

## Piggy Moto: All Good Things

Smoke from innumerable pipes and cigars thickened the air at Raging Jim's Tap House. The crowd raised their pints to the foreign pigs from the Faunation Confederacy and tossed what pennies they could spare into the tip tankard that stood on the edge of the stage. The strangest looking among the performers: Byron, a pale-skinned boar with roses, daggers and skulls all over him, who sang raunchy limericks as his four porcine band mates took a break to wet their whistles.

Two months had passed since the pigs left the large port city of Farpoint. The small towns and villages along the southwest road to the Candleton had welcomed the pigs' tamer compositions. Country hospitality and cuisine suited the swine well, and they almost regretted arriving at the fortified capital city.

Raging Jim's paled in comparison to the Sheltering Arms as far as food and drink were concerned. This, however, had become the norm. None of the inns, taverns, or theaters at which the swine managed permission to perform could hold a candle to the luxury that they'd enjoyed in Farpoint. Some proprietors had the courtesy to lie about their booking status, but most merely rejected the pigs at first glance. So, the boars were stuck performing at smaller, less prestigious venues.

The gigs and stage time that the swine did manage to book, however, typically allowed for broader application of the boars' talent. Less affluent patrons typically enjoyed a wider variety of entertainment; those at Raging Jim's were no exception. Things seemed to be going well.

That is, until one evening when a detachment of the king's guard burst into the tap house with swords drawn. Patrons shouted and scattered, overturning tables in their flight. Bottles and ceramic tankards toppled and shattered, covering the floor with frothy suds.

Byron bellowed obscenities the likes of which curled his traveling companions' toes. And once he got a clear shot, the drunken boar hurled his own tankard at a heavily armed badger in mail armor.

Soldiers rounded up the rabble-rousers (including every member of Piggy Moto and several locals) one by one and tossed them into the back of a jail wagon that waited just outside. Upon his own deposit, Byron rose onto wobbling legs, strained against his shackles and shouted something rather incomprehensible at the wolverine guarding him. Thoroughly unimpressed with his captive's impetuosity, the guard swatted his charge on temple with the flat of his broadsword. Byron crumpled into the bed of the cart, clutching his head. With a triumphant shout, the driver cracked his reins and set off to the city's garrison. The passengers suffered every bump and cobble as the cart jostled and lumbered toward the jail.

The prison rose high into the gloomy, spring night, silhouetted by the full, leering moon. Bells rang high in the prison tower—calling the gate men to make way for a fresh load of prisoners. Guards hauled the pigs along by chains and led them into the main processing hall. Inquisitors stripped the swine of all their clothing, searched them most indignantly, and then redressed them in ill-fitting, gray-and-blue tunics. Guards then led the rapidly-sobering pigs up four levels to individual cells, where they were locked in for the night. The place reeked of old chamber pots.

It was not until well after midnight that most of the pigs realized that they had no idea why they'd been incarcerated. Every time the pigs made any attempt to talk—to puzzle out just what they'd done wrong, guards would thunder up the stairs and hammer on their cell doors. They raised a clamor that drove spikes of pain through the hung-over prisoners' ears. The boars could do nothing but sleep and wait until morning.



At the far end of the court room sat a panel of bird and deer magistrates dressed in black robes. They looked much like confederate judges but lacked the ridiculous wigs to which the Faunatians were accustomed. Above them hung a banner-draped balcony in the center of which stood a massive wooden chair and two little stools.

Rows of bench seating lined the left, right and back walls of the chamber. Locals filled these seats and hissed under their breaths to one another—conspiring to devise most fitting punishments for whatever crimes the swine had committed.

The trial was brief, and by the end of it four of the swine glowered more darkly at their rebellious mate than even the witnesses whose windows he'd smeared with unspeakable things, roofs he'd vandalized with unrepeatably scrawlings, and flower gardens he'd defiled most unpleasantly. Byron offered no defense for his actions.

“Seven weeks service to the community!” declared a crow overseeing the hearing. “After which, banishment proceedings will transpire.”

Seven *weeks!* The pigs reeled. By the king's law, every member of a troupe, band, coterie or party was equally convicted for crimes committed by any other member. Thus, friends were expected to keep their own in line. The system usually worked.

Seven weeks without pay—they were practically slaves to the crown. Whenever Byron dared utter this point, however, his friends punched his shoulders, kicked his shins, or did whatever else it took to silence their belligerent companion. The work wasn't to be so miserable, though.

The court ordered Piggy Moto to clean up all of the messes that Byron had made. Following that, guards put the swine to dung detail and ordered them to shovel the streets free of fertilizer left behind by the day's carriages. After three weeks, the pigs were permitted to entertain tenants at the city's orphanages and almshouses.

The last four weeks of their community service left the pigs feeling proud and accomplished. They'd found renewed motivation. At the end of the seventh week, guards escorted the pigs to the courthouse and brought them before the king himself.

Ralph Loweman, king of Lancemyth, sat flanked by two mouse attendants on the balcony above the judges' panel. Most of the boars kept their faces low so as to avoid the king's unnatural gaze. For, while one of the bull's eyes looked perfectly normal, a wicked scar crossed over the other. The destroyed eye had long ago been replaced with a spherical gemstone, which glowed with eerie, sapphire luminescence.

