

The Treasure Punt #27

Far and away the most prestigious and valuable competitive event in the pirate almanac is the International Annual One-Arm Wrestling, Schnoz-Cigar Smoking, Rum-Flagon Swigging, and Serenade Singing Soiree, a complex contest for multi-tasking mavericks, colloquially known in pirate circles as the 'I-Aye O-Aye.' Renegade athletes from across the seven seas compete for the pride of their ships, and this year, for the reward of the following recently nabbed goods: one standard gold bar from Rand Refinery in Germiston; a champion live fattened porker from the Welsh Pig Company; the original Buster Warenski 'Gem of the Orient' dagger, the world's most valuable knife; two sturdy Australian peasant wives; and one purebred though mangy and rabid Afrikaner hound from Sandton, this latter prize a potentially formidable secret weapon in decimating rival pirate crews.

"All righty, me hearties," Captain Blackbird, a previous winner, announced to the entire crew of The Bountiful, rubbing his one hand together with itself in gleeful anticipation. "Practice rounds start tonight, an all-comers affair. We'll enter as many good men as can stay the distance with me, and this year I'm setting the bar at fifteen minutes."

The crew collectively gasped, for this was indeed a formidable challenge. Managing to smoke two 66 ring-gauge extra-large Puros Indios Corona Garda cigars, through the nostrils, drinking a one-gallon flagon of Stroh rum whilst balancing the vessel on the shoulder, singing an arioso from Mozart's The Magic Flute, and arm-wrestling with Blackbird, whose one good arm was muscularly wider than an elephant's leg, all at the same time, required the careful balancing of a considerable range of unusual skills, but to do this for a full quarter-of-an-hour, well, this was a truly Herculean endeavour.

But there was no shortage of candidates, though first-mate Long John Platinum (LJP), coxswain Rupert Redbeard, simple sailor in accelerated development One-Eyed Dick, and most of the s-men – Siphon, Severino, Seve, Steve, Sergio and Socrates – were quickly eliminated, all lasting only as long as it took to drink the Stroh rum.

"I'm just limbering up," Blackbird bragged cheerily, in song, his cheeks more rosy than a hippopotamus's underbelly, having imbibed nine gallons of 80% proof alcohol, and with smoke wafting eerily out of his ears and empty eyeball.

"I'll match 'yer, captain," challenged simple sailor Simon, who had previously proved himself an athlete of Olympian prowess.

A silence descended on the rowdy gathering, broken only by some sniggering emanating from the bilges, where a number of enemy creoles were held captive by heavy hemp fish netting weighed down by the boat's spare anchor. However, less naïve pirates, who had witnessed for themselves Simple Simon's amazing talents, knew better than to underestimate his competitiveness.

Simple Simon took his seat at the table, shuffling his bum from side to side, then standing up again to free his banana hammock thong caught up his fundament, before taking comfort. He closed his eyes, pressed his hands together and prayed to The Monkey Island Pirate God. Meanwhile the other ordinary rank-and-file comrades chanted out his name in an ever-more deafening crescendo.

“SI-MON, SI-MON, SI-MON,” they chanted to Blackbird’s annoyance.

“Get going!” announced LJP, as the ship’s brass clock, placed high on the bulkhead for all to see, struck midnight.

After five minutes both adversaries had downed the liquor and dispensed with the flagon of rum, and both were easily hitting the high and low musical notes, their gruff voices occasionally breaking. Snorting like buffaloes, after ten minutes, the four cigars were completely cindery, from top to bottom, vanishing to piles of ash within the next four minutes. Blackbird’s and Simon’s singing became more lusty as the deadline drew nearer, as did the audience’s chanting. The strain on the men’s necks and faces was a sight seldom seen, as new blue veins popped like varicose vessels from under their skins. But neither arm would yield.

At fourteen minutes and forty-five seconds, something devastating put a premature end to the battle, at least for the simple sailor. Captain Blackbird’s glass eye popped forcibly from its socket, striking Simon’s right temple like a cannon-ball, and rendering him temporarily comatose. He fell back from the bench, lying fitfully on the deck, his body convulsing like a speared barracuda, though strangely still singing.

“THE CHAMPION, BLACKBIRD OF THE BOUNTIFUL!” shouted out our colourful captain, filled with bravado.

When Simon had regained his composure there was a terrible argument between Captain Blackbird on the one side, and the entire crew, and the creole captives, on the other.

“I said fifteen minutes and fifteen minutes it stays,” Blackbird repeated endlessly, irrespective of the various arguments put forward by the other pirates for including Simon in The Bountiful’s line-up for the I-Aye O-Aye.

“Two’s got twice the chance than one,” LJP reasoned, but even his wise counsel was spurned by the captain.

“Now all of ‘yer shut ‘yer gobs before I pull the plank,” Blackbird concluded, putting an end to any further protestations. “LJP, get one of the pigeons to deliver my application form before we miss the deadline.”

But on the day before the I-Aye O-Aye something gratuitously awful struck down The Bountiful’s leader. During musket practice a dead albatross, shot by One-Eyed Dick, fell from the sky and landed on the nape of Blackbird’s neck, its outstretched claws causing severe tearing to his sterno-, thyro- and omo-thyroids. The slightest strain he put on his chest consequently caused unbearable muscular pain, and he was forced to sit out the competition, like Simon, as a spectator.

Treasure Hunting Tip: When shortlisting candidates, never rely on a single frontrunner. Always have at least two and preferably three top-notch competitors for the same position. Successful placement is never guaranteed, but the odds are considerably enhanced when clients are presented with the good dilemma of who, among two or three options, they will choose to select.

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