

This extract is taken from <https://www.theickabog.com/professor-fraudysham/>

## Chapter 21 Professor Fraudysham

The morning after the funerals, Spittleworth knocked on the door of the king's apartments again and entered, carrying a lot of scrolls, which he let fall onto the table where the king sat.

'Spittleworth,' said Fred, who was still wearing his Medal for Outstanding Bravery Against the Deadly Ickabog, and had dressed in a scarlet suit, the better to show it off, 'these cakes aren't as good as usual.'

'Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, Your Majesty,' said Spittleworth. 'I thought it right for the widow Beamish to take a few days off work. These are the work of the under pastry chef.'

'Well, they're chewy,' said Fred, dropping half his Folderol Fancy back on his plate. 'And what are all these scrolls?'

'These, sire, are suggestions for improving the kingdom's defences against the Ickabog,' said Spittleworth.

'Excellent, excellent,' said King Fred, moving the cakes and the teapot aside to make more room, as Spittleworth pulled up a chair.

'The very first thing to be done, Your Majesty, was to find out as much as we could about the Ickabog itself, the better to discover how to defeat it.'

'Well, yes, but *how*, Spittleworth? The monster is a mystery! Everyone's thought it a fantasy all these years!'

'That, forgive me, is where Your Majesty is wrong,' said Spittleworth. 'By dint of ceaseless searching, I've managed to find the foremost Ickabog expert in all of Cornucopia. Lord Flapoon is waiting with him in the hall. With Your Majesty's permission—'

'Bring him in, bring him in, do!' said Fred excitedly.

So Spittleworth left the room and returned shortly afterwards with Lord Flapoon and a little old man with snowy white hair and spectacles so thick that his eyes had vanished almost into nothingness.

'This, sire, is Professor Fraudysham,' said Flapoon, as the mole-like little man made a deep bow to the king. 'What he doesn't know about Ickabogs isn't worth knowing!'

'How is it that I've never heard of you before, Professor Fraudysham?' asked the king, who was thinking that if he'd known the Ickabog was real enough to have its own expert, he'd never have gone looking for it in the first place.

'I live a retired life, Your Majesty,' said Professor Fraudysham, with a second bow. 'So few people believe in the Ickabog that I've formed the habit of keeping my knowledge to myself.'

King Fred was satisfied with this answer, which was a relief to Spittleworth, because Professor Fraudysham was no more real than Private Nobby Buttons or, indeed, old Widow Buttons in her ginger wig, who'd howled at Nobby's funeral. The truth was that beneath the wigs and the glasses, Professor Fraudysham and Widow Buttons were the same person: Lord Spittleworth's butler, who was called Otto Scrumble, and looked after Lord Spittleworth's estate while he lived at the palace. Like his master, Scrumble would do anything for gold, and had agreed to impersonate both the widow and the professor for a hundred ducats.

'So, what can you tell us about the Ickabog, Professor Fraudysham?' asked the king.

'Well, let's see,' said the pretend professor, who'd been told by Spittleworth what he ought to say. 'It's as tall as two horses—'

'If not taller,' interrupted Fred, whose nightmares had featured a gigantic Ickabog ever since he'd returned from the Marshlands.

'If, as Your Majesty says, not taller,' agreed Fraudysham. 'I should estimate that a medium-sized Ickabog would be as tall as two horses, whereas a large specimen might reach the size of - let's see—'

'Two elephants,' suggested the king.

'Two elephants,' agreed Fraudysham. 'And with eyes like lamps—'

'Or glowing balls of fire,' suggested the king.

'The very image I was about to employ, sire!' said Fraudysham.

'And can the monster really speak in a human tongue?' asked Fred, in whose nightmares the monster whispered, 'The king... I want the king... Where are you, little king?' as it crept through the dark streets towards the palace.

'Yes, indeed,' said Fraudysham, with another low bow. 'We believe the Ickabog learnt to speak Human by taking people prisoner. Before disembowelling and eating its victims, we believe it forces them to give it English lessons.'

'Suffering Saints, what savagery!' whispered Fred, who'd turned pale.

'Moreover,' said Fraudysham, 'the Ickabog has a long and vengeful memory. If outwitted by a victim - as you outwitted it, sire, by escaping its deadly clutches - it has sometimes sneaked out of the marsh under cover of darkness, and claimed its victim while he or she slept.'

Whiter than the snowy icing on his half-eaten Folderol Fancy, Fred croaked:

'What's to be done? I'm doomed!'

'Nonsense, Your Majesty,' said Spittleworth bracingly. 'I've devised a whole raft of measures for your protection.'

