

*That master of the ferocious beasts! Presenting...*

## **FRANKLIN WINTERS, THE LION TAMER**

**Y**ou are, quite easily, the oldest person that you know. It isn't that hard when you're immortal, after all.

You were born in the year of our Lord, Sixteen Hundred and Fifty One, in Salem, Massachusetts. Your Christian name was Jonathan Corwin. You were a good, God fearing man, and served your town well. You grew to be a prominent Judge in the town, not as well known as your friend John Hathorne, perhaps, but still you had authority.

In the fateful year of 1692, you learned what a mistake authority could be. That was when Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and their serving girl Tituba were accused of witchcraft by the local girls, many of whom were exhibiting bizarre behavior. You do not know to this day why the girls decided to act out as such, but you are fairly certain that it wasn't witchcraft.

Oh, you still believe in witches, but you have roughly two hundred years of hindsight to look back on your deeds. You were swept up in the hysteria that followed. Over twenty people died before Governor Phipps stepped in and stopped the madness, but it was already too late for you.

You remember the day of the curse quite well. It was the morning of July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1692. Five so-called witches, Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Wildes, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, and Sarah Good were to be hanged that day.

You awoke that morning in a cold sweat, shaking from some horrible dream. But you must still have been dreaming, for a specter appeared, hanging in the air in front of you. It was an old crone who dangled in the morning light, her face masked. The apparition was glowing slightly and you can see the walls of your modest house through its ghastly visage.

She spoke to you, in a voice that rang of fingernails on slate, "As will be done to me, shall not be done to thee. Thou shalt have all eternity to reflect upon thy misfortune." And then the specter moved to lay hands upon your forehead and you screamed and passed back into blessed unconsciousness.

You awoke again a few minutes later. Your room was empty save yourself. It was eerily quiet except for your ragged breathing. All seemed right with the world again. You said a quick prayer to the Lord and hurried to the hanging.

You were now confident you were doing the Lord's work. One of these women was indeed a witch, but

you were faithful and pure. She could not hurt you. Your hubris was your undoing, for as you watched the five women dangle, you felt a strange dread that you could not name.

It was several years later that you learned the truth of the crone's curse.

You were out back chopping wood for the fire when your hand slipped and the axe bit deep into your leg. At least that's what you thought at first. But then you noticed that you had actually managed to cut off your own foot, just above the boot. The pain was incredible. You watched your life bleed out of your leg in spurts. You nearly lost consciousness from the shock and the pain. You wish you had.

As you watched in horror, your severed foot began to move, taking its place at the bottom of your leg. The pain you felt before was but a fraction of the agony you now felt as your flesh began to knit together. You were in complete unbearable agony for several minutes, unable to do anything but gasp with pain. And then the pain was gone and your leg was whole again.

Shaking, you got back to your feet, and gingerly walked back to your house. There was no pain. Oh, there was blood; your leg was covered in it. But you weren't bleeding. It hit you then. You could not die. Oh, you could be injured, and you could certainly feel pain, but you wouldn't die.

You walked back into your house and tried to figure what you would tell your wife.

Ten years later you buried her. You moved on after that. People were beginning to talk. How you never seemed to get sick, how you still looked so young, how you hanged all those witches... You had to leave before you were strung up yourself. It wouldn't have killed you, of course, but it would have hurt like the dickens!

The next few years passed in a blur. You seemed to be constantly moving. You couldn't stay in one place for too long. You lived through good times and bad. You remember taking a belly full of lead fighting the redcoats. Your body rid itself of the lead pellets when your stomach reformed, and that hurt twice.

You took to drinking, not to ease the pain, but to make money. Drinking is a sin, of course, but since alcohol doesn't affect you at all, you are not very worried about it. But you can win all sorts of wagers – yes, gambling is a sin as well – and get people to trust you if they think that you are in your cups. You have not tried some of the more popular pharmaceuticals, such as laudanum, although you

suspect that they would not affect you either. Luckily, you don't get sick, otherwise you would be even more miserable, as you could not even try a tincture of cure.

