

The Treasure Punt #5

Captain Blackbird of The Bountiful was more excited than a Christian child on Christmas Eve. Word had reached him via a vagabond carrier albatross that The Elusive, a Roman galleon transporting the Holy Grail, the chalice passed around the table at the last supper, and recently reportedly discovered on the island of St Helena, was becalmed in the Southern Atlantic. Bound for the Vatican, The Elusive carried surely the most valuable artefact on earth, for a pirate or a Pope. This would indeed be Blackbird's find of finds, the treasure of all treasures. Thousands of others, nobler than Blackbird, including King Arthur himself, had unsuccessfully quested for the grail, and now our complex Captain had his chance.

'I'll covet the chalice to my dying day,' mused the pirate captain, 'or at least until the church offers a large, a very large, sum of gold in return.' He smacked his lips following a large swig of rum, pondering a predicament a rather large predicament. The Bountiful was unfortunately similarly becalmed, but in the northern reaches of the Pacific, at least four thousand nautical miles from The Elusive! If his bovine shaped boat had flown over the moon, thought Blackbird, always a lover of simple poetry, only then could he be further from the treasure he so desperately sought. Blustering bother!

'What to do?' Blackbird worried.

A man of action, Blackbird did not think long. Mustering his crew to the main deck, our fearless captain did as all good captains do. He simply put his sailors to work.

"Out with the oars, me hearties," he instructed, "and get yourselves rowing."

The groans grumbled across the ocean in waves, but not those of the type desired by Blackbird.

"He's surely bonkers," even Long John Platinum was moved to whisper under his beery breath.

Notwithstanding the wisdom of an old sea dog, those simple Simon, Siphon and Seve sailors rowed with their collective might, but naturally to no avail. By nightfall, they were no more than one nautical mile further south.

'Time for plan B,' Blackbird had resolved by the following daybreak.

"All righty, men. Hoist the main sail, gather together on deck, and blow on it with all your might."

The other sailors stood in stunned silence. Some considered mutiny, but the gang plank reminded them of their likely fate. The main sail was raised, hanging as limply as a night gown, and the sailors filled their lungs with the sea air.

"It's hard," puffed sailor Sam, placing his smouldering pipe in his pocket, and deeply regretting his bad habit.

"It's impossible!" wailed the resting crew.

Once more, that evening The Bountiful was little further south, at most another two nautical miles closer to The Elusive, and most of that would be accounted for by the current. When Blackbird encouraged his sailors with the motivational comment, 'Keep blowing, only three thousand, nine hundred and ninety seven miles to go,' nineteen of the weaker, exhausted sailors jumped overboard, taking their chances of swimming to Hawaii! This action prompted Blackbird, always one to sleep things over, to later that evening formulate plan C. The following morning he climbed the main sail all the way to the crow's nest, a considerable undertaking, given his one bad arm and his one bad leg. Then he instructed the crew to put on their bathing trunks and run the anchor rope, thankfully without the anchor, over the bow of the boat.

"Right," instructed Blackbird. "Now get in the water and grab hold of the rope. Form a long line from biggest to smallest. Biggest near the forward and smallest towards the aft."

Even Blackbird accepted inwardly that plan C was a very long shot indeed. The Bountiful weighted over a thousand ton. The crew, after gazing expressionless at Blackbird, and then, eyebrows raised, at themselves, did as they were told. Most jumped into the water, though simple sailor Simon double backward somersaulted, entering the water straight and sharp as a blade. When all the crew were correctly positioned along the rope, following some conflagration as to who was bigger and who was smaller, Blackbird shouted out the next command.

"All swim, in unison mind, in a southerly direction. Paddle as hard as you can."

The unreasonableness of plan C was quickly evident, if not to the simple sailors, who lacked the proper perspective, then definitely to Blackbird, perched up on high like a tern on the wing. As hard as the sailors swam, and even with the best will in the world, for whom many of which was now lacking, The Bountiful was immovable. Plan D, implemented immediately thereafter, was plainly ridiculous, and formulated following Blackbird taking several desperate swigs of his rum. He ordered the sailors to instead rig the anchor rope from the boat's stern, and in the same way to position themselves along the rope from big to small, and to swim with all their might. The sailors could naturally get no direct and focused purchase on the rope, which meandered in as many different directions as there were men. It moved in the

sea like a string of soggy spaghetti. Resolutely refusing to acknowledge the madness, Blackbird insisted that the sailors continue doing the doggy paddle, only changing his mind when a few of the weaker sailors were seen to drop beneath the surface of the water to their Neptunian graves below.

“Okay,” Blackbird finally accepted, telling the surviving crew to abandon the rope and clamber back aboard. "We'll wait for the winds, and forget about hunting the Holy Grail," he announced, to the great relief of all of his followers.

Treasure Hunting Tip: To attempt to find some treasures, like the mythological chalice of the last supper, is pure folly. Insist on your clients being more realistic in their expectations.