

## King Frow Jubilay and the Crisis Involving Sea-Porcupines

### 1.

Frow Jubilay, King of the City of Althazar, located south of the borders of Skrellvania and north of the Nivar Fields along the western shores of the rich Calthumbrias, worried about the crisis involving sea-porcupines.

These purple creatures did not concern him at first. Frow thought they were a little annoying, and furthermore one had stung him on the buttocks as a child. They were pests to the seafarmers too, descending on the kingdom's coral crops like a swarm of underwater locusts. He initially thought it a blessing when the Skrells expanded their hunting season for sea-porcupines to an entire year.

But now that the sea-porcupine was endangered, King Frow realized they were a species crucial to the balance of this world. Already a number of Calthumbrian predators had gone extinct. Also, without any sea-porcupines to feed on the violet nectar of the Wyndlelilies, hardly any amounts of precious Wyndle pollen could make it to the surface. This was something the Nivar Fields could not thrive without.

Orsen Crom-vol, the Duke of Skrellvania, refused King Frow's proposal to ban sea-porcupine hunting amongst the Skrells, as he did not want to lose popular votes in the upcoming election. This

left King Frow with a nasty decision to make: should he go to war with the Skrells in order to save an animal he didn't particularly like at all, or let the sea-porcupines die out and watch his kingdom collapse?

King Frow did not know what to do, so he decided to ask God. In order to contact God in Calthumbria, one must travel to the crystal shores of East Yfland. There, one must take an elevator up to the top floor of the Third Castle on Your Right. Whose right remains an ancient mystery, unsolved since Calthumbria was first created. Not even the old Brine Mystics of Kelpvod know the answer.

King Frow left the polis of Althazar once the Great Golden Ostrich leapt over all five moons in the Cantaloupean Sky. He and his men fought off seaslugs, bandits, dragon-gulls, and a pack of wild womperjacks, until at last reaching the Third Castle on Your Right.

An elevator man with the head of an elephant took King Frow to the top floor and lead him to a room filled with rusty cogs, cracked screens, oily sprockets, and wires sprawling all over the place like the tentacles of an enormous, electric squid whose mantle were glowing like a magnetic core of irradiated amethyst. It just so happened that a shard of such crystal levitated calmly

in the center of the room. Through this ionized contraption, King Frow would be able to speak with his Creator.

“Bip, bip, bip! Creator, is that you?” King Frow furrowed his brow in concentration, as a series of 1’s and 0’s started replicating themselves across the room in cryptic patterns.

“Creator, it is I, Frow Jubilay, King of Althazar, the first Calthumbrian Lord to create peace amongst the peoples of Calthumbria. I have come in need of your advice. The Skrells threaten our entire world by hunting the sea-porcupines to near extinction: if I do not act, the ecosystems will die out and all Calthumbria will be lost. However, if I act, that would mean going to war with the Skrells. What should be done?”

“Would you stop calling me Creator?” a nasally voice from the dimension at the other end of the crystal node whined back at him. “It’s Pat, bub. I don’t know how many times I have to tell you. Pat.”

“Yes, err...Magnificent-Creator Pat,” King Frow nervously continued, “forgive me, Omnipotence Pat, I did not mean to offend you.” Pat’s sigh was transmitted through the connection. “But, Pat, what should I do? Calthumbria’s fate hangs in the balance.”

There was a slurping noise of some kind, accompanied by several munching sounds and what might have been a carbonated belch, and then Pat said, “Listen, bub. I have some news for you,

and I'm not sure you're going to like it...the truth is that I'm not God. I'm a programmer. This whole world of yours, Calthumbria, is a virtual matrix built upon my server. You're not really human either. You're a holographic image based on an algorithm that's advanced enough to develop its own sense of consciousness... All you are seeing and feeling is an AI simulation...you're not even made of real DNA! I'm telling you this because you're taking too much space on my hard-drive, and I need some bytes to download the new *Spacenugets* game. It just came out. Yeah, so, sea-porcupines or no sea-porcupines, I'll be wiping y'all from my server. Should take me up to a week, local time. Nothing personal."

This was a distressing message for King Frow Jubilay to receive, so he decided to contact the Mothership.

## 2.

King Frow sailed from East Yfland to the nearest *transmediportation* pad, located within the crystal-chamber of a gleaming emerald lighthouse. Once he was there, he sat down on a patch of synthetic-grass, crossed both of his legs and closed his eyes. After the release of his nine-hundred chakras, King Frow was able to broadcast an encrypted message across the universal-thought-database of Calthumbria's quantum energy-field and enter

the Planes of Immaterialization. A laser beamed down on Frow's forehead and swallowed him up.

