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'Students Serving Students'

Cocos Island

cont. from page 16

(as opposed to cattle rustling), and someone was muttering under his (bad) breath. Freebie peeked around the edge of the doorway and caught sight of the meanest-looking, ornieriest son-of-a-gun he'd ever seen.

"Expletive deleted, we're in for it now!" he hissed.

"There's only one way to handle this," replied Sam, as he calmly stood up in the doorway to meet the stranger. Freebie nearly flipped.

"Are you out of your mind?" he rasped, as he clambered under a crate.

"Just watch me," confided Smooth Sam. At this point, the stranger arrived at the hut, and looked Sam over.

"Musta drunk too much coconut moonshine," he muttered. He rubbed his eyes and blinked a few times, but Sam refused to disappear.

"Shay, jess who are yew, anhoo?" the strange guy asked, accusingly.

"I'm the ghost of Christmas Island," Sam replied. "And who are you, my good sir?"

"G-Ghost? Did you shay ghost?" asked the other. Without another word, he turned and stumbled back into the jungle, stopping just once to glance back in drunken disbelief.

Cautiously Freebie emerged from his crate and peered out the doorway.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "He could have shot you down."

"Not in the state he was in," countered Superior Sam. "The way I figured it, this guy hasn't seen another human being in many years.

When he saw me, I knew he'd be more inclined to be scared than to shoot me."

"Still, it was quite a risk."

"I suppose I deserve a medal," Sam commented modestly. "The thind to do now is snoop through that guy's persona articles till we find something valuable."

"Don't you have any respect for his privacy?" Freebie protested.

"Sure, but we're not disturbing him here. He's off in some part of the island, now."

Freebie shook his head in bemusement, and started to flip through the bum's magazines. Not wishing to

stay too long, lest the bum had second thoughts about their intrusion the duo left after "borrowing" a few maps and papers. In an hour, they were back at the beach, where they met Maria, who had just returned from her aquatic adventure.

"Well, look who's got a great tan!" greeted Freebie.

"I'm looking, I'm looking," said Sam, glancing idly around. "Meet any strange people, M'?"

"Not until now," she retorted. "But I'll tell you what I did meet..."

Enough said. "Hey, I wasn't finished yet!"

"Sorry, but them's the rules and youse's the players. I'm the dealer, and this is the deck (52 pages instead of cards). Continuing the narration, after I was so rudely interrpted, the trio exchanged their stories, and then rowed out to the boat, for supper. Over fresh mugs of coconut milk (they had just bought the mugs in Panama), they discussed their plans for the next day. First, Sam took out the papers he and Freebie had chosen, and started to read them out.

"This is a crude map of the island," he announced, holding up a yellowy sheet of ragged paper. Freebie took out one of their maps for comparison.

"It's the island, alright," he corroborated.

"Now that we've got your expert opinion, what are those weird markings on the map?" asked Maria.

"They're either random scribblings, trails, migration patterns of lemmings or decorative insignias," Sam deduced.

"Let's call them trails," Freebie suggested. "But why are some of them marked with dotted lines?"

"I know!" exploded Maria. "They must be caves. They're marked that way 'cause they're underground."

"Amazing deduction, Holmes," Sam said in a pseudo-British voice. "And what do you think the X stands for?"

"That must be where treasures are hidden."

"Either that or the bum's secret booze supply," added Sam.

"Whatever it is, it's worth cont. on page 18