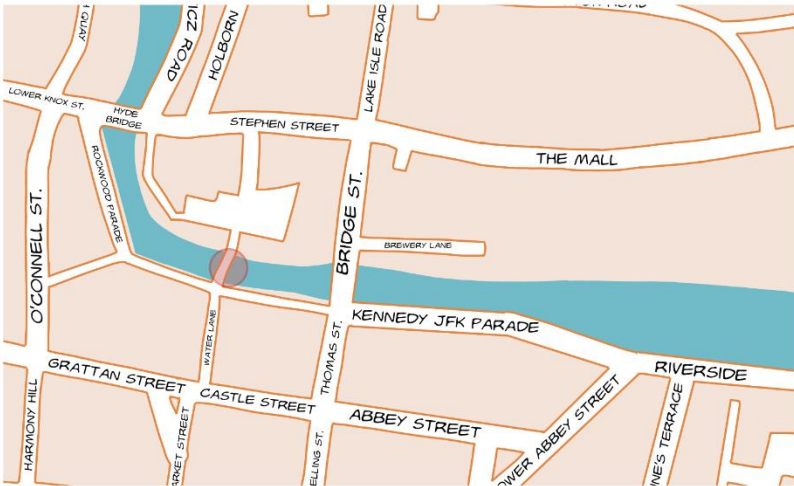


The delightfully named Bridge of Light is home to one of Sligo town's most storied residents- perhaps you'll stumble upon him yourself some day, but until then Hexlord has secured an exclusive interview with him...



EYE ON SLIGO: EPISODE 129

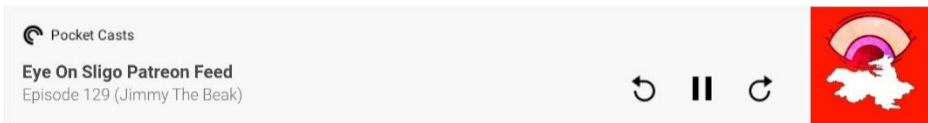
by Hex Lord

Taken from an upcoming episode of the Eye on Sligo podcast, the popular conversation and history podcast documenting some of Sligo's most interesting characters.

Hex Lord here, reporting from the tomb of technology; the recording studio! Today I have a unique interview to share with you. Perhaps you're aware that Sligo has a long and storied history with the sea. The waves, the oceans, the life that we pull from its heavy veil. Fish, I mean. Fish from the water. And fishy creatures too.

A quiet corner of our town is home to a neighbour we rarely have the chance to ask questions of. He's always busy, running errands and TCB (Taking Care of Brine), but he's still happy to give a friendly smile and stop to chat.

Without any further ado, let's play that interview!



Our meeting was informal. A spot on the banks of the Garavogue, right by The Bridge of Light, that seems to be a favourite of our friend. The sun above us was pouring through the thinning cloudbank. The babbling of the river accompanied our conversation.

Eye On Sligo: Thank you for stopping to chat with me today, Jimmy.

Jimmy The Beak: Happy to.

EOS: Seems like we're always seeing you about town but never really get the chance to talk.

JTB: Seems so, yeah.

EOS: You're always on the move.

JTB: Mhmm.

We sit quietly together, looking at one another. We nod, smiling politely.

EOS: Jimmy, I can't help but notice you're a kappa.

JTB: That's right, I am a kappa.

The nodding continues. At this point I feel I should give a brief review on our local water sprites. The Green Lady, the Selkie, these are your common-or-garden variety of water sprites in rivers and at sea in Ireland. Stories of their helpfulness or their hindrance are commonplace near bodies of water and Sligo being a port town throughout history has had its fair share of horrors and blessings bestowed by such beings. Kappa, however, are very much NOT a common creature to find here. This is due to the fact that Kappa are all found 9500 kilometres away, in Japan.

EOS: I've never asked you before but what made you move here, of all places. You were born in Japan, right?

JTB: I was, yes, sometime in the late 1500's, though I'm not entirely certain what date or year. I haven't changed much since then, physically. That's just part of a Kappa's good genes though, you know? We age very gracefully.

EOS: I can certainly see that! 500ish years old and you still look so young! Incredible!

Jimmy laughs a little here, a coy smile playing across his transparent, green tinged face. The bag of shopping at his feet is adjusted slightly. I allow him a moment to regain his composure.

JTB: Well, I made my landing here around the end of the 1500's. It was not exactly my choice, you see. I was abandoned by my ship after it had gotten into some trouble with the locals. Our Captain had made a deal with a local shipwright to fix up the hull after we had taken damage. Then he took off in the dead of night before paying!

EOS: He did a dine and dash on the shipwright?!

JTB: That's right! You see, shipwrights here at the time were not inexperienced and the best ones came at a price my captain was loath to pay, as it would also come out of the pay of the crew. Not mine though. I was paid in cucumbers.

EOS: Cucumbers? I have read that cucumbers are especially beloved by your people. But surely you couldn't have kept fresh cucumbers on a ship for that long.

JTB: That was a problem, yes. We often faced the issue of the cucumbers going bad in the cargo hold. When I was younger, though I don't like to admit it, I had a bit of a problem with my temper. I got angry. I didn't ask for much from anyone and I worked hard like the rest of the crew. All I wanted was those cucumbers.

At this point Jimmy opened the grocery bag and removed a cucumber. He looks at its shiny green surface, a thin layer of plastic protecting it from the world and the decay it would inevitably face if left unprotected.

