

Helena Ferez, Bearded Lady

Once upon a time, in the faraway land of Fandonia, there lived a beautiful princess. The princess had everything she could ever want. She lived in the lap of luxury, surrounded by the most delightful fields and gardens. She was waited on by faithful and pleasant servants and maids who provided for her every whim from when she awoke until the late hours when she fell to sleep. But most of all, she was surrounded by love and goodness by her family. Her mother and father, the Queen and King, were good hearted people who cared for their only child and never wanted to see her come to harm.

And so she grew, surrounded by love, in a life of pleasantries and ease. But this did not harden her heart, for her father was a wise, benevolent ruler who cared for his people, and her mother had a good heart and cared for all living things, great and small. And the princess grew up caring and loving and tender and warm.

And her parents brought for her the greatest tutors in all the land. And they taught the young princess mathematics, and language, and the history of Fandonia and all the world beyond. And the princess learned and grew wise.

But, as is always the case, something happened to change her life, and not in a good way at all. She had just turned sixteen when her parents bid her to meet them for lunch. There with her parents was a horrible old man, the Regent of Freedonia.

Now Freedonia shares a long, treacherous border with Fandonia. It is said that the people of Freedonia, despite the country's name, are not free and happy. They are oppressed by their horrible regent who stole power from the throne after the King and Queen passed on and the young prince mysteriously vanished. They have been this way for over five hundred years, with the Regency passing down to the heirs of the Regent.

The people of Freedonia have a myth that gives them hope. They believe that when times are darkest, the young prince will return from his five hundred year sleep, decked in the crown jewels of Freedonia and lead them on to happiness and peace. But until then, the all-powerful Regent rules the Independent State of Freedonia. And his rule is neither kind nor just. And it was that man that the princess faced that very lunchtime.

"My dear," her father, the King, began, "I have news for you. Please, come sit with us for a while." And the princess sat as her father continued.

"You no doubt know, my daughter, that this man is the Regent of Freedonia, our neighbor to the west." And the princess allowed her hand to be kissed while the King pressed on.

"And you may know as well, dearest one, that Fandonia and Freedonia have been at the brink of war for some time, and that things are quickly coming to a head. In less than a decade, war will be inevitable." The princess, suspecting what was coming, shifted uncomfortably in her seat and listed carefully to her father.

"I have spoken to the Regent here, and we believe that we have found a solution, a way to keep lasting peace between our two countries. We wish to unite them by marriage, daughter. You shall be wed to the Regent."

The princess surveyed the horrible old man, and choking back tears, replied, "but... but I wish to marry for love. I want a husband who is young, for I am barely but sixteen. I must love my husband!"

And as the tears started flowing, her mother placed a hand on the princess' shoulder and replied, "daughter. You are a princess and you have a responsibility to your people. This marriage is necessary to keep peace between our two countries."

"And perhaps you can learn to love your husband," interrupted the King. At this, the princess could take no more and ran from the room, sobbing.

And then the princess did the first truly selfish thing in her life. She did not want war, but she could not stand to marry that horrible man. So she packed her few things and ran away, deep into the woods of Fandonia, and was never seen again.

This was nearly ten years ago, and Fandonia and Freedonia are ever closer to war. The princess was never seen again and is still mourned by her parents. And for most people, the story ends here, but you are not like most people and know how the story continues.

The princess traveled through the woods all day and night. And the woods were *dark* that night. The princess was afraid, and for good reason...

A digression. There is another story told by the superstitious people of Fandonia, the story of the Old Woman of the Woods. She goes by many names, "the Night Witch," "the Baba Yaga," "the Wood Crone," but they are not her true name and for the purpose of this story, names do not matter.

She is the spirit of the woods at night, mysterious, powerful, and foreboding. She has power, yes, but

no good purpose. And every child who wanders into the woods and is never heard from again is hers, now and forever. The simple people of the countryside have reason to fear her and sometimes, yes sometimes, superstitions are real.

So the Old Woman of the Woods saw the princess enter the forest and came to her to offer a deal. The Old Woman of the Woods would disguise the princess and send her to a place far away and she would never have to marry the Regent. However, the princess would have to perform a task for the Old Woman of the Woods. If she failed the task, she would be the property of the Old Woman of the Woods until the end of time.

An agreement was made and the deal was done, and the princess fell into a deep sleep.

You woke up in a small clearing in an unfamiliar forest.

You took a quick inventory. All of your belongings were gone, and you were dressed in simple peasant wear. You didn't feel sick or injured, so you stood up and stretched and started walking down a nearby path. You heard music and shouting in the background and decided to walk in that direction.

It was a fair of sorts, or some sort of exhibition. You saw a large placard written in English (luckily, you are well versed in many languages), "Colonel Sebastian T. Rawhide's Wild West Spectacular." You knew then that you were in America.

But your true shock came when one of the small children stared at you and then turned to her father and asked, "paw, is she part of the show?" You didn't know what to think, but just then, you caught sight of yourself in a mirror. You sported a thick, full beard, completely obscuring your face. You did what any polite woman of good breeding would do in that situation. You fainted.