You got your start as a wild animal trainer in the early days of the circuses. You were visiting Barnum's American Museum in New York – despite the popular beliefs, it was really quite educational – and a lion had managed to escape from one of the upstairs exhibits. Most people ran, but you were cornered. You had some experience with animals from working on farms, and you were somehow able to calm the creature down and get it back to its cage without being harmed.

Barnum wanted to hire you right then and there, but you didn't want to be in the public eye, so you said no and left New York. But the idea of working with animals stuck. Animals may notice that you don't get sick, or never seem to get older, but they never say anything. You worked for a while in a zoological gardens and then in a menagerie.

And from there, you changed your name – you change your name every twenty years or so when you move on – and became Franklin Winters, Lion Tamer.

You joined Colonel Rawhide's Circus about a year and a half ago. You like working here; Colonel Rawhide is a good man. The people here are almost like a family. It will be a shame to have to leave them eventually. There are a few flies in the ointment, of course. One of them is Daisy Belle, Colonel Rawhide's fiancée.

Daisy doesn't care much for circus folk. She especially doesn't like you. She feels that you all should have good and proper jobs and that working as clowns, or acrobats, or with animals is beneath decent people. You can understand her point of view. When you were a judge in Salem, you would have run a wild animal trainer out of town. How things have changed in just two centuries.

Daisy isn't a bad person, just not very tolerant of those different from how she was raised. She's a dignified southern belle and doesn't understand that such a life is not for everybody. You understand her point of view, and know that her tolerance will broaden as her horizons expand. However, it has become imperative that she come to accept the circus as soon as possible.

You've grown very fond of these people, and for many of them, yourself included, the circus is your livelihood. Several months ago, the circus was doing quite well, and Colonel Rawhide planned a trip to Europe. The tour started in England, wound its way through the continent, and ended in France. During that time, Colonel Rawhide picked up some new acts.

The Masked Rider, the knife thrower, Bobo the Dog Faced Boy, and Zelda the Clown all joined the circus in Europe.

However, the circus didn't do quite as well in Europe. Also, toward the end of the tour, accidents started happening. Uma the Unicyclist fell off her high unicycle and nearly broke her ankle. She stayed on in France, under doctor's care. Preston the Prestidigitator was fired when a panel swung open during his act, revealing the illusion behind the woman he was cutting in half. By the time the circus got back to America, it was losing money quickly. Colonel Rawhide still owes you, personally, \$50 worth of back pay.

Then the Bunglings moved in. The Bungling Brothers own a rival circus, built piecemeal from the wrecks of other circuses. They are ruthless and cruel, and nobody really wants to work with them. Unfortunately, they buy contracts from other circuses and folks cannot leave. Daisy has seen this as an opportunity to get Colonel Rawhide to sell the circus and get a "legitimate" job.

So a group of folks got together one night to discuss the situation. It was you, Clifford Credenza, the Townshed brothers (back when they were still talking to each other), Bobo, and Lydia the Tattooed Woman. You hit on a plan. One of you – you forget which one, you maybe? – is to get a spare mask from the Masked Rider and pretend to kidnap Daisy.

Then, on a prearranged signal, everyone else chips in to rescue her, letting the masked kidnapper escape. Daisy will then be so grateful that she'll forget about her dislike of circus folk. It's drastic, but it just might work. Your plan is to do it not too long after the main show ends. You wanted to try the phony kidnapping before the main show, but Clifford Credenza insisted it be after the show.

You are looking forward to the show. You genuinely like the animals. Plus, you now have a helper with them. Young Bobo the Dog-Faced Boy has been helping you with the animals. He is from Fandonia, or Freedonia, or one of those European countries and only speaks broken English. He doesn't speak much about his home life, most likely the poor lad ran away from home because of his hair. It covers most of his body; he's hairier than most of the adults and possibly some of the animals. And he's only eight years old.

Or so he claims. Sometimes in your conversations, he slips and talks about things that should have happened before he was born. He once talked about "your American civil war," when you were talking about the possibility of war between his country and Fandonia (or Freedonia, one of the two). He spoke of it like an adult, like he remembered it.

