

THE CHRONICLES

OF

CADAVER COLLEGE:

THE PIRATE QUEEN'S TREASURE

by

Olive Mooney

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The moral right of the author has been asserted

This book is dedicated to Thomas

This is a work of fiction. All characters, corporations, institutions and organisations in this novel are the product of the author's imagination or, if real, are used fictionally without any intent to describe their actual conduct.

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Chapter 1

A Ghostly Galleon

It loomed out of the misty darkness: sinister, gaunt and misshapen. I could tell it was a sailing ship (of sorts), as its torn and dirty sails strained in the high winds. Its double prow thrust forward as if it had every right to be there. But there was something wrong. Dreadfully wrong. Through the gloom, I saw the ship's skeleton ribs. My stomach lurched as I realized the strangely shaped sails were actually a patchwork of skins, and a crimson flag flew from the highest mast. With growing alarm, I saw that the ship bristled with cannon.

A violent gust of wind caught the sails. They immediately billowed like grotesque, giant bed-sheets and cut like a lance through the churning water – directly towards me. *I have to get out of here fast*, I thought.

I gasped as I discovered I was bobbing on the boiling seas in a tiny, rubber dinghy – there were no oars! I turned again to the ghost ship, which even in the split second I looked away had narrowed the gap between us and was almost on top of me – sinister, and threatening. There was water for miles in every direction and as the ship loomed overhead, dark and forbidding, I recognized *The Vulture* – Halbizia's hunting ship. I'd last seen it when fighting the sea-witch in Cadaver College.

My stomach plummeted, my legs shook uncontrollably and my mind raced. Like a helpless insect in a poisonous spider's sticky web, I was trapped.

Halbizia's face hovered directly above me, silhouetted against a red sky. I couldn't believe my eyes; every instinct told me She was dead, but She wasn't... She was only yards away and surrounded by dozens of Her foul creatures armed with knives, muskets and cutlasses. They jumped up and

down, jeering, screaming and brandishing their weapons. As the two vessels came side by side they were poised, ready to pounce, but I was still frozen in position, unable to move, as white sparks erupted from Halbizia's cruel eyes, burning my skin.

'Not so easily got rid of, am I, young de Bruin?' She hissed. 'Or should I say *Commander*? Is that what those idiot Cadaver ghosts are calling you now?'

Another shower of sparks sizzled as they hit the water, sending up clouds of steam, making it even more difficult to see. I shrank backwards, almost falling out of the dinghy. The acrid smell of burning rubber hit my nostrils. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a small, flickering orange flame. I couldn't look away; I couldn't think. I couldn't move. I was trapped in a burning dinghy and Halbizia had returned! *How could this possibly be?*

'How...why are you here?' The question burned like fire in my brain. 'I watched you,' I shouted now, over the howling wind, 'I watched you die three months ago.'

'But I'm not dead...am I?' She screamed in reply. 'You can't kill ME that easily.' Her cruel face contorted with rage. 'The time for talk is over, de Bruin,' She hissed, springing onto the dinghy and almost knocking me out of it as Her curling talons latched around my throat. I gasped for breath as Her fingers tightened and Her foul breath torched my face, enveloping me in a vile, thick haze as searing, hot flames, ignited by Her sparks, licked and burned my ankles. The dinghy would sink any second! A scream rose in my throat but was cut off by Halbizia's grip. *There's nobody to hear anyway*, my dying brain thought. I'm alone in this maelstrom, apart from my worst enemy. I could never turn into a dragon under these circumstances. Then the Shield of Prophecy, strapped to my right arm, wriggled and squirmed, as if it were *alive*. And as I slipped into unconsciousness, I could barely make out the carved

figures on the Shield running amok and waving their spears and swords. Tiny hands and feet crawled over me and I remembered nothing more.

I sat up abruptly in my bunk, sweat streaming down my face, and stared blankly at the interior of my cabin. 'Not on a dinghy then,' I said out loud, so great was my relief. I quickly glanced down. I wasn't on fire and it was obvious I was still alive – at least in the way I now understood the word: *I was alive as a ghost*. Since my arrival in Cadaver College last year, I'd somehow got used to this state of affairs.

Now it came back to me! We'd sailed from Cadaver three weeks ago. With relief, I fell back on my pillow, and closed my eyes. I was safe now, on the Commodore's ship. And most of the college ghosts were here with me. It had been a nightmare, a horrible nightmare...but it was over now. There was no longer a sea-witch with which to do battle! *Or to try to kill me again*.

The ship gently rolled and a salty breeze blew through the open porthole, cooling my sweating face. Small, innocent white clouds chased each other across an impossibly blue sky. I was thrilled they looked so *normal*.

'I knew it,' I muttered to myself, 'She *is* dead.' She'd died three months previously, in a half-demolished Cadaver College tower. And everyone *knew* witches couldn't come back from the dead...at least, *as far as I knew* they couldn't. I was safe from her then. I couldn't help heaving an enormous sigh of relief.

I wiped my sweat-covered forehead, feeling stupid but still a bit shaky. *But it had felt so real*, I couldn't help thinking as I slipped into a dead sleep.