

# Cocos Island continues again

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"Well, what did you expect, a blazed trail with arrows pointing to the treasure?" Freebie retaliated.

"The solution is right before us," Sam suggested, suddenly.

"What do you mean?" asked Maria.

"Take a look at the creek," Sam invited. The other two did so. Immediately obvious was the turbulent water, which gushed its way over the numerous boulders in the streambed, and was ice-cold to the touch. Lining the banks of the creek were tall, overhanging trees of all tropical varieties.

"I don't get it," admitted Freebie.

"Leave your love life out of this!" quipped Maria.

"You see," Sam explained, "all we have to do is follow the bank of the creek, and we'll make it to the source. simple?"

"I guess it was just too obvious," said Freebie, abashedly. "So should we get out the hipwaders, Sammo?"

"Sure, but it's going to be a long slog, and we've only got two sets of waders."

He turned to look at Maria. Freebie followed his stare.

"Hey, you guys can't go without me," she protested. "I want to find that treasure as much as you do."

"Nobody said you couldn't come," said Freebie, "but from what I've read, the insects here are terrible, not to mention the snakes, piranhas, alligators and orangutans."

"Orangutans?" echoed Sam, incredulously.

"Well, you never know. Anyway, it's not a pretty sight. You still want to go, Maria?"

"I've got a better idea," she said. "Why don't I stay here and guard the boat? You never know what kind of cut-throats might show up around here."

"If that's what you prefer," said Freebie. "Just don't go too far from the boat. Me and Sam'll be back by sundown, if not, you can send out a search party."

"Do you think we should follow it?" Freebie queried.

"Have you got any better

ideas?"

The path ran parallel to Ship Creek for awhile, but then veered off to the left. Freebie hesitated.

"If we stay on this path," he told Sam the Man Unusual, "We won't get up to the source of the creek."

"But if we don't follow the path, we'll be up the creek in a different sense." Sam returned. "Since someone's obviously gone to the trouble of putting in this path, the least we can use it for him. Besides, it might lead somewhere interesting."

".. Or dangerous, more likely," added Freebie.

With that, we cut back to Maria. She had dozed off while sunbathing on the beach at Wafer Bay, but awoke when she felt the cool water of the incoming tide lapping against her toes. Raising herself up on her elbows, she inspected the scene, and decided to go in for a dip. She waded carefully into the bay, and then started to swim about. The water was very cool and refreshing and soon Maria was swimming down into the crystalline depths. The water got steadily cooler, and before long she could distinguish the bottom of the bay. Lush vegetation grew where the sand ended; sea plants lazily waved back and forth in the gentle current, as a myriad of multi-colored fish glinted in the refracted rays of the sun.

On the murky bottom of the bay grew massive chunks of coral, which harboured such denizens of the depths as stingrays, skates, giant clams and octopus. Maria was taken aback at the sight of the latter creature, so she surfaced to catch her breath. Then curiosity got the better of her, and she redived to take a better look. The octopus glared up at her with its baleful yellow eyes, and Maria felt a thrill of terror run through her. Even yet, she swam closer, and thought she saw the glint of a yellow metal. Gold? she wondered. Then one of the octopus' tentacles uncoiled and reached out to grab her. Maria turned to escape and at that moment caught sight of the mouth of an underwater cave. On impulse, she entered it. All was black, and she almost panicked in the inky

darkness. Then she broke the surface of the water, and breathed in a lungful of thick, moist air. Apparently, she was in some sort of submerged grotto, with enough air pressure to keep out the tide. Tentatively, Maria felt the sides of the chamber until she found a ledge. She was able to crawl up onto this but there was not enough room to stand. A passage seemed to lead out of the grotto but Maria was hesitant as to whether or not to follow it. Then an eyeless underground newt ran over her outstretched hand. A scream resounded in the enclosed cavern and Maria rapidly retraced her steps, diving back into the murky water. Giving no mind to the octopus she swam to the surface, collected her things from the beach, and departed.

By this time, Sam and Freebie had gone quite a distance down the path, which led haphazardly through the jungle. Freebie was getting frustrated.

"Do you realize I don't have a clue which part of the island we're on?" he complained to Sam.

"Don't blame me that you can't read maps," Sam retaliated. "Just keep on trudgin' awhile; we're bound to get somewhere."

Sure enough, the rain-

forest soon gave way to an open clearing, in which stood a mishapen, shotgun shack. Sam and Freebie stopped in their tracks.

"Do you think someone lives there?" Freebie asked in a low voice.

"One way to find out: let's go ring the doorbell," said Sam, and so saying, he calmly walked up to the house. Before he could be stopped by Freebie, Unscrupulous Sam knocked on the front (and only) door. That was all he was permitted before the door caved in.

"Hospitable folks," Sam remarked. He walked in through the doorway, soon followed by Faltering Freebie. Inside was a jumble of old wooden crates, a shelf of yellowing books, magazines strewn across the dirt floor, a few empty boxes and tins of food.

"Looks like no one's been here for ages," opined Freebie.

"You never can tell," cautioned Sam. "It may have been ten years or an hour ago."

Then a third voice interrupted them.

"Arrrrgh, mateys, batten down the hatches; it's time for grub!"

Freebie looked up, startled, and spotted a colourful cockatoo in a cage by the door.

"That's a relief," he said. "Polly wanna cracker?"

"Before you get too affectionate," Sam put in, "don't forget that someone had to feed that parrot within the last day."

"You mean...?"

"We are not alone."

"Well, let's get the heck out of here!"

Freebie made for the door, but Silent Sam signalled him to halt.

"I think I hear footsteps approaching," he whispered.

From the outside came the sounds of grass rustling

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