The next moment Frow opened his eyes, he found himself in the midst of a celestial glass ballroom. Chandeliers carved from sea-crystal floated here and there between magnetic pillars inside an astral dome. Meanwhile, the floor was transparent, allowing an astronomical view of the stars, clouds and constellations glittering like sunken treasure below. The ceiling itself was filled with holographic windows to all nine-hundred-galaxies in the Calthumbrian Universe.

"Oh Frowsy, what an unexpected surprise!" shrilled a female voice from behind him. King Frow turned around and there, hovering on a balcony, floated the royal Queen herself. She was one of the most influential entities in all of Calthumbria, a neutral keeper of peace between the nine-hundred autonomous kingdoms of this world, and she basically looked like a squishy octopus made out of bubbles and gold marmalade. Her crown, one of the most cherished objects in all Calthumbrian existence, was a frosty pink cupcake.

"What brings you here to the Mothership?" asked the Queen, gliding serenely down from the balcony like some beautiful blob of ambrosia. "Those Skrells giving you a hard time up north? Why don't I feed you some vitamins and you can tell me all about it."

“No, no, it’s not that,” said King Frow, “I’ve learned of matters far worse! I need you to summon—” It was at this point that Frow involuntarily threw up. This was a common side effect for him whenever his bit-molecules were vaporized and then instantly put back together again through the wondrous means of *Transmediportation™*.

“Oh dearie me!” gasped the Queen. “Here, I’m going to fetch you tea and vitamins this very instant. I won’t hear a peep from you till you’re feeling better.”

Once King Frow had been properly attended to, with a good night’s sleep, a bib under his neck, and a chewy pacifier stuck in his mouth, he walked out the next morning in his royal pajamas and addressed the Queen once more, “Your Majesty, I am better now—”

“You took your vitamins this morning?”

“Yes! My Queen, I am fine. What I have to share with you is a message of grave importance...in fact it is an issue that threatens all of Calthumbria! Please, I beg you to summon the admins of the nine-hundred kingdoms of this realm. I beseech you!”

“Alright, calm down,” said the Queen. “I will channel their ports with my electric beams of quantum telepathy this very instant... Presto!”

Within seconds, an assembly was gathered in the Mothership's ballroom. All of the most important figures were there: Warfle, of the Wizardly Wardens, Marbeard, King of the Nivar Dwarves, Pixula, late Princess of the Pomegranate Seeds (the last one tragically drowned one morning in her own bowl of soup,) Argon Snarlson of the Snowsnails, Quimulus Quackmire of the Meddlesome Cleverstone Gang, Prince Xandiban of Heliotropolis, Quarbles Empress of the Porcelain Porpoise Tribe, Shyla Goddess of the Andai Serpents, Omashkenan, Chieftain of the Olajiwarian Ostrichmen, Orsen Crom-vol, the pale Duke of Skrellvania, Aurelis King of the Lithadonians, Salam of the Swiftfooted Salamanders, Sonaya Lady of the Nigh, Hammersnout of the Ironslags, King Hammond of Calthumbria 2.0, Quarvax of the Hordaeon Divide, Borgwaz, Bounty Hunter of the Boraborean Alps, Ludgar Captain of the Chosen Guard, Ludfallos Hero at the Battle of Ishkabod, Ludthug Gladiator of Boraxe, Rinko the Master-Architect of the Royal Architects' Guild, Ozeban, Rucashanks, the Duchess Mordana Swanksommerauge and her radiant daughter Wendylia, Charles Le Peef, recently knighted Champion of Althazar, Sir Janet the Janitor... even the most hermetic of the Brine Mystics, Old Man Rivers, was present, and myriads of advisors, ambassadors, entities, and envoys were all gathered here as well.

“Um,” uttered King Frow. He hadn’t expected the Queen’s summoning powers to take effect so quickly. As Frow stared out at the multitudes of throngs in front of him, he realized he was still wearing the fuzzy onesie he had woken up in this morning. He checked behind him to make sure the butt-flap was not hanging open.

“Greetings, gentle kind,” crooned the Queen in a voice sweet as molasses. “I have summoned you all here because Frow Jubilay, King of the Althazarians, and the first Calthumbrian to create peace amongst the marvelous peoples of Calthumbria, has a message of great importance that he wishes to share with us.”

“I thought I’d made myself clear!” snarled Orsen Crom-vol, fangs protruding from the depths of his misting visor. “Sea-porcupine hunting is a practice deeply integrated in the traditions of Skrellvania. Without their meat the economy would surely collapse. I won’t budge on this issue!”

“Why you speckled shlormonger,” growled Marbeard angrily, “I’ll prune your bunions—”

“Actually, it’s not about sea-porcupines anymore,” said King Frow. “You see...” And King Frow relayed, in detail, the doomsday scenario he had received from Pat.

After a long pause, King Marbeard began laughing hysterically, as did all the Calthumbrians. “*Spacenugets!* Ho ho



ho! THAT is a rich one, you really had us going there ol' Jubesy!"

