

SYNOPSIS: A large greedy 3rd year Green Frog takes the best spot in a pond for himself, and tries to make himself king of all the other inhabitants.

KING WILMORE

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR – Reads the

WILMORE – A large third-year Green Frog, of breeding age

JEREMY – A second-year Green Frog, of breeding age

SAM – Also second-year Green Frog

MABLE – A female of breeding age

FIONA – Female, also of breeding age

GOONIES – First-year sexually immature Green Frogs, have become acolytes of Wilmore

IGNEY – A smaller juvenile goonie

THE POND

The pond had always been beautiful, and a very nice place to live in. The residents were happy; the support system — the moving water, the algae, the aquatic plants — was healthy.

The next level, the worms, isopods, mosquito larvae, dragonfly nymphs and snails – too many to name – were also doing well, in a balance that was, somehow, fairly fair to all.

And those at the top of the pond hierarchy, the frogs, had likewise been delighted with their set-up.

Now it was spring, and they were all coming out of their winter dormancy. Life was good.

Except, perhaps, for a pervasive niggling worry about Wilmore. As the frogs woke up, they realized that Wilmore, who had been getting rather bossy last year, had now become overbearing!

Even though he was one of the biggest Green Frogs of the third-year males, he didn't go off to set up his own territory in a new pond, as most had hoped. Instead, he decided to stay at their small one.

And he had attracted a group of First-Years, juveniles, and they were enamored with him and his bluster. They strutted as if with reflected glory, and attended to his every wish. The other frogs weren't sure why, but his followers began call him "King", King Wilmore!

JEREMY: *(to Sam)* Wow. Look at that. All those First-Years tagging along with Wilmore. What's up with that?

MABLE: Oh, they're telling everybody that Wilmore is so big and strong and smart, and he's like their king. And Wilmore says if they want to call him that, it's OK with him! And then they can stay close to him, and be his helpers and guards.

JEREMY: His guards?

MABLE: In case anybody tries to take his territory, or his females.

JEREMY: His territory?

MABLE: Yes. He has chosen what he thinks is the best spot, right there in the center of the pond. The bottom is a little higher, and the water, a little shallower. It will have a lot of plants growing there, and it will be most visible.

JEREMY: So that he can be the center of attention?

MABLE: And so he and his acolytes can keep a look-out on everybody else.

JEREMY: Us?

MABLE: Right. To keep us out of his territory, and away from his females.

JEREMY: *"His"* females?

MABLE: He says if he wants them, they're his!

The night settles warm. The males begin calling, sounding like single banjo strings being plucked. Green heads with yellow throats poke through the pondweed —"Gunk!" "Plunk!" "Bong!" — Songs erupt from all along the edge of the pond, and the water roils with males pursuing females. In the center comes the especially deep calls of Wilmore, surrounded by the splashes and squeaks of his minions fighting off any males coming near his area. With their assistance Wilmore manages to mate with two females that night.

In the morning the water is calmer and quiet, though several couples are motionless, still locked in connubial bliss.

MABLE: *(to Fiona)* Well, that was certainly an exciting night! The air so soft, the moon so bright. Did you lay any eggs?

FIONA: Oh yes. But that brute Wilmore got ahold of me!

MABLE: He did? I tried to stay away, but once or twice I almost got drawn in by his siren call...

FIONA: *Siren call?* Well, *I* managed to resist it. But as I was swimming by, he jumped onto my back from under some milfoil and grabbed me!

MABLE: Eww.

FIONA: I know. I tried to squirm away, but his goons kept swatting at me to keep me there!

MABLE: Was it awful?

FIONA: Pretty bad. His arms are big, not exactly fat, maybe pudgy, and somewhat strong, but his hands are oddly small...Anyhow, he squeezed me around my abdomen and made me expel some eggs, while he hung tight on my back and squirted his sperm over my eggs as they emerged... Soon though, I pretended they were

all out, and he pushed me away in disgust. I tried to lay only a small clutch. I didn't want to waste all my progeny on the likes of him!

