Rae's spirit sank. "We're a little south of it, but I figure we can sail close to the coast, in case we need to find a safe harbor before we reach the Isle."

"Won't we lose speed closer to land?" asked Kittarina.

"She's right. We might do better aiming for the open sea. It'll get us there quicker," said Rodin Rae.

"Captain, with all due respect, their gaining."

Rodin Rae bit her nail, cursing under her breath. "How many men did you spot on the other ship?"

"A hell of a lot more then we have here. They outnumber us two to one," said Arenek.

Rodin Rae cursed again. Her crew was only fifteen strong, and that was counting Elam, Arenek, Jade, Granarinth, Kittarina, Loquitor, and herself. It hadn't been a wise move to pick up that last cargo of goods before hiring a guard and someone to Captain it. That last port was probably where the Pirates had begun tailing the Sea Sylph.

"Ok. Loquitor, you and Arenek go and get your bows. There is plenty of oil in the kitchen. If they try and attack, you have my permission to set their boat on fire with your arrows. I'll tell Jade to set a guard over the supplies in the hull, to be a last defense should they try and take my

goods. I'll be damned if they'll have my wares *and* my ship. I'd rather sink her than see The Sea Sylph fly a pirate's standard. Oh, and tell Willow to get below. We don't need her to get herself or the baby injured."

Everyone stood ready. Rodin Rae, Elam, and Kittarina on the port side, Granarinth at the prow, and Arenek and his arrows with Loquitor soaking them in oil on the starboard side. Jade was at the helm, carefully angling the Sylph toward the Isle. There was still a chance that they might make the bay before the Pirates overtook them, it was just a matter of playing the waiting game.

Time passed laboriously slow. In the distance the land features began to materialize out of the horizon. Blue blurred into green, and then into the definition that was clearly the Isle of Long and their port destination. But behind them, the Pirate ship, flying a hideous black and gold dragon standard, was gaining. Rodin Rae could see the faces of the men on board. Some of them were drow. She wondered briefly if this might have anything to do with Loquitor's nemesis, Deckla. Wouldn't it be wonderful when that evil elf was out of everyone's life?

A sharp, whizzing sound pierced the air and an enemy arrow lodged in the center mast of the Sylph. Elam pulled it out and tasted the tip, then spit. "Poisoned," he said, "Everyone take care!"

"Probably dipped in Dragoon blood," noted Rodin Rae. The Dragoon was a feared prowler of the seas, whose scales and blood were deadly if ingested.

"Is there an anecdote for that?" asked Kittarina, squinting up her eyes in disgust.

"I might still have a vial of it," Rodin Rae replied. If I didn't trade it in a sparklie game at the Mayfestival, she thought.

"It's in my sparklies chest," said Jade. Arenek raised a brow. "I won it from Loquitor last night."

The Sea Sylph cut the water as only a doubled hulled ship could. She was fast, but not fast enough. With the Isle of Long in view, barely a league from the Bay, the Pirates attacked on the Starboard side of Sylph, blocking her sailing wind and forcing her to a near stand still. Arrows flew from Arenek's bow, one after another, flaming across the sky. Loquitor had his bow out too, but the Pirates cleverly avoided many of the arrows. They managed to set the main sail on fire before Arenek could burn their sails, and if it were not for Amethya showering water down on them all, the entire ship would have caught fire. Unfortunately, her good deed also ruined anymore flaming arrows that Arenek might have hoped to let fly to the enemy ship.

"There boarding us!" announced Granarinth.

"Some 'pleasure' cruise," muttered Kittarina under her breath. Rodin Rae shot her a side long glare and then Elam let out a sound that pierced everyone's ears. It was a Wild elf battle call. He attacked the first few pirates with a vengeance, sending their blood spilling out of their bodies and into the blue of the sea, turning the water around the ship a ghostly violet hue. Rodin Rae pulled her cutlass just in time to catch the brunt of an attack by the ugliest pirate she had ever seen. He deserved to die just for what he was wearing, she thought. It was most unbecoming. She cut his throat and then nearly threw up breakfast. It was the first she had killed in two years. Loquitor got her back while she covered her deck in regurgitated food.

"So much for Jade's hard work," said Loquitor, careful not to slip as he lunged at the next attacker. Then he went to aide his half sister.

Even with Granarinth, Elam, and Arenek screaming Aerie of Tir Thalor battle calls, it was clear that they were out numbered. Time seemed to stand still as the Pirates came in waves to try and capture the Sea Sylph. For a moment, Rodin Rae thought what a nice picture this would make, the men and women fighting side by side on the Sylph. Her daydream was interrupted by the slash of an enemy blade that nearly cleaved her head in two. Kittarina's rapier had deflected the blow.

“Thanks!”

“No time!” And she danced off to get Granarinth’s back. Although several of the enemies forces ended up floating in the bay of the Isle of Long, it soon became obvious that they were going to lose the Sylph and possibly their lives.

