

Voyage to Cocos Island (continued)

"It has a nice ring to it," admitted Sam. "Did you write it yourself?"

"Of course I didn't!" Maria denied, hotly. "But I bet it was meant for us."

"Wait a minute," put in Freebie, with a wave of his hand. "How could a message you found here in Cancun have anything to do with our trip to Cocos Island?"

Maria was taken aback.

"Well, Captain Moron was a pirate, wasn't he? Maybe he's warning us to stay away from his treasure."

"Perhaps, but he never hid one on Cocos, at least that we know of," Sam rationalized. "That note was probably left here by some wino who wanted to scare some poor, unsuspecting tourist."

"Maria qualifies on both counts," opined Freebie.

The girl made a face at him. "By the way, speaking of wine, I'm starved. Let's find a restaurant."

With this in mind, the trio left the beach and sauntered through the streets until they came to a "Taco Hell".

They ordered tortillas de pollo, enchilladas and a round of the local punch. It was a knock-out dinner. When they were finished, they stopped at a few shops to buy souvenirs, and then sailed away. The next two days passed swiftly, as "The Beach Bum" took a direct route to Panama, passing the Islas Santanilla, Cabo Gracias a Dios and the Isla de Providencia on the way. On the fourth day out of Key West, the trio reached to coast of Panama, and got clearance to traverse the canal. Three hours later, they had arrived in the capital city of Panama.

There, they went to the American Embassy to obtain permission to treasure-hunt on Cocos. Luckily they had come on a Saturday, so they got the special weekend discount rate: a permit to dig and a map of the island for only 100 pesos! That night, they anchored in Panama harbour, and prepared for the last leg of their voyage, which would take them to the island in two days, weather permitting.

As it turned out, the weather was uncomfortably calm for the next two days. The wind was barely perceptible, and the boat would have been stranded but for the resourceful provision of an outboard motor and a barrel of oil. Eventually even this ran out, and the trio found themselves floating slowly through the surf, many miles from land. Unperturbed, Freebie scanned the horizon for a sign of life, while Sam opened up the sails so that they could catch the slightest breeze.

"At least we've got enough food to last us for a month," Maria commiserated with her shipmates.

"That's what I'm afraid of!" Freebie commented glumly. Just then a seagull flew overhead, screeching noisily.

"Heads up," Sam warned. Then a thought occurred to him. "Hey, if there's a seagull here, it probably means we're near to land."

"Let's hope it's the island and not the mainland," Maria added. Freebie had picked up the bins again, and suddenly exclaimed: "I'll be darned. It's the island!"

He pointed excitedly to the starboard side of the boat. Quickly, Sam readjusted the sails, and "The Beach Bum" started to crawl across the glassy water. Slowly, the island hove into view, first appearing on the horizon as a microscopic green speck, and then expanding into a formidable mass of vegetation and rock.

"That's her for sure," Sam confirmed, consulting his maps and charts. "Now all we've gotta do is find Chatham Bay and anchor there."

They closed in on the island and circled it to find the bay. Cocos was surrounded almost completely by precipitous cliffs, and many treacherous rocks jutted out of the choppy water, within a few hundred yards of the island.

"It's going to be tough going, trying to land on a shore like that," Freebie stated the obvious.

"Relax," replied Sam. "Dozens of other ships have come here before us, and only about half of them have crashed!"

"That's reassuring."

"Hey, wise guy, whose idea was it to come to this god-forsaken place in the first place?" Maria reminded accusingly.

Before an argument could erupt, Chatham Bay made a timely appearance. The imposing rockface lining the shoreline fell away to reveal a shapely, circular, harbour converging at a bottle-neck opening, flanked by two monumental, rocky crags.

"Looks a lot nicer than I imagined," mused Sam.

The three of them steered and manoeuvred "The Beach Bum" into the bay, and anchored it just offshore. Then they took out their inflatable raft (they couldn't afford a dinghy) and rowed to shore. This was quite a feat for the three of them, considering the size of the raft. It was like trying to ride on a jellyfish. It was with great relief that our heroes(?) set foot on the beach, after their long, harrowing voyage. Sam immediately dropped to the sand and

acted as if he had fallen asleep.

"Get up, you slouch, we've got work to do!" enjoined Freebie. He took a map out from under his arm and examined it.

"Let's see... Right now, we're at the head of the harbour, so we're within spitting distance of Ship Creek."

"Watch your language," griped Maria.

"I'm just telling it like it is," returned Freebie.

"What's at the creek?" beseeched Sam. "Besides water."

"Hopefully, the start of a trail that should lead to a treasure."

"Where are the other two supposed to be?"

"One's in the sunken wreck of a ship around Wafer Bay, a few miles from here. The other one's totally uncharted."

"Oh well, two out of three ain't bad," Maria philosophized. "Besides, we probably couldn't take them all back in the "Beach Bum" anyway."

"So what's the game plan, Freeb?" asked Sam the Man, as he lay stretched out in the sand.

"Well, it's a toss between going up Ship Creek, without a paddle, or diving in Wafer Bay for the shipwreck. We didn't exactly bring scuba gear, so that limits the possibilities."

"Don't worry, Maria has the best set of lungs among us, so she can do the diving!" suggested Sam.

"Oh yeah?" Maria retaliated. "You're the one with the most hot air."

"Nevermind, we'll hit the trail first," conceded Freebie. "C'mon, it's over this way."

He pointed down the beach. It wasn't long before the trio heard the babbling of a brook (it was like something out of "the Blue Lampoon").

"This must be the place," remarked Sam. "Where's the path?"

"There isn't a path," replied Freebie, innocently enough.

"Whaddya mean there isn't a path?" Maria almost shrieked. "You expect us to cut through that undergrowth with a magic machete?"

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