So saying, Spittleworth took hold of one of the scrolls he'd brought with him and unrolled it. There, covering most of the table, was a coloured picture of a monster that resembled a dragon. It was huge and ugly, with thick black scales, gleaming white eyes, a tail that ended in a poisonous spike, a fanged mouth large enough to swallow a man, and long, razor-sharp claws.

'There are several problems to be overcome, when defending against an Ickabog,' said Professor Fraudysham, now taking out a short stick and pointing in turn to the fangs, the claws, and the poisonous tail. 'But the most difficult challenge is that killing an Ickabog causes two new Ickabogs to emerge from the corpse of the first.'

'Surely not?' said Fred faintly.

'Oh, yes, Your Majesty,' said Fraudysham. 'I've made a lifelong study of the monster, and I can assure you that my findings are quite correct.'

'Your Majesty might remember that many of the old tales of the Ickabog make mention of this curious fact,' interjected Spittleworth, who really needed the king to believe in this particular trait of the Ickabog, because most of his plan relied on it.

'But it seems so - so unlikely!' said Fred weakly.

'It *does* seem unlikely on the face of it, doesn't it, sire?' said Spittleworth, with another bow. 'In truth, it's one of those extraordinary, unbelievable ideas that only the very cleverest people can grasp, whereas common folk - stupid folk, sire - giggle and laugh at the notion.'

Fred looked from Spittleworth to Flapoon to Professor Fraudysham; all three men seemed to be waiting for him to prove how clever he was, and naturally he didn't want to seem stupid, so he said: 'Yes... well, if the professor says it, that's good enough for me... but if the monster turns into two monsters every time it dies, how do we kill it?'

'Well, in the first phase of our plan, we don't,' said Spittleworth.

'We don't?' said Fred, crestfallen.

Spittleworth now unrolled a second scroll, which showed a map of Cornucopia. The northernmost tip had a drawing of a gigantic Ickabog on it. All around the edge of the wide marsh stood a hundred little stick figures, holding swords. Fred looked closely to see whether any of them was wearing a crown, and was relieved to see that none were.

'As you can see, Your Majesty, our first proposal is a special Ickabog Defence Brigade. These men will patrol the edge of the Marshlands, to ensure that the Ickabog can't leave the marsh. We estimate the cost of such a brigade, including uniforms, weapons, horses, wages, training, board, lodging, sick pay, danger money, birthday presents, and medals to be around ten thousand gold ducats.'

'Ten thousand ducats?' repeated King Fred. 'That's a lot of gold. However, when it comes to protecting me - I mean to say, when it comes to protecting Cornucopia—'

'Ten thousand ducats a month is a small price to pay,' finished Spittleworth.

'Ten thousand a *month*!' yelled Fred.

'Yes, sire,' said Spittleworth. 'If we're to truly defend the kingdom, the expense will be considerable. However, if Your Majesty feels we could manage with fewer weapons—'

'No, no, I didn't say that—'

'Naturally, we don't expect Your Majesty to bear the expense alone,' continued Spittleworth.

'You don't?' said Fred, suddenly hopeful.

'Oh, no, sire, that would be grossly unfair. After all, the entire country will benefit from the Ickabog Defence Brigade. I suggest we impose an Ickabog tax. We'll ask every household in Cornucopia to pay one gold ducat a

month. Of course, this will mean the recruitment and training of many new tax collectors, but if we raise the amount to two ducats, we'll cover the cost of them, too.'

'Admirable, Spittleworth!' said King Fred. 'What a brain you have! Why, two ducats a month - people will barely notice the loss.'

**Question. One**

*King Fred was satisfied with this answer, which was a relief to Spittleworth, because Professor Fraudyscham was no more real than Private Nobby Buttons or, indeed, old Widow Buttons in her ginger wig, who'd howled at Nobby's funeral.*

Why have they presented the King with a 'fake' expert?

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**Question. Two**

'Moreover,' said Fraudyscham, 'the Ickabog has a long and vengeful memory.'

Use a dictionary to help you discover, what is the meaning of the suffix word vengeful?

**Question. Three**

Why would they tell the King that the Ickabog is vengeful? What are they trying to do?

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**Question. Four**

*Spittleworth now unrolled a second scroll, which showed a map of Cornucopia. The northernmost tip had a drawing of a gigantic Ickabog on it. All around the edge of the wide marsh stood a hundred little stick figures, holding swords. Fred looked closely to see whether any of them was wearing a crown, and was relieved to see that none were.*

Why did Fred look for a picture of someone wearing a crown? Why did he feel relieved at not seeing one?

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