MABLE: Good! Glad you still have some left. — I swam around Jeremy last night, and tonight I'm going to hang around Sam. Why don't you swim by Jeremy tonight? He's a good fit fellow, very considerate too. It would be good for the gene pool.

FIONA: We'll need all the good ones we can get, to offset Wilmore's offspring... *(looking toward the center rise)* Hey, what's he doing now?

Wilmore's troops have gathered around him, and are whooping and cheering.

WILMORE: Yes, yes. It was a good night, wasn't it, boys? A good night, a very good night! Well, you haven't had the pleasure yet, but next year you'll be in on the action, too! So, take note how you surprise 'em. Leap on 'em and grab! Squeeze hard! They actually like it.

GOONIES: *(more cheering, and they start to wink and nudge each other)* Yeah, yeah. It'll be great. — so many of them... I can't wait!

WILMORE: — But hey, I just want to show you how great my place here is — *(He turns and gestures around his plot)* This is where it all happens! This spot is the best, the very best. My water here is warmer, lots of vegetation for hiding in *(he winks)*, lots of sunlight sparkling on the water. — And hey, did you notice, it's sparkling on the gold in my eyes also — *(he sticks his head out toward them and opens his eyes wide)* — see the gold? I've been told many, many times that I have beautiful eyes, regal even — must be the gold — just can't help that royal look...

GOONIES: *(start to slap the water and shout)* King! King! KING!

MABLE: Oh, he must have said that line before. That's probably where all the "king" stuff came from.

Sure enough, the sun does catch the gold glittering from Wilmore's eyes. All Green Frogs have golden or bronze flecks mixed in the green of their irises. The metallic hues reflecting from their eyes in the sunlight do give them a regal look.

GOONIES: *(the laughing and clapping continues)* King, king, king!

FIONA: Oh brother. What stupid kids. Look at your own eyes, dingbats!

WILMORE: OK. OK. Yes. Right. Right. *(nodding his head as he accepts their admiration)* Thanks. — Now I have an announcement. To keep our pond orderly and safe, I will command from my area here. This will be Central Command. You *(looks at his minions who are salivating at every word)* will defend my territory from all sides. Everyone else will establish their territories away from Central, along the periphery of the pond. Possibly not as good, but still good spots, very good spots. — Yes, they will be a bit shadier, have a little less vegetation, have a little more algae, be a bit cooler, with more water flow. But here at the Rise, I will be able to monitor everything, keep everybody safe. I will protect everybody from invaders, like Bullfrogs, who might want to move in and take over your areas. I will be able to keep watch on you!

GOONIES: NO BULLFROGS! NO BULLFROGS!

MABLE: What malarky! Bullfrogs!

FIONA: Such lies! A Bullfrog wouldn't be caught dead in a little puddle like this!

MABLE: Why do those neophytes believe him? Haven't they had any education?

Several more days and nights pass by, and the pond vibrates with life. Males poke their heads sporadically out of the water, sounding their unique croaking calls, competing with the cacophony of birds singing and chirping their mating calls. Females enticingly wend their way through waterweed and horsetail and hornwort, though keeping a distance from Wilmore's plot. Every so often Wilmore would clamber up onto a rock in the middle of his rise, to expound on his greatness...

WILMORE: Look at this — *(gesturing around his rise)* Lovely, lovely. It is the best, the best frog territory. Lots of sun, warm water, not too deep so lots of heathy plants grow... Lots of food! I have brought fertility and prosperity to our pond! I have brought it! I alone have brought it! Just look at all my beautiful eggs! All these eggs! *(he points to a couple of egg masses near the surface)*

As he rambles, one of the guards near Wilmore notices a small fly that has landed on his own arm, and he cautiously bows his head and extends his hand toward Wilmore. With a barely perceptible downward glance, Wilmore, and without a pause, tongues the offering into his mouth.

WILMORE continues: Just look! LOOK AT ALL MY BEAUTIFUL EGGS! —More princes!!

GOONIES: *(shouting)* MORE PRINCES! MORE PRINCES! *(but perhaps not as full throated as possible...some of them might have wanted to be princes too...)*

Jeremy, Sam, Mable and Fiona are standing back, rolling their eyes.

