

This writer feels the need to lay down on paper the story her grandmother told her, when she was a little changeling barely reaching her knees. An absolute glutton for stories, and especially that most precious of story traits - that it was all true. It concerns the Virtue of Prosperity and the Blade of the Isles: Zemress. Of course, she's a woman of many stories but this one was always my favourite.

Zemress had an ongoing antagonism with the Asaveans. For a while, this mutual dislike was kept to skirmishes and small battles on the high seas. There were many moments of bold daring, huge opportunities to show Courage and Vigilance and not just from the woman herself. Her crew was as brave as she was and rallied around their leader. She refused to give an inch to the enemy and neither side exhausted their resources or wiped out their opponents. But the situation had to come to a head and come to a head it did.

One day, she found herself faced with several Asavean ships to her lone craft (the Kracken's Bane, naturally). Rather than flee or surrender, naturally she decided the only other option was to win. Systematically, she went through each and not only captured their riches but sent each and every one scurrying back to Asavea with their tails between their legs.

Funnily enough Asavea didn't take kindly to this. They didn't take kindly to this at all. This was not just a fun looting excursion - it was all out war. And accordingly, to fight a war they needed all the might they could gather. As flattering as it would be, the fleet wasn't entirely aimed at subduing Zemress. She would be a bonus in their mission of going about invading the Sumaah, a goal they had had in sight for some time.

Luckily for Sumaah, Zemress was not about to stay out of this fight, resting on her laurels. She took to her ship and took to the seas, determined to do her part. And do her part she would. She and her crew battled all they could and shrugged off losses and injuries, never letting it dim their passion for Sumaah and its people. But soon she realised something - she was just one ship and she couldn't do this alone.

Now, not only did she have skill. She had resources. Resources gained from the payments and bribes she took from her enemies, but also whatever they contained within their ship. You see, she had a specialist part of her crew - a group of merrows that would be sent out to every ship she sank, swimming inside the wrecks to pick up whatever they could. With this all in order she began recruitment. Not just honest sea-faring folks from Sumaah, oh no. She saw a different opportunity. She started to pay pirates, criminals, brigands, any desperado she could find. She went into lawless taverns, packed docks and distant cities. She went where many feared to go and she paid them to fight on the side of Sumaah. She piled them with gold and jewels until they could barely walk under the weight of riches.

But while they were fighting, she began to preach The Way. She took them by the hand and sang of The Labyrinth, the Virtue we all must embody and share, what is expected of us and how great each and every one of us can be. She spoke from the heart and her brazen passion moved all who listened to her. More and more of those she had hired began to convert, taking anointments, finding how to center their lives around the Way too.

Oh and the war was won of course. Sumaah stood triumphant and proud. All the Asavean ships were sunk and lost to the eddies of the sea. She was honoured and praised, as were

her crew (even the merrow amongst them!). But that wasn't nearly as important as all the souls she brought into The Way, saving them from a life of spiritual deficiency. And did you know that to this very day the descendants of those pirates still follow the Way, many of them practising inside the Sumaah Republic to this day. Her legacy lives on in the children, grandchildren and distant relations that all owe their conversion and belonging to her.