"You should be a court jester!" squawked Quimulus Quackmire of the Meddlesome Cleverstone Gang, as he lifted his indigo tail-feathers from his seat to reveal a pair of iridescent eggs freshly lain from laughing.

"I'm serious!" King Frow cried out to the roaring audience, "If we don't find a way to escape we'll all be deleted!"

"Put a cork in it," grumbled Old Man Rivers, "I thought we were here to discuss politics, not a raving madman's jape!"

The guests began taking their leave. "My Queen, you believe me don't you?" begged King Frow.

"It was a very imaginative tale," said the Queen politely, "though it is something I would have preferred you share with me beforehand. Oh poor Frowsy, you're still not feeling well from traveling! Here, I'll go fetch you some more vitamins..."

Not a single soul believed King Frow's tale. This caused him to fall into a severe state of depression that lasted for months... though in Pat's world it might only have been nanoseconds. The King never left his palace. In fact he never left his bedroom. Whenever his servants tried coaxing him out, the King was reported to shout things like "Don't you realize? We don't even exist!" and "nothing matters anymore, we are crumbs on an

unwashed platter!” and occasionally he would throw potted plants and rare shiny artifacts at them.

Without leadership, the once magnificent City of Althazar fell into neglect, and with neglect came ruin. There was no longer any order, and the streets were divided up between vicious criminal gangs financed by corrupt dukes and earls.

As the sea-porcupine crisis continued getting worse, it was not long before the Wizardly Wardens, allied with King Marbeard, ambushed a hunting-post occupied by Skrells north of the Hordaeon Divide. Their combined forces won the battle, but then Duke Orsen Crom-vol ordered a massive invasion on the Nivar Fields. Not only were their farmlands scorched and salted, forcing the Nivar dwarves to retreat underground into their Wyndlelily tunnels, but the Skrells also captured their benevolent King Marbeard. What they did to him was far worse than death: they shaved off his rich, kingly thickets!

War was declared. The Calthumbrian hoplites began their dreadful march.

### 3.

One morning, as King Frow was sulking beneath his bed-sheets, a knock came from the door. “How many times must I order you, just slip my medications through the keyhole,” he grumbled bitterly.

“Arrgh, open up ye scurvy sod!” barked a voice from out in the hallway. There was only one man who could address the king like that and get away with it.

King Frow rubbed his eyes and walked out to greet his old friend, Percibal the Pirate.

“Ahoy mate! Ain’t ye a sight fer sore eye, ye shore look a mess these days.” Percibal grinned from ear to ear, displaying his diamond fang among otherwise crooked, smelly teeth.

“Percibal! You sparkling scoundrel, give it here.” The two friends embraced like brothers, but it was not long till King Frow drew away from the jaunty swashbuckler.

“Are you here to try bringing me out of my madness?” asked King Frow, “because it won’t work. Not even you could convince me otherwise.”

“Har har har, try spendin’ a year maroon’d on an island, drinkin’ naught but seawater an’ havin’ yer ship’s bonnie figurehead reduced t’ a mere toothpick t’ keep ye company, then talk t’ me about madness! Har har har...” laughed the pirate. “I’m actually here hopin’ ye could shed some light fer me on this whole Pat business. Ye see, as cap’n o’ *The Mayfly*, I’d been commission’d by th’ late Princess Pomegranate Seed t’ shoot down some zepp’lins owned by the Brine Mystics at East Yfland. Not too shabby a bunch o’ geezers by me own ’pinion, but apparently Ol’

Man Rivers insult'd th' Princess last fortnight. Said she's not sweet as a pomegranate at all, but rather sour as a wrinkly ol' prune. Ye know how things arr these days, what wit' th' wars goin' on, things lyke that get blown waaaay outta proportion. So here me is lootin' all th' booty I can find (an' twerent much, these Brine Mystics arr a bunch o' frugal fogeys) when I runs into Ol' Man Rivers himself. Th' hermit looks grave, pale as if he'd jus' smelt somethin' harrrrrible. I tell him t' hand over wot bloody booty he's got but th' man jus' shrivels up, and then like that he begins chucklin', nay, *cacklin'* mad!

'He was right!' th' ol' curmudgeon croaks, "Pat exists, we are only as human as we think we are!" Then before me eye th' ol' man blows himself into a hurricane. Methinks me times arr up, aye, but he doesn't head after me vessel. Instead, he hovers over th' Third Castle on Your Right, and strikes it t' smithereens!

"Now fer a while I thought naught o' it, till one day when I was sailin' through th' skies, havin' jus' escaped a flock o' Cleverstone's harrrrrpoonin' harrrrpies, when a glimmerin' object catches me eye. First methought 'twere a sea-porcupine, but lookit!" Percibal the Pirate handed King Frow the strange object.