JEREMY: Listen to that fool! He thinks he is King of the Mountain, I guess. Thinks that mound there is the best. He might have a surprise coming his way.

SAM: I don't know. That vegetation is growing pretty well there in the shallower water, with all the sunlight... Lots of mint has come up, and its blossoms attract tons of bees —

MABLE: You're right. Look there now.

Wilmore is perched on the sunlit sandbar, his eyes half-hidden with his vanity. All around him, the dense, mint plants are alive with the humming of bees. He plops himself right beneath the purple flowers, and picks the hovering bees off at will — so quickly he hardly even seemed to have moved.

IGNEY: *(Watching, one of the smaller juveniles edges sideways toward a companion, speaks without moving his lips)* Better get back a bit, Fauval. He might think you'll try to get one of his flies.

The guards know not to get too close to the feeding king... Wilmore's long legs would thrust out at them just as quickly as he could flick up a fly!

FIONA: *(to Jeremy)* What did you mean Jeremy, he might be in for a fall?

JEREMY: Have you noticed that there have been an awful lot of sunny, dry days?

SAM: Yeah, a dry spell seems to be coming up. Maybe even a draught!

JEREMY: Just watch what's going to happen to his mound.

And drought conditions did descend over the countryside. The water in the pond begins to evaporate at a fast rate.

JEREMY: See there, Wilmore's area has gotten shallower and shallower. His egg masses are getting dangerously close to the surface and the water temperature is getting awfully warm for the eggs. The algae is getting thick and his eggs are becoming quite green.

MABLE: You're right, Jeremy! Look at our plots. Our water was a little deeper, had more shade, was cooler and didn't evaporate so quickly. And our eggs are still underwater... Our algae has increased a bit too, though... Could that be bad?

FIONA: I don't think so. I noticed last year that eggs that get a little green in the gel do quite well, sometimes better than those without it...Not ones that are almost all green though!

MABLE: Like Wilmore's!

FIONA: *(smiling)* Yes. Like Wilmore's!

Research has shown that algae can be helpful to egg development, especially during drought. The algae inside the egg gel, in sunlight, makes oxygen, and that helps feed the developing embryos. When there is no sunlight, the algae itself needs oxygen, but the excess made during the day is usually enough to sustain both the algae and the embryos at night. And the deeper cooler water circulating at the pond's edge holds more oxygen than the warm stagnant water at Wilmore's mound.

Soon though, the mating season is over. The eggs at the periphery developed well, and many healthy tadpoles are seen jerking about, grazing on plant stems for nutrients or on the bottom for organic debris. The adults fall into a pleasant summer routine, living peaceably in their perfect periphery, with lots of food in the water, — mosquito larvae, water worms, snails and slugs, — and lots of food on land — grasshoppers, beetles and flies... Prospering and generally contributing to the health of their pond and surroundings.

Wilmore, on the other hand, did not fare so well.

SAM: I see what you meant, Jeremy. Look at him, sitting there beside his stagnant puddle. Still thinks he is king, won't leave his 'throne'.

JEREMY: Not much of a 'kingdom'; the eggs on top dried out and died, and were eaten by wasps and mice –

MABLE: I saw a Green Bottle Fly laying eggs on some of them too...

FIONA: And you know what that means. Maggots!

MABLE: At least he'll have food close by!

JEREMY: — and the ones that were still submerged died from lack of oxygen, and were eaten by snails and leeches and worms... – Even the newly hatched tadpoles, our tadpoles, OUR CHILDREN, are eating Wilmore's eggs!!

There was unseemly glee as the adults, having decided to go on a land expedition to search out some newly hatched crickets, leave the water and look back at Wilmore.

There they see a shrunken flabby figure, sitting listlessly on his mud-cracked sand bar, with browned and dying plants shriveling overhead. A ring of healthy water teeming with tadpoles gulping at the surface surround him, but he pays no attention. He may be comatose, they think.

He finally does raise his head and watch as his once adoring followers, after an indecisive pause, scramble up the bank to follow the Second-years on their cricket hunt. And that is why he didn't notice the shadow above him, a Red-tailed Hawk plunging straight toward him...

END