You awoke in what best would be describes as a wagon set up as an office. A man dressed in a fancy cowboy outfit brought you a glass of water. When you were slightly composed, he cleared his throat and spoke, "Ma'am, I'm Colonel Sebastian Thomas Rawhide. I presume the heat got to you. Are you feeling well?"

You allowed yourself to drink some water, carefully. The be... The beard got in the way. You acknowledged that you were well and that it must have been the heat. Colonel Rawhide smiled and said, "I assume, ma'am, that you have come here seeking employment?"

"Employment?"

"Why yes, ma'am, you do know that you are at Colonel Sebastian T. Rawhide's Wild West Spectacular, don't you?"

You allowed that the fainting spell may have rattled your senses, but the more you spoke to Colonel Rawhide, the more you realized that the Old Woman of the Woods had sent you here on purpose. Using the name Helena Ferez and claiming to be from Rumania, you joined the Wild West Spectacular along with the Townshed Siamese twins. Colonel Rawhide even had an American doctor examine you to produce a "certificate of authenticity."

Eventually he gathered a number of new acts and changed his show to a circus. People have come and gone, but you have managed to make a small circle of friends. The Townshed Brothers are sweet when they aren't yelling at each other. Uma the Unicyclist was always a good friend. Binky the Clown always manages to make you laugh, even when you miss your family. And the young eight-year-old Bobo the Dog faced boy has always been a special friend. You share a common bond, that of unusual facial hair.

You even like Daisy Belle, Colonel Rawhide's fiancée. She even looks a bit like you, well without your beard. It's a shame that she doesn't care for circus people. She looks down on those different from her. You can sympathize. When you first joined the circus, you cried yourself to sleep almost every night because of your beard.

Ah, the beard. It is quite a mystery. It doesn't grow, and you've never lost a hair of it (unless it was pulled out, and it *hurts* when you pull on it). You've never tried to shave it; you're quite convinced that it would never grow back. The Old Woman of the Woods only gives you one chance, and you don't want to squander it.

You've kept abreast of national events as well. Freedonia and Fandonia are slipping closer and closer to war. That's why it really disturbed you when Colonel Rawhide announced a tour of Europe. The tour started in France, toured the continent, went to England, and then ended up back in France. You went for most of it, but took a leave of absence from Fandonia and Freedonia. You told people that you were afraid of the war, but in reality, you were afraid of being recognized.

But, as it turned out, you needed not fear. The circus made it back to France without event. You even picked up a number of new members on the continent: Zelda the silent clown, your friend Bobo, and the Masked Rider and the knife thrower.

The Masked Rider is just amazing. When you were younger, you were trained in horseback riding by the Captain of the Guard, Dana "Jumping" Jehosiphath. Captain Jehosiphath was the best rider in the kingdom and even the Captain's abilities pale in comparison to the Masked Rider. You greatly admire the Masked Rider and would like to see if you could take some lessons; it would remind you of home.

You also gained a very close friend in Bobo, the dog-faced boy. Bobo, like you, is cursed with facial hair, although not quite so literally in his case. He is a cute, charming, eight year old boy, and wise beyond his years. He helps out with various chores around the circus, especially with Franklin Winters, the wild animal tamer. Bobo is very good with animals.

Unfortunately, the European tour wasn't quite the success Colonel Rawhide thought it would be. Crowds didn't flock to the circus the way they would in the United States. Privately, you were not surprised – people are more refined in Europe. And then there were the disasters in France.

You had always been friends with Uma the Unicyclist. Everyone liked Uma, with her cheery personality and honest friendliness, but near the end of the tour in France, she slipped off her unicycle and severely sprained her ankle. She had to stay with a doctor in France. There have been rumors of sabotage. You understand that the cycle is in the possession of the sword swallower. Not that you know the first thing about unicycles, but maybe someone should look at it.

Then there was Preston the Prestidigitator. He was in the middle of sawing a woman in half when a panel swung open revealing the illusion. He was laughed offstage and Colonel Rawhide had to let him go. There have been rumors that the Bungling Brothers are messing with the acts in an attempt to cause the circus to go under. At first you weren't so sure, but after what happened last night, you know it to be true.

When you woke up this morning, your face felt funny. As you were washing up, you realized that someone had shaved off your beard while you were asleep! They did a professional job too; you were lucky they didn't decide to cut your throat. Choking down panic, you rushed to a nearby drawer. You had a fake beard made for just such an emergency. A little spirit gum and you were ready to face the world.

But now you are certain that there is a saboteur in the company. You want to catch him or her, but you cannot. You have a show today and you cannot reveal that your beard has been shaved off. Worse, you are not convinced that it will grow back. Someone – especially one of the people from Europe – might recognize you without your beard.

You're not sure what to do, but you'll have to think about it soon, and calmly. Your beard will fall off if you get too nervous.

ITEMS

A fake beard: This is kept on with spirit gum and will fall off if you get too upset.

A certificate of authenticity: showing that you have been examined by a doctor and are a real bearded woman.

A birthmark: The birthmark of the Royal Family of Fandonia, in the shape of the Royal Seal. It is on your upper calf, so you wear dresses to cover it. Expect to wear a temporary tattoo.

