

Voyage to Cocos Island (continued)

(continued from last week)

"I hate to butt in," interjected Maria, "but I don't see why you two guys should make the decisions around here. I happen to live here too, and I think we should go find the treasure."

"That's the spirit!" Freebie encouraged. "What do you say, Sam?"

The latter furrowed his brow for a moment, then smiled abashedly and answered, "Oh well, I guess I'd better keep the peace in this place." He offered his outstretched hand. "All for one?"

"...And one for all!" the three chorussed.

That day, the trio purchased enough supplies for a month and started to carefully plan out the trip. It would take about five days to reach the island, by a route which would take "The Beach Bum" around the western tip of Cuba through the Yucatan Channel, past the Cayman Islands, through the Panama Canal and across a six-hundred mile stretch of the Pacific to Cocos Island. Freebie made a trip to the local archives to find further information about the island and its treasures. By late afternoon, the expedition had been organized, and the trio made plans to leave the next morning.

At the break of dawn, "The Beach Bum" left her berth in the harbour of Key West and started out on her 1800-mile journey. Sam steered and navigated the boat, while Freebie manned the rigging and Maria rustled up grub for the trio. The sky was clear and there was a strong easterly breeze, enabling the boat to make good progress for most of the day. Toward the evening, the sky clouded over a slight squall hit the boat. Soon, both Sam and Freebie were totally drenched, and sloshed their way into the galley, where Maria was cooking some alligator stew. She took one look at them and said,

"Ugh! You guys look like something they dredged up from the Okefenokee Swamp!"

"Raarrghh!" replied Freebie, gesticulating wildly. "I guess we'd better change out of these soggy clothes into something respectable."

After doing so, they all sat down to a tasty dinner of stew and Key Lime pie. Unfortunately, a lot was spilled because of the boat's unstableness in the rough water and generally foul weather.

The next morning, "The Beach Bum" sailed by the coast of Yucatan, not far from the beach resort, Cancun. Maria convinced the others to make a stop so that she could take a break from cooking and sample the Mexican food there. Sam and Freebie readily agreed, so they went ashore. Docking and tying up their boat, they took an exploratory walk along the beach. Lining the shoreline were many new high-rise hotels, as well as fashionable beach-houses. Not too many people had hit the beaches yet, but occasionally the trio met a brave sunworshipper or shallow-sea diver. Maria began to pick up seashells along the shore, while Sam and Freebie took in the scenery.

"Hey, look at this," said Maria, out of the blue. She was holding up an old wine bottle.

"No thanks, I'm not thirsty right now," remarked Sam.

Maria grimaced. "Idiot! Can't you see what's inside of the bottle?"

"Captain's Moron's Black Rum, according to the label," Sam replied. In reaction to Sam's apparent insensibility, Maria uncorked the bottle and pulled out a folded-up paper. Unrolling it, she read it aloud:

"To whom it may concern: Turn back before it's too late! If not, then you have sealed your fate! (Signed) Anonymous. What do you think of that?"

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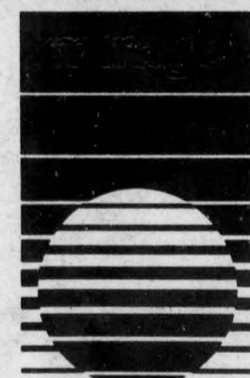
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