JTB: I was young. And the crew did what it could to stop me from drowning too many people in my cucumberless rage. Youth, heh.

EOS: At least your crew did its best. Did they ever come up with a way to preserve the cucumbers?

JTB: Yes, though it was a very strange way of dealing with it. Back home in Japan we used to be offered the freshest cucumbers, so I had never heard of the process they called "pickling". Apparently, humans have been doing it for years but it had never reached Kappaland.

EOS: Mmm, I love pickled cucumber. Delicious!

JTB: It really is very good! I keep a small corner of my cave for pickling now. I enjoy the process and it reminds me of those old days at sea.

We fall silent for a moment, taking in the fresh air. The sun is peeking out from behind the clouds. The shine on Jimmy's glistening turtle shell is dulling a little, but his flesh appears to maintain a nice slimy glow. I see Jimmy is drawing effortfully on a notepad- later he will blush as he presents me with a memento of our interview- a drawing of both of us meeting.

So lovely to meet you ♡
- Jimmy -



Illustration courtesy of Jimmy the Beak

EOS: So what made you join a ship and set out?

JTB: Well, I wasn't really in a position to choose. I had been out wading in the Azusa river during Golden Week. Sometimes we get extra offerings during times of celebration, but I hadn't been as careful as I should have been. My skin has a camouflaging capability that usually works by instinct, but for some reason I had been so transfixed by the thoughts of the offerings that my body took on the same crisp shade of green as the inside of a cucumber. I stood out- quite a bit apparently, because the next thing I know I'd been conked on the head. I woke up in a dark and small space. It was full of water, thankfully, but ... I was trapped. I was stuck there, alone for what felt like weeks.... I was so hungry... So angry.

At this point Jimmy stopped talking for a moment. In his large, shining eyes I could see that the memory of being trapped was still within him. Inside of his mind there was still a small, dark space, filled with water. A space he still couldn't escape sometimes.

JTB: Well, at some point, the sky seemed to explode into light. After so long in the dark my eyes had forgotten how to let light in without blinding me. I could hear a voice and see a blurry figure move something close to me. "Eat up, friend. You're safe now". And there it was, right in front of me. A shiny, crisp looking cucumber. I almost took the hand holding it too! I was so happy. I remember crying a little afterwards, holding that perfect green fruit in my arms. Eventually I realised the sky hadn't lifted at all. It was a lid. And I was in a barrel. It took a few days and a few more cucumbers before I would get out of the barrel. By then I had already heard the story. I had been captured, put in confinement and sold. I was offered to the highest bidder and been brought aboard this ship. A pirate ship. We were already at sea, set to raid the coast of south China. I wasn't asked to do much during the first few weeks but eventually... I learned why I had been sold. Why I was prized. The captain had been kind to me so far. Had given me an offering every couple of days. Let me spend time wrestling the crew members in their down time. I loved to wrestle. It had been nice, and I hadn't truly understood what being an owned creature meant. But when the first battle against a navy ship began...

The story Jimmy relayed to me was graphic and brutal. He had been sent overboard. With his natural affinity for the water he was told to make his way to the other ship and neutralise any and all enemies. On a side note, the word paintings he made with his mouth made my tummy want to tumble and barf. However, I am a professional.

EOS: That's gross as heck, Jimmy. I'm gonna be sick.

JTB: Yeah, it was pretty gnarly. I lived another 7 years or so like that. Eventually, the ship was taken over by a Portuguese crew. They bought the ship from the captain, a man I had realised very quickly was not my friend at all. He taught them how to control me, through offerings and praise. Back then, I didn't know how to control my instinctive behaviours towards mortals and magic bonding. I accepted the offerings and I repaid with service. It took years of living alone to break that habit. Even now I... Well, sometimes I just want someone else to buy me a cucumber, instead of going to the shop for one.

EOS: I think everyone can relate to that, a little.

JTB: Yeah... I think you're right. We all want someone to think about us from time to time.

EOS: So, you eventually made it to Sligo.

JTB: I did. And when I got here and the crew that had last held me abandoned me, I was free again. For the first time in a long time. I had nowhere to go, no one to report to. No one to make offerings to me. I found shelters here and there throughout the county. I wasn't restricted from going anywhere because most of the anti-fae magic used in Ireland doesn't affect me. I guess we have some key biological differences. I didn't see many people, if I could help it. I hid a lot.

EOS: But in recent years you've been a very visible presence in the town.

JTB: Well, it got to a point where people became less concerned with appearances.

There are some people who do stop to ask me where I'm from or if I'm an alien. But usually they're just curious. My neighbours are always very polite to me and I spend a lot of my time in the local waterways, keeping the water clean.

EOS: There are a lot of litterers out there.

JTB: So many! But if I can, I try to talk to them. I believe that the concept of landownership and privatisation has led to very unhealthy relationships with our environment. I'm hoping that by showing people the beauty of their homes, they will become more attuned to it.

EOS: That's a very beautiful approach to environmental stewardship, Jimmy.

The sun had burned itself out while we spoke, leaving only a bright ray of heat to fall across our backs. I could see my Kappa friend was looking a little dry under the collar and so we decided to wrap up for the day. As I watched Jimmy the Beak walk across the bridge and onto Rockwood Parade, climb over the rails and swim upstream, I marvelled at the indomitability of the soul. A Kappa, somewhere around 500ish years old, living peacefully and with great compassion in his heart, right here, in our town. Just one more life, among the 20,000 people of Sligo living beside each other.