The king perused the case scrolls before him. His brow arched curiously. “Your case is uncommon,” the bull said in a rumbling, earthy voice. “You'd caused no trouble since your arrival until one night, seven weeks ago, Mister Byron Nicodemus Warner decided to go on a vandalism spree. Witnesses report that, in your belligerence, you told them where you and your friends could be found. You... dared your victims to have you arrested.” The bull glared down at the smirking, inked boar.

“Aye,” Byron said with a nod.

“And when you were brought before the court, you pleaded no contest to any of the charges,” said the bull. “Were you *looking* to be thrown into jail?”

“Aye,” Byron said again.

“But,” said the king, frowning, “why?”

“Well, now that you ask,” said Byron. “I did this for an audience with Your Grace.”

Four pairs of piggish eyes locked onto Byron, and four be-tusked mandibles dropped to the floor.

Before anyone could stop him, Byron explained. "You see," he said, "there's an handful of little gremlins back in Farpoint, right? And they been waiting for some time now for you to respond to an official request they've filed some eight months ago."

"Official request?" wondered the bull. "I've gotten no attention requests from Farpoint."

"Yeah, I rather reckoned you hadn't," said Byron. "But what with how you helped them blokes in Port MacBrie, I figured you'd be interested in helpin' another lot of 'em. Similar situation and all."

The bull's brow crashed down to his muzzle, "Eight *months* ago?"

"Right," said Byron. "I reckon the paperwork just got lost on its way to you, what with how far it had to travel and all. And me own requests went so long unanswered, I reckoned this was the fastest way to get an audience."

"I've received no official requests from you or any gremlins in Farpoint," the bull rumbled.

"Yeah, well, no surprise that, is it?" said Byron. "I mean, we're just a bunch of schweinsters, and them's, what, a buncha lizards, right?"

The bull glowered, turning his magically radiant stare down to his now blustering magistrates.

"And while we're on the topic of things lost and forgotten," said Byron. "I'm under the impression that you'd allotted some hundred-thirty pounds tax silver to repair the storefronts and quaint little city houses what me and me blokes just finished tidying. Them that got smashed up by all those winter storms what came through."

The bull turned back to Byron, "I did," he said. "What has that to do with anything?"

"Well, nothing, really," replied the boar, "cepn' that only about ninety pounds worth of repairs got done. Yeah, the shingles was new and everything, but I think if Your Grace was to inspect the work himself, then he might just find that some corners was cut."

"Silence, insolent swine!" bellowed one of the king's judges. "How dare you insinuate such treachery!" The courtroom erupted with protests and rage.

Loweman knocked calmly with his gavel, and the chamber fell silent again.

"Jenkins, fetch an engineer from the university," said the bull to one of his mouse attendants, "and take him to Waxton Street to examine the storm repairs."

"I'll handle this, lord," spoke a badger amongst the magistrates.

"No, Sir Quincy," replied the bull, his voice low and steady. "I am sequestering you and all of my court until this matter has been properly investigated."

"But surely," said the badger, "your royal inspector would be better suited for this task than a lowly engineer."

The bull smiled softly, his eyes never leaving Byron. "Quincy, keep your seat. Jenkins, to the university."

"Aye, lord," said the tiny mouse scribe. He hopped down from his stool and scurried out of the courtroom.

"As for the gremlins of Farpoint," said Loweman. "It is not within the king's authority to interfere in the real estate decisions made by a sovereign city. That is if their plight is similar to that in Port MacBrie."

Byron opened his mouth to object but thought better of it and said nothing.

King Loweman settled and regarded the pigs before him. “One pound of silver a head,” he said, “to be paid immediately. You have six days to leave this country, and I do not want to hear of you returning until one year and one day have passed. If you disrespect my wishes, then you and all of your companions will spend the remainder of that duration in the tower. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” the boars responded.

“Take them from my sight,” said the bull with a dismissive gesture.

With that, cervine guards led the pigs from the court house. Clerks returned their property and set them out into the street as free, albeit considerably poorer, boars. The band ignored Byron for half of the day, but Raging Jim's welcomed the boars back in with a reception fit for heroes.

Music and subdued celebration filled the next few days for Piggy Moto. The fine made less of a dent in their savings than the pigs had feared. Anonymous benefactors threw silver into the band's tip tankard—enough to offset the court's fee. The swine ate well and drank deeply, but they reveled quietly.

Officials booked the boars' passage west to the Faunatian Confederacy. They would be deposited in the neighboring nation's closest port. Piggy Moto remained in the city long enough, however, to learn that seven magistrates and six other bureaucrats (including the king's royal inspectors) had been sacked and put into stocks for four days. The boars lingered just long enough to watch the king and his escort depart for Farpoint on most pressing and secret business.

Whenever the other swine questioned Byron about how he'd learned of the aristocrats' treachery, the tattooed boar merely said, “Like I said an hundred times mates, I have me ways.”

As the crew of the Yesterday's Dreams got their vessel underway and the hubbub on deck calmed, Byron left his companions to climb topside. He gazed back over the bay and could only barely make out the city's patron statue from this distance. He traced a finger up along the vines on his left arm and smiled to himself.

“*Now*, me scaly friends,” he said to nobody in particular, “*now* we's even.”