"Amethya!" called Jade, when she had a quick second to breath. "Can't you help us with a spell? Anything, before we lose the Sea Sylph!"

"Yes, yes!! Bad men!" cried Amethya. "Very bad men, lock fairy in cages, steal pretty things from RoRa." She thought of what she could do, and decided on changing all the evil, bad warriors to lowly workmen. She grabbed her faire dust and spilled it liberally down from the mast to the fray below.

Now, Amethya had a good heart. But her fairy magic working wasn't up to what it used to be since the time she spent locked in the iron cage. So, sometimes things worked, but most often they didn't. Or they didn't quite work as planned. This was once of those times. Instead of changing the pirates to boatswains, transforming their weapons to scrubbing equipment, she changed the Warriors on the Sea Sylph into wenches. One minute Elam was swinging his battle sword high, the next he found himself in a skirt, dancing cymbals where his blade once was. Arenek, Loquitor, and Granarinth found themselves in the same position, and none of them were happy about it.

"Change them back!" screamed Rodin Rae, but it was too late. The Pirates doubled over in laughter and took possession of the Sea Sylph. Their Captain, a drow with longsilver hair, sauntered aboard, laughing at the ridiculous scene before him.

"Well, this was easier then I anticipated! Foiled by your own fairy! Who would have thought!" He waltzed around Arenek, "Nice legs." Arenek spit in his face.

"No manners!" said the drow, and repaid Arenek's kindness by slicing open Rodin Rae's forearm with his dagger. She screamed, more in anger then in pain, as Loquitor yelled curses at the drow.

"So what should I do?" asked the dark elf, "Drown you all or take you prisoners?" Rodin Rae looked around. All of the men had been over powered without their swords by the sheer masses of Pirates. Kittarina was in the same position as she was, held tightly still by enemy warriors. Suddenly Jade was there, like a shadow on the deck. The Pirates hadn't spotted her, but Rodin Rae, on the edge of consciousness from blood loss, saw her. Jade had been a trained Assassin, too. One of the Guild elite. Her dagger flew from her hand, glistening briefly in the sunlight, and landed in the drow Captain’s chest, roughly where his heart should be. He gurgled to his death on the deck, but not before the drow screaming, “Kill them!”

It was clear that Captain Bellock and her friends were going to perish, in sight of the harbor, not fifteen minutes away from their clan-kin and friends, at the hands of some of the meanest Pirates ever to sail the Westron Sea. It was a ridiculous affair; Granarinth, Arenek, Elam, and Loquitor in skirts, Amethya trying to change them back to warriors. She succeeded at one point in changing all their dancing costumes back to armor. She hadn't been so lucky with their swords. Rodin Rae would have liked to have struggled against her captor, but her forearm was bleeding heavily. Jade was the only one who seemed to be killing any of the enemy, and then, like a saving grace, came a swift blade to cut down the attacking Pirates.

In the fray of skirts and scarves, Rodin Rae had not noticed that a second ship had sailed beside the Sea Sylph. A new warrior now joined the Battle, miraculously fighting to save the Sea Sylph. In less then a heartbeat, the tide of the battle turned. With the drow Captain dead, the rest of the Pirates fell into disarray at the surprise attack by the mysterious ship. And then Amethya remembered how to change all of the warriors’ weapons back to their proper shape. Armed with

their swords again, Elam and Granarinth took out the lion's share of the Pirates, side by side with an elven warrior that was curiously familiar.

"Zandelle Dragonfire?" Rodin Rae asked in amazement when all the Pirates seemed to be dead or dying. She remembered him from the Mayfestival. He had won the dagger throwing tourney.

"At your service," he bowed. Captain Bellock was in shock, mostly from loss of blood, she told herself.

"What are you doing here?"

"You mean besides saving your ship? I was a passenger on the Omicron, I just returned from a stay with Nightbringer and Rook. The Captain saw your main sail on fire and I recognized your Standard. I thought you might need some help. Apparently I was right."

"We're going to need to be towed into harbor, too many of the crew is injured to row," said Jade. Rodin Rae had not even noticed when the rest of her crew had joined the fight. She looked around now. It was over, the Pirates were all dead and Kittarina was tearing her shirt to make a bandage for a cut on Granarinth's face.

"Anyone dead?" asked Rodin Rae, fearing the worst.

"No," answered Arenek, "but we've got a few seriously wounded who need a medic, and you look like you need help, too, Captain," answered Arenek.

"I'll be fine until we reach the gather, Areanna can look at it then. Where's Willow? Is she Ok?"

Willow came above deck and embraced Elam, then pulled off his armor to check for wounds as he protested he was fine. They all stared at each other in shock as the Omicron towed the Sylph safely to dock in the Isle of Long.

"I need a drink," said Loquitor, and Arenek went to find his mead and pass it among them.