ROLEPLAYING HINT

You are royalty, and sometimes you cannot disguise these things. However, you are a good person, and not stuck up. For all the fairy tale life you led, you do have a pragmatic streak and that should serve you well.

THE OTHER CHARACTERS:

Colonel Sebastian T. Rawhide: A fine Southern gentleman and a war hero to boot. You are proud to be working for this fine man. It is a shame that you may not be working for him any more if your beard doesn't grow back.

Daisy Belle: Colonel Rawhide's fiancée, a real Southern belle. She doesn't care for the circus. She has a passing similarity to you.

Jack Bungling: The older of the two Bungling Brothers. You have never met the Bungling Brothers, but you have never heard anything nice about them.

The Flying Credenza Brothers: They keep to themselves a great deal. They have their own private wagon, and they don't let anyone else in. They claim to be from Italy, but they don't speak Italian and they don't seem to know anything about the country. Very suspicious.

Herman Binkowicz, "Binky" the Clown: Binky was one of the original performers. His talent allowed Colonel Rawhide to change from a wild west show to a circus. He is constantly hilarious and makes you laugh.

Susan Wildes, The Strong Lady: She is in her late teens and is very strong. She is a bit naive, but a very nice, polite girl.

The Townshed Brothers: They were also part of the original circus. They are very nice people, but they constantly argue. You cannot imagine what it would be like to be connected to someone else every hour of every day, and that could be why they always fight.

Franklin Winters, The Lion Tamer: He is a nice enough person, but he does tend to drink. It hasn't gotten in the way of his work, yet.

Peter Wainwright, the Fire Eater/Sword Swallower: He joined the circus some time ago. He has a very

flashy show, but is nice enough in person. Lately he seems to be bothered by something.

Bobo, the Dog Faced Boy: He's an eight year old boy who joined the circus in Europe. He is one of your closest friends. You share a common bond, that of unusual facial hair. He could only speak Freedonian and some broken English when you first met him, but now he can hold his own in English thanks to your tutelage. Bobo has a wisdom above and beyond that of an eight year old. If he weren't so young, perhaps, but no... A princess could never love a commoner. Or could you? You are a commoner now after all yourself. But what does it matter, he's only eight.

Zelda the Clown: Zelda joined the circus in Europe as well. She cannot talk, nor read or write, but she is very energetic. You understand that Daisy has been teaching her to read and write. You wonder if you could help.

Señora Mysterioso: She joined the circus just before it left for Europe. She claims to be gypsy fortune teller, but you don't believe her. You know Spanish. She *should* be Señora Mysteriosa, and she isn't even married. She should be Señorita Mysteriosa, by all rights. And her accent is all wrong. She is a complete fake.

The Masked Rider: Joined the circus in Europe. The Masked Rider is the best horseback rider you have ever seen. Some of the Rider's stunts almost seem impossible. You used to take riding lessons when you were a girl, perhaps the Masked Rider could teach you some tricks.

The Knife Thrower: The Knife Thrower also joined the circus in Europe. The Knife Thrower likes privacy, but is very talented. You saw some knives being thrown perfectly, while the thrower was blindfolded.

Lydia the Tattooed Lady: She joined the circus just before it left for Europe. She also bears a passing resemblance to you, although her tattoos obscure that somewhat. While in Europe, she had the royal seals of every country she went through tattooed on her body.

Zimmie the Clown: Zimmie is odd. There is something just wrong about him. He isn't very friendly, either; you tried striking up a conversation once, but he just ignored you.

The Great Zamboni: He arrived today asking for a job. Colonel Rawhide decided to give him a chance. You don't know much about him.

WELL KNOWN CHARACTERS NOT IN GAME:

Senator Hiram Bungling: He is the father of the Bungling Brothers. He is a powerful and influential man in Washington DC. Where Bungling goes, so goes the nation.

John Bungling: The younger of the Bungling Brothers. You've never met him.

Uma the Unicyclist: Uma used to ride a large unicycle while juggling or across a high wire. However, while in France, she fell and severely twisted her ankle. She has stayed on in France in the care of a Doctor. She was a good friend and you are sorry to see her go.

Preston the Prestidigitator: His act also was ruined while in France. While he was sawing a woman in half, a panel swung open revealing the illusion. He was booed out of the tent and Colonel Rawhide had to fire him.

ABILITIES

Combat: 8 cards.

Well Schooled: You have learned many things. You may ask the GMs four yes/no questions during the game. Or, instead of asking a question, you can attempt an activity that would require some training, even though your character history doesn't specifically mention that training. This is limited to things a normal person, even a princess, might be trained to do. For example, you can use this ability to perform simple first aid, but not major surgery. Also, you can read, write and speak English, Fandonian, Freedonian, Spanish, Italian, and French.

First Aid: Should anyone become injured, you have learned a few methods to patch people up in emergencies.

Binky the Clown: You find Binky so hilarious that after a few minutes of talking with him (or interacting with him in any way), you must burst into laughter, no matter what the topic of conversation is. You cannot stop laughing until he leaves, and afterwards, you cannot clearly recall what you were talking about (or doing), but – my – that Binky sure is funny.