

The Treasure Punt # 7

The Bountiful was sailing steadily southwards after sunrise off the Somali seashore one superb summer's day, when sailors Siphon, Simon and Sergio, on watch off the starboard side, saw a slight sailboat on the horizon.

"Small ship ahoy!" shouted Siphon.

Long John Platinum, LJP, was the first of the senior crew to clamber up from his cabin, for unlike his suffering colleagues, he had taken to bed at a reasonable hour the previous night, whilst the rest of the crew celebrated Captain Blackbird's fifty-fifth birthday. A sometimes wise old bird, not unlike his mentor Blackbird, who after all had an excuse to party on his special day, LJP knew these unfamiliar waters to be dangerous, not so much for the currents or the reefs, but for the rival East African pirates, strangers to those on The Bountiful, who preferred to plunder their treasures on the western waves.

On the helm, the Coxswain made a minor navigational adjustment, heading the boat directly on course towards the foreign vessel.

"It's flying no colours, nary even an old, holey vest," Sailor Seve added from the bird's nest, his telescope firmly fixed on the approaching boat. "They're a motley bunch, I tell yer," he added richly, for Blackbird's pirates were as unkempt and unclean as rats in a sewer. "One old tattered sail, and lookie here, there's a gash in the hull, and they're bailing water."

The hubbub on deck aroused the captain from his slumber, and Blackbird pulled off his filthy pyjamas, muttering madly about the mermaid he had happily been dreaming of before the interruption. Donning his favourite black jacket, resplendent with a thousand brooches and badges, over a crumpled though bright fire-engine red shirt, he pulled his baggy trousers above his belly button with his one good arm, awkwardly tying them tight with an old rope, and finally placed his good foot in its black boot. Hobbling on his left leg, he stuffed his right stump into its steel brace.

"Shiver me timbers!" he shouted in agony, as the steel tip of his wooden leg stuck in a gap between the floor boards. Wrenching it free, he glanced over at his reflection in his big brass bell, and though distorted, he could draw the hook of his left arm through the tight curls of his beard, and was pleased with his appearance. In the full knowledge that form often takes precedent over substance, Blackbird always made a point of impressing his potential foes, hoping to intimidate them into submission. Then he stuffed his pipe between his silvery whiskers, and happily puffed past the galley and up the stairs to the deck.

"There's a bunch of black blighters on board," shouted Siphon aggressively, his deep ebony skin glistening in the rising light. "Humbuggers, they're a sad and sorry sight," he added, snorting and spitting a huge tobacco yellow gob towards the foreign boat, as The Bountiful drew alongside. The gob slung airily through the ether before

landing on the cheek of the leader of his adversaries, slithering snail-like down towards his mouth like a slug.

The Somali sailboat was quickly tethered by the super-sailors of The Bountiful, offering not the slightest resistance, and indeed its five crew members smiled at the sight, confounding Blackbird and all his merry men.

The English and Somali-speaking sailors battled to shout any sense to each other, but the non-verbal Ubuntu of the latter was crystal clear in their body language and tone.

“Hold back, mateys,” Blackbird instructed, abseiling with Long John Platinum off the midships of The Bountiful, down onto the modest boat below.

Then, winking, not once but one hundred times, so much so that Blackbird and LJP thought he must suffer from a dreadful nervous tick, the leader of the Somali gang motioned his captives towards a tattered treasure trove hidden beneath the collapsed forward sail of his small boat.

There was a sight for sore sailor eyes when the lid of that treasure chest, fastened one old rusty bolt, was lifted. It was filled to the brim and beyond with gleaming gold, dazzling diamonds, peachy pearls and titillating titanium.

“Argh!” moaned Blackbird, slapping the Somali. “You think the great Blackbird can be tricked? This stuff is cheaper than a Chinese chopstick,” he mocked, rolling his good hand through the loot, lifting it up and chucking it down again.

“I totally agree,” added LJP, who wasn’t first-mate for nothing. “Any old fool knows this is counterfeit,” a statement which puzzled Blackbird.

“False, sir, false,” the first-mate clarified to his captain.

“What do you simpletons think?” Blackbird shouted up to Siphon, Simon, Steve and Seve.

The opinion was unanimous.

“There’s no way on earth these blighters could have anything genuine on offer, just look at them,” they derided.

“Ho, ho, ho,” said Captain Blackbird, tipping the treasure trove overboard, to the apoplexy of the Somali sailors.

“Luckily for you I’m in a good mood,” Blackbird said, being pulled with LJP back on board The Bountiful. “It’s been my birthday, and you have wonderful smiles. Let them be,” he instructed, “and head for Persia, where we’ll find some real treasures.”

Centuries later the authentic treasure plundered by the Somali sailors from ex-brother leader Colonel Gaddafi’s single ship, The Destitute, bound for the Cape of Good Hope, and derided as false by the stupid sailors of the Bountiful, was re-discovered, rivalling the collective worth of the Crown Jewels.

Treasure Hunting Tip: Don't let your prejudices deflect you from considering real talent, despite its outward appearances. Scientific studies have demonstrated that when something authentic and valuable is presented superficially as false and cheap, prejudices and stereotypes trick the observer in to de-valuing its importance. Talented characters indeed come in many guises, some attractive and some unattractive.

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