"A chip?"

“Aye, but look closer...” As King Frow examined the green tint of the frame, a flicker of briny beard suddenly caught the focus of his eye. “Why, it’s Old Man Rivers!”

“A part o’ him, ’tis all that remains,” said Percibal darkly.

“Proof at last!” exclaimed the King, “We better take this up with the Queen immediately! Quick, to the *transmediportation* pad!”

No sooner had King Frow left his palace that he came into full perspective of the devastation that had been going on in his absence. The stormy skies were filled with shrieking harpies ripping apart the seams of wizardly war-zeppelins. Meanwhile, Skrellvanian catapults could be seen launching fusillades of volcanic fire down upon columns of Marmar machine-tanks, Snowsnails were freezing Boraboreans in arctic slime, Andai Serpents were wrestling with the Olajiwarian Ostrichmen, and the City of Althazar itself was a ravaged wasteland of smoking rubble and debris. Civilization had finally crumbled, and as King Frow prophesized they were all like crumbs on an unwashed pan.

“Looks lyke yer *transmediportation* pad has grown a few weeds on it,” grunted Percibal, “guess ‘we’ll have t’ take me zepp.”

They boarded Percibal’s zeppelin, *The Mayfly*, and cast off, flying low, using the dark clouds for cover.

“Look!” exclaimed King Frow in horror. “Part of the *Spacenugets* game...it’s already been uploaded!” Sure enough, high up amongst the stars, huge pixilated rocks could be seen plummeting through Calthumbria’s weakened atmosphere.

“Arr, those graphics be harrrrrible,” muttered Percibal the Pirate.

When they reached the Mothership, there was no need to pass through the standard gateway protocol. This was because one of the *Spacenugets* had smashed a hole through the Mothership’s main thrusters, causing her to flip sideways and crash-land into the highest peak in all of Calthumbria: Mount Nimbus.

Galvanized with fear, King Frow rushed forward through one of the ruptured entranceways to see if he could locate the Queen.

“My Queen!” he exclaimed, “Are you alright?”

“Yes dearie,” she mumbled weakly, “though I’ve run out of vitamins, and I’m also dying.”

“No!” grieved King Frow.

“It seems...you were right...about the world ending,” spoke the Queen, words ripe with serenity, “but here, you must take this...”

She gave King Frow the frosty cupcake that had always balanced on her marmalade-mantle. "It's, it's not vitamins...but..."

"FROW JUBILAY!" someone howled. There stood Orsen Crom-vol, Arch-Duke of the Skrells, and recently elected Commander-in-Chief of the Nivarian Confederacy. "I have caught you in the act of murdering our beloved Queen! Now I shall finish you off and claim Althazar in the name of Old Man Rivers!"

"Arr," growled Percibal, brandishing his cutlass, "we'll see about that." Orsen Crom-vol and Percibal fought, clashing blades in an epic duel that lasted for eons. At one point Percibal victoriously slashed through Crom-vol's exoskeleton armor, but the duke avenged his own death by piercing Percibal's ribcage with a poisoned claw. The two rolled over on the floor, drenched in each other's blood. Their corpses were both crushed by a falling piece of *Spacenugget*.

"No!" lamented Frow. "All my friends are dead. Everything I have ever loved is gone, ended!" Frow trudged outside onto the high deck of the wrecked Mothership to gaze at his former kingdom. In his arms he carried the deflated corpse of the Queen, now reduced to a slushy marmalade-like substance, as well as the dear cupcake she had given to him. Looking up at the broken, static sky, he could make out glitches where files of a destroyed Calthumbria were slowly being crumpled up and dispensed into the

void, making room for the meaningless barrage of *Spacenuggets* that would reduce this realm to a bit in the game's low-resolution background.

"Well, what should I do now?" the King asked nobody in particular. He was numb and exhausted. Already King Frow could feel himself deteriorating. Soon he too would no longer exist. He took out the Queen's cupcake and licked off some of the frosting, a final dessert before his bitter annihilation.

"Ow!" Something pricked his tongue. Unwrapping the rest of the cupcake, King Frow was amazed to find that it wasn't a cupcake at all. It was a purple sea-porcupine, the last of its kind. The King wept, for it was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. Cradling the little endangered critter in his arms, Frow Jubilay waited for the sound of impending *Spacenuggets* to come crashing down on both their heads.

*Thump!*

*Thump, thump!*

*Thump, thump, thump-thump-thump-thumpthumpthump..*

King Frow looked up and stared into the clouds.

"Why, Pat, why?" was all he could say.

"System error," Frow heard a far away answer, "download incomplete."



*Spacenuggets* were not falling down on the ruins of Calthumbria anymore. Instead, it was raining millions and millions of sea-porcupines.