

## The Treasure Punt #18

Rupert Redbeard, The Bountiful's navigator following Navi Kumar's tragic drowning demise, was understandably distraught when receiving the news that his one hundred and twenty-nine year old mother had passed away from exhaustion, and immediately submitted his application for compassionate leave to the captain.

"Mmm, I don't know about this, Rupie," mulled Blackbird, having grown fond of the rusty redhead. "Couldn't she have chosen another time? She's had more than a just a wee while to prepare, after all."

Blackbird's insensitivity cast upon Rupert a dreadful weeping and wailing, setting the boat's carrier albatrosses to flight, and driving the other pirates below decks. Rupert's chest heaved in terrible tremors, his head sunk beneath his knees, his throat rumbled, and hellish noises emanated from his throat. To witness such a usually ferocious pirate so wretched would have been awkward in a psychiatric ward, but for the strong, tough-minded seamen on the boat it was intolerable.

"Ok, ok, ok, my brother," said Blackbird, now visibly so far out from himself that he could no longer even grasp his comfort zone. Blackbird saw his good hand reach out and pat Rupert repeatedly on the thigh, and immediately withdrew it for fear that his limb no longer belonged to him, having developed a heart of its own.

"Go, just go!" Blackbird snapped, no longer able to deal with these unfamiliar emotions, and jumping to his foot and wooden leg. "But just tell your bleeding mother that next time she shouldn't interfere when such prosperous work is at hand ...," he continued, before checking himself as Rupert's fibrillating howling threatened to destabilise the galleon.

As Rupert dived off the main deck and began the long swim ashore, Blackbird retreated to his cabin, summoning first-mate Long John Platinum, and simple sailors Siphon, Seve, Steve and Sergio to join him. As the other sailors' occupied seats at the round table, leaving the head open for their captain, Blackbird hopped on his wooden leg around and around the cabin, faster and faster, disturbing the other sailors in their knowledge that this habit was invariably brought forth by high anxiety. That Blackbird was concurrently downing a bottle of rum so strong the pirates often used it in flaming bottle bombs unleashed upon enemy boats, did not inspire in them a spirit of relaxation and comfort.

"Men, men, men, we have, have, have to get, get, get to the Mediterranean, in double-quick, double-thick, I mean double-quick time," blurted Blackbird, each repetitive word in rhythm with his wooden leg thumping on the wooden deck. "The bird that brought the news of Rupert Redbeard's blackest day also brought word that Greece is bleak. They've run out of money, the Germans are asking for all their Porches back, and rich Grecians are hiding out with their jewels on their pleasure palaces, until ..."

"Until ...," enquired LJP, his and Siphon's, Seve's, Steve's and Sergio's heads turning back to look at Blackbird, who had suddenly stopped circulating.

Blackbird's cheeks puffed out fatter than a chipmunk's, and his eyes bulged precariously, especially the glass one, which popped precipitously out of its socket onto the floor, and rolled from one side to the cabin to the other as the boat listed with the tide.

"Until we get there," Blackbird snarled, the look on his face fixed on his first-mate and non-verbally shouting cretin, numbskull, imbecile, moron, idiot, and birdbrain, all at once.

"Now, listen up!" snapped Blackbird, "Does anyone on the boat know a sextant from a stirrup, or a map from a menu."

Nonplussed, the fabulous, famous five shrugged their shoulders, raised their eyebrows and lifted their hands in the air as faultlessly as dancers splay their legs in a chorus line.

Then one of them pushed his chair back from the table and rose to his feet.

"I know what to do," Siphon said sharply. "It's simple really; we'll take on a temp."

Seve, Sergio, Steve and LJP nodded their heads sagely in response, the expressions on their faces earnest and sincere.

"Forget, forget, forget about it," Blackbird shrieked shrilly, drinking down the last drop of the rum, pulling off his wooden leg and sinking to his knee and stub, and searching for his eye-ball. "There'll be no spies on my boat, never, never, never. No, no, no, me hearties, between us we'll make our way to the moon and back, if necessary."

Though his voice was muffled, his comrades all heard him clearly. Blackbird managed eventually to grab the errant eyeball, which he then placed, still on his knees, in a glass on the table, before thrusting his prosthesis into Siphon's hapless hands.

"Use it like a billiard cue to get the ball back in my socket," Blackbird instructed, his faced pushed up against the edge of the table, whilst his good thumb and forefinger pulled his right eyelids wider than the Kimberley big hole.

Siphon looked perplexed and nervous, but all the same adopted a billiard player's posture, cued up the eyeball on a knot on the table, drew the wooden leg back under his armpit, its tip perched between thumb and forefinger of his outstretched arm, and let fly. The eyeball was hit with such ferocity that it flew upward in the air and struck Blackbird hard on his forehead, and the captain fell back prostrate, but only momentarily. We already know that captains become captains for good reason.

"Your turn," Blackbird then instructed Seve, who after some time gathering himself, miscued nervously, with the sharp tip of the prosthesis lacerating his superior's upper-lip, suitably anaesthetised by the alcohol. Sergio and Steve similarly missed, though less injuriously, before LJP demonstrated why officers become officers.

“I’ll show yer,” LJP bragged confidently, as the battered Blackbird readied himself for the next onslaught. The first-mate’s misspent youth was clearly evident in his professional snooker stance. Although he took longer than the other pirates to settle down, when eventually LJP propelled that eyeball forward, it was straight and true, landing in Blackbird’s black hole like a golf ball in a cup.

Blackbird jumped excitedly to his foot, stumbling forward towards his liquor trunk in pursuit of more rum.

“You see, you see, you see,” he shouted gleefully. “If we work together, we can do anything. LJP found a way to shoot my eye into its socket, and you all think we can’t find our way to the Mediterranean. Huh, have more faith, me hearties.”

But The Bountiful, sans navigator, did not make it on time to the Mediterranean. The Germans long beat them to it. While the Heinzes, Helmut, Helgas and Hildas ensnared the Greek vessels before annexing the entire European ocean, our simple sailors were arguing whether west was west, east was east, south was south, and where was true north?

**Treasure Hunting Tip:** Temporary placements are invaluable in replacing mission-critical skills. Neither the best teamwork, nor the hardest or smartest work, will make an air traffic controller of a radio-controlled airplane enthusiast, or an acrobat a pilot. Not to replace key skills with interim placements is foolhardy.

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