

# Frogman Prince

Bremerhaven is a dreary place. Alas, it's a dreary place with an excellent harbor on the coast of what used to be Great Bavaria. Match that with the usual mad Baron von Barking Madman that seems to crop up regularly in post-War Europe, and you end up with what could be one devil of mess on your hands. Which is why I, and my mad bunch of Bedlamites, were there on the scene and quietly rowing our way to the castle's base. ...And **why** is there even a castle here to begin with? This town is barely older than I am. Honestly, that they went to the trouble of building an actual castle should have *itself* long since convinced the sages in the War Office that something was up.

But that's a common complaint in my branch of... never mind who we are. Let us just say that, when Mother says that She Is Not Amused, we're the fellows who make sure that nobody else is amused, either. And Mother was not amused at the idea of a mad Baron in Bremerhaven causing trouble.

And her lack of amusement would be pointless if we couldn't get into the bloody castle in the first place. The intelligence that we had said that there was a handy tunnel

via, of course, the sewers; said intelligence forbore to mention that somebody had put a shiny new lock on the grate. From the inside. And the bars were, of course, too narrow for a hand to pass.

But this was expected. I grimaced, stripped down to my alchemical water-suit, swallowed the emergency kit handed to me with a grumble and a shudder, and approached the grate. Then it was just a matter of following the mantra: *You were born a man. But you lived as a beast. The Beast lives within you still. Find your Beast...* And... transformation. A quick leap through the bars, and I was through. My team was used to this, by now; which is to say, none of them fainted or vomited. I'm told that switching my form like that is rather alarming to see.

Switching back was easier - after all, I know what my **true** form is, and it isn't a small amphibian - but a little painful. The 'curse' kind of bites at you on the way past; it may have been lifted, but it knows what it still wants to do to you. But nobody else seriously complains about their old war wounds, especially when there's a mission going on.

...Which then proceeded to go to the Devil, not five minutes after I got the lock opened and the rest of my

team in, of course. I blame young zeal: somebody must have brought in one of those depressingly keen sorts, which meant that the patrols were doubled and the areas regularly swept. Normally, we would have started removing those patrols, but this time the kid gloves were on. We had business with the Baron, and him alone.

So, of course, in the finest traditions of Briton, I allowed myself to be captured and taken to their leader. Go to the source, eh?

Only, the Baron was a bit of a cheater. Instead of doing the whole monologue-cum-death trap business, he simply locked me in a cell. Silver-chained my legs to the ground, too, which was damned rude; for all he knew, I was the sort who kept the allergy to silver while in human form. And - this was the bit designed to be cruel, of course - the key to those silver chains were put high up, out of reach 'of prying hands and tongue,' as he so gutturally sneered on his way out the door, presumably to deal with me later. ...So, clearly, the hushed-up details of my former cursed state were in fact out and about by now. And you've probably guessed it at this point: I was a prince that was cursed at birth to be eventually turned into a frog. So *clearly* I was the sort who could be easily dealt with.

The Baron was thus remarkably alarmed when I burst into his inner sanctum before he did... whatever he was going to do. I don't really pay attention to the details of an enemy's Evil Schemes when I'm in the middle of a thwarting; it's distracting, sorry. But the conversation was entertaining, if a bit uninspired on his part.

Baron: **You!**

Me: Me.

Baron: But the key...

Me: ...was poisoned, yes. I could smell it from across the room. That's why I didn't touch it.

Baron: But how did you escape your cell?

Me: [tiredly] Who am I, Baron?

Baron: Prince Alfred. Mongrel son of the Traitress Victoria.

Me: Yes, well, Mother didn't want to give up our German holdings, either. Go dig up Bismarck from

whichever crossroads the Russians buried him in and shout at **him**.

Baron: Also, you are a frog.

Me: Well, not at this moment.

Baron: You will always be a frog, in your heart.

Me: Oh! Right! Well, yes. Quite true, that.

Baron: You feel no shame about this?

Me: ...I'd wager that you never had a biology tutor?

Baron: So! There you stand, reveling in your degeneracy...

Me: :muttering: Not while Mother's the Queen.

Baron: What?

Me: Never mind. Pray, Baron, continue thy crazed monologue.

Baron: PIG-DOG! DO NOT MOCK ME! FEEL YOUR BOWELS TURN TO WATER AS I ASSUME MY TRUE FORM OF THE GREAT GERMAN WOLF! I WILL FEAST ON YOUR ENTRAILS...

Me: No, wait! WAIT, DAMN YOUR EYES!

Baron: [Almost at his half-wolf monstrous form at this point] Yheesss?

Me: I forgot to answer your question. I got out of my cell by turning my stomach inside out. I swallowed some lockpicks before I started the mission. Easy-peasy, pudding and pie. [Next part said with deliberate malice aforethought] What-what, eh?

Baron: [Frankly indecipherable noises]

Me: You *did* ask.

And then it was simply a matter of going into *my own* half-beast monstrous form. Which was a terminal surprise to the Baron, because he was expecting me to be, I don't know, some sort of small frog. The kind of inoffensive beast that princes always get cursed to be turned into in the stories.

Funny thing about curses, though: they usually assume that people will fight back. But even if you win - *when* you win - you'll still have that curse in your heart, weakening you. But if you don't fight back? If, instead, you **help** the curse? Well, it sits much more lightly on you. In my case: yes, a fairy godmother went to Mother on the day of my birth and told her that I would be cursed to be turned into a frog. Mother did not panic, she did not scream, and she certainly did not wail and weep: instead, she ordered her savants to find the most dangerous, yet civilized, werefrog tribes that existed.

Admittedly, she was unhappy to find out that the best candidates all came from our former American colonies, but that didn't stop Mother from acquiring a suitable colonial to make sure that I was discreetly infected. Very nice chap, in fact. Had one of those amusing names - Jeremiah Samuel Makepeace - that always goes over well in a bored winter Court.

And Jeremiah was a **bullfrog**.

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