Sure, the possibility may exist that he is a middle-aged man pretending to be a very hairy child, but you are willing to believe in something more. Stranger things have happened. To you. Of course, you dare not voice your suspicions. You have no great desire to have your curse revealed to the world, especially in a place where people are willing to make money exploiting freaks. You could just see your act changed into something that killed you, every day. That would hurt! Or worse yet, you'd be jailed and studied by one of those *scientists* whose work is coming into vogue these days.

No, what you really want is for your curse to end, ideally allowing to live out the rest of your life like a normal man. You've experienced the pain and death of too many lifetimes and you are ready to quit. But how?

### ROLEPLAYING HINT

You are old although you look like you're in your thirties, and ready to die. However, since you can't, you try to live your life as best you can. You are a decent man, although you are considered by many to be a drunk. You do not dissuade them of this opinion since alcohol does not affect you and it seems to get people to trust you. Remember that you cannot be killed, but you can be hurt and pain is very unpleasant.

### NOTE

The wild animals are not well defined. If you wish there to be a specific wild animal, we will do our best to accommodate you. During your show, the wild animals will be portrayed by children.

### THE OTHER CHARACTERS:

Colonel Sebastian T. Rawhide: The owner of the circus. He is a good soul and really does want what is best for his employees. You are glad to be working for him. Of late, he is worried because the circus is not doing well financially. He owes you \$50 of back pay.

Daisy Belle: Colonel Rawhide's fiancée. She does not care for the circus. You can sympathize, but you need to change her mind quickly before she convinces Colonel Rawhide to sell the circus. That is why you have embarked on a phony kidnapping plan with some of the others.

Jack Bungling: The older of the two Bungling Brothers. You've never met them, but you know them by reputation. They have a large circus that they built by buying out smaller circuses. Right now, they are threatening to buy out Colonel Rawhide's circus and you don't want that to happen.

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. Clifford, however, is helping with the scheme to kidnap Daisy.

Herman Binkowicz, "Binky" the Clown: You've never quite understood Binky. Everyone else thinks he is so funny, but you do not see it. His acts seem more filled with pathos than humor.

Susan Wildes, The Strong Lady: She is in her late teens and very, very strong. There is no real rational explanation for why she is so strong, but you know better than to depend on rational explanations.

Rupert and Rudolph Townshed: They have been with the circus since the very beginning, but lately they've become argumentative and aren't even speaking to each other. This has really hurt their act since they are Siamese twins. They are supposed to be helping with the phony kidnapping, too.

Helena Ferez: The bearded lady. She also was one of the originals of the circus. She has a real beard too; Colonel Rawhide had her examined by a doctor when she joined.

Peter Wainwright, the Fire Eater/Sword Swallower: His act is a bit flashy, but he's a fine fellow. Lately, he's been a bit restless.

Bobo, the Dog Faced Boy: Besides working in the sideshow, he's your assistant and your best friend. He claims to be eight years old, but you suspect he's older. You want to talk to him, but you don't really like revealing your condition.

Zelda the Clown: Zelda joined the circus in Europe. She is a mute. You think that she has a thing for Binky, but you aren't certain.

Señora Mysterioso: She claims to be able to see into the future. You once sentenced a number of women to death for much less.

The Masked Rider: The Masked Rider is a very solitary individual, staying aloof since joining up in Europe.

The Knife Thrower: The Knife Thrower also joined the circus in Europe. The Knife Thrower also isn't a very forthcoming individual.

Lydia the Tattooed Lady: Lydia joined the circus just before you all left for Europe. It seems like she has something to hide. She is helping with the kidnapping attempt.

Zimmie the Clown: Zimmie is odd. There is something just wrong about him. He isn't very friendly, either.

The Great Zamboni: He arrived today asking for a job. Colonel Rawhide decided to give him a chance. Again, you are leery of magic, even stage magic.

### **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. Jack is the public persona and John runs things behind the scenes.

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.

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: 12 cards.

Cannot Die: No matter how much damage you take, you regenerate and cannot die. You are immune to all drugs and alcohol.