

The Treasure Punt #16

“Darn! I was sure I’d put it in here,” Captain Blackbird explained to Peacock, The Bountiful’s pirate purser. “Maps, I tell ‘yer, they’ll be the death of me,” he mused, ruminating thoughtfully to himself, in the full knowledge that speed to the treasure makes or breaks a pirate ship.

“Didn’t you perhaps hide it somewhere?” Peacock asked plaintively.

“Hide it somewhere?” answered Blackbird sarcastically. “Of course I hid it somewhere, you bleeding cretin. What do you think a pirate does with a treasure map; put it on a notice-board? Smarten up, pea-brain, or maps will be the death of you too.”

Peacock looked contrite, as he should. While Blackbird sank to his one knee, so Peacock sensibly also went down on his haunches to investigate the deeper reaches of the captain’s cabin, thankful for still being fully able-bodied.

“You didn’t stuff it into your spare boot, did you?” the pirate purser Peacock posed.

“Now, why’d I do that? A valuable map needs full-time protection, not exposure to acidity or damp or disease. I keep dried sardines in my spare boot, for snacks. Now just get on with looking, Peacock. No more stupid questions, okay?”

With both noses only an inch above the teak, Blackbird and Peacock searched every square inch of the cabin’s floor, but to no avail. Though there were piles of old single stickily stuck socks, many dirty bandanas, breeches and other clothing, at least four dozen empty and discarded bottles of rum, hundreds of gobs of chewing tobacco, and under Blackbird’s bunk, a clutch of nine young tabby kittens being suckled by their mum, and watched over by Honey, Blackbird’s pet hyena, there was no sight of any map.

Precious time was ticking by, and with each minute milestone, Blackbird got more irritable and Peacock more nervous. Expletive followed expletive, curse after curse, and exclamation by exclamation.

“Oh, I know,” Blackbird announced conspiratorially. “It’s hidden inside me trunk. I sometimes put them there.”

“Good, good,” agreed Peacock.

When the captain of The Bountiful opened his large trunk, a flat albatross staggered out the top, fell over on its beak, slowly spread its wings, flew haphazardly into one of the bulkheads, and crest-fallen, lay on its back with its feet up and its throat gasping for air.

“You know, I’d completely forgotten I’d put him there,” Blackbird shared shamelessly. “Must’ve been a week or so, at least. Tis a strong bird, an albatross, very strong indeed.”

Peacock sensibly said nothing as Blackbird, now getting more frantic, emptied the trunk, filled with a greater variety of goods than a haberdashery. Old jars of marmalade were hurled in the air, followed by metal mugs, and then a rusty sextant hit the belly of the stricken, screeching albatross, which flew into the ceiling before flopping on the floor again. Wooden pipes, some plain and others ornate, were scattered aimlessly, as were an unusually large collection of mouldy corks, which kept on coming and coming between another thousand different artefacts. Eventually the trunk was empty - the last item being Blackbird's great-grandfather's leather sporran - as was Blackbird's patience.

"I know, I know, it's here somewhere," he repeated rhythmically though maniacally with each throw, the sentence said with increasing volume, and ending in a large crescendo. Blackbird's lack of swearing revealed his growing desperation.

The captain hopped up onto his good foot and wooden leg.

"It must be in me cupboard, of course ..." said Blackbird, but not with the same confidence as before.

"I'm sure it is, sir," agreed Peacock, wanting to be helpful and encouraging. "Here, let me open that," he continued, reaching out an arm to open the cupboard door.

As the door was opened the inside stuff, for that is what it was, poured out of the cupboard faster than Zambezi water over the Victoria Falls. Blackbird was knocked off his one foot, and Peacock also succumbed to the pressure. Both pirates were left prostrate under a pile of debris. Hyena Honey, startled, uncharacteristically ate two of the kittens, and then whooped frenziedly out of the porthole, though it was broad daylight. The albatross once again took to a short flight, bulkhead to bulkhead, before hitting his head and collapsing again. As Blackbird and Peacock emerged, they both plucked at pieces of one thousand scattered papers, previously literally stuffed with the other stuff into the cupboard. As the two pairs of pirate hands, four palms and seventeen fingers, swept across the floor, it became self-evident to the two treasure hunters that finding the map was still some hours away, if at all, and that rival boats privy to the same intelligence would easily beat The Bountiful to the target.

'Better housekeeping makes for richer pirates,' thought Peacock, though he didn't share his view with Blackbird.'

Treasure Hunting Tip: The value of a map to a pirate is the same as the value of a talented candidate to a recruiter. To be the first to the placement revenue, recruiters have to have easily accessible, up-to-date records, as well as well-maintained relationships with talented candidates from previous assignments. The 'Um, ah, who was that guy we saw last year for ...?' inevitably leads to failure. A nimble database augmented by regular contacts with a small pool of talented candidates will always outperform an unwieldy database of many candidates who are long-forgotten.

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