

The Treasure Punt #14

“Long John Platinum, I want you to find us an Astronomer,” instructed Captain Blackbird.

“Aye-aye, sir,” replied his first-mate. “I understand. You want to be stary-eyed?”

“LJP, that’s weak, very weak. It’s too often we’re losing our way. Now just do it, and don’t waste any more of me bleeding time.”

LJP strode off the gangplank with a great deal of enthusiasm. He’d never looked for such an unusual pirate before, and furthermore, he believed in what the stars foretold. ‘I’ll need some specialist help,’ he mused. So he went straight to the Tattle and Yarn, on the dockside, where the rum was always fiery, and where old sea-dogs sailed not in ships, but in their imaginations.

“Professor Calculus!” LJP exclaimed, to the revered scientist standing at the counter, and whom he had not seen since childhood, in his collection of Tintin adventures. “I’d recognise you anywhere, and I need your help.”

“Ten trillion times twenty divided by two and twenty tenths is ... mmn, that’s harder than I thought,” replied the good professor, mesmerised by the mental mathematics. “Oh, pardon me,” he continued, looking at LJP’s equally perplexed expression. “Help you say. Help of what kind, young fellow?”

“I, well actually my boss, Captain Blackbird of The Bountiful, needs a stargazer, and I don’t know where to look,” answered LJP. “If you can help, there’s a big sum involved, and I know how much you love those.”

“I’d gladly help for a big sum, along as it involves a second-order differential equation or two.”

Hardly knowing addition from subtraction, LJP just nodded pleasingly.

“Stargazers,” mused Professor Calculus. “Ah well, there are lots of those snake-oil salesmen and other fortune-tellers around. You’ll find them in all five corners of the world, and anywhere and everywhere in-between.”

“Oh will you, Professor, will you please?” not seriously considering the professor’s disdain for the treasure.

“Certainly,” the old scientist agreed. “Though I don’t understand why Blackbird would want one, but mine is not to reason why ... Give me a week, and we’ll meet again, right here. I’ll bring them along.”

For the next week Professor Calculus searched, and by the time he met with LJP again he had gathered forty-two stargazers, all looking for new work opportunities. There was Madame Aurora, Madame Aflora, and Madame Minora. There was Madame Esmeralda, Madame Moustafa, and Madame Mullaafa. There was Madame Palmoil, Madame Sunfloweroil and Madame Oliveoil. Madame

Tealeaves was there, and Madame Coffeebeans, and Madame Heinzketchupstains was also there. And so on. So many Madams!

“I’m thrilled!” exclaimed LJP. “Truly delighted, Professor, I tell yer, I’m overcome at your abilities. Blackbird will see them now, and let’s see who he chooses,” he indicated, running off with forty-two stargazers in his slipstream.

But Blackbird chose none of the stargazers presented to him, and truly admonished LJP from the height of the mail mast, telling him off for his terrible treasure-hunting.

“None of them even knew a black hole from a bolide, and not ablation from albedo,” Blackbird ranted.

So LJP, somewhat dejected, put Professor Calculus to further work, and the following week Madame Fireballs, Madame Fingernails and Madame Eyesockets, Madame Cookabrew, Madame Corsetstootight and Madame Bathalot, Madame Spithergob, Madame Stealyourstuff and Madame Pokeyourpleasure, and another thirty-one stargazers, were presented to Blackbird.

Again, with no success!

“They hardly know a coma from a corona; neither a nadir from a nebula,” lamented Blackbird. “With all your stargazers, LJP, and those of your professor, it’s all dark matter!”

LJP put Calculus to further work, for another week, and then another, and then another, all with the same unsuccessful outcome. When a total of two hundred and fifty-two stargazers had been presented to Blackbird, LJP was tired, and Professor Calculus was exhausted. However, the promise of a sum kept the old man going, but eventually, at the end of a full year, with a total of four thousand two hundred stargazing candidates having been rejected, he could take no more.

“LJP, I demand to see Captain Blackbird!” Professor Calculus railed, uncharacteristically banging his fists down on the counter in the Tattle and Yarn, and spilling LJP’s long-glass Armada rum and coke.

“Well, I’ll see what I can do,” LJP responded hesitatingly. “He’s important, you know, and busy, very busy, and very important, actually. Yes, very important. And he’s clever, you know, very clever, a clever bird indeed. He doesn’t suffer fools gladly.”

“We’re on our way,” Professor Calculus resolved, pulling LJP by his bandana. The salty sea-dog and scientist soon found Captain Blackbird in the officers’ mess.

“Captain Blackbird,” said Professor Calculus respectfully. “I’m at my wits end. I’ve found you four thousand two hundred stargazers, and still I’m waiting for my sum. What’s happening?”

“Professor,” Blackbird answered. “Of all those hundreds and thousands of stargazers you’ve found, not one is an astronomer. All I’ve seen are stupid astrologers.”

LJP stood in stony silence, as smoke started to bellow from the nose, mouth and ears of the good professor.

“But ... but ... but, I thought ...” muttered LJP, but nothing he could say could calm the nerves of Professor Calculus.

Treasure Hunting Tips: A lot is lost in translation, and executive search consultants must take their briefs from the person who is directly recruiting, and not from the latter’s cohorts. From the very beginning and throughout the selection process, always insist on meeting directly with the decision-maker, or much effort is often expended in vain, with invariably unsuccessful recruitment outcomes.