



THE PIRATES!

IN AN ADVENTURE WITH
SCIENTISTS

SMART, FUNNY AND UNEXPLAINABLY DAFT:
A BLACKADDER FOR THE HIGH SEAS

GIDEON DEFOE

THE PIR _____.

In An Adventure With Scientists



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THE PIRATES!

In An Adventure With Scientists

**To Sophie,
who has a quarter of a million pounds.**

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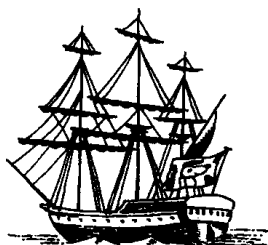
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COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

One

INTO ACTION UNDER THE PIRATE FLAG!



‘The best bit about being a pirate,’ said the pirate with gout, ‘is the looting.’

‘That’s rubbish!’ said the albino pirate. ‘It’s the doubloons. Doubloons are easily the best bit about pirating.’

The rest of the pirates, sunning themselves on the deck of the pirate boat, soon joined in. It had been several weeks since the Pirates’ Adventure with Cowboys, and they had a lot of time on their hands.

‘It’s the pirate grog!’

‘Marooning! That’s what I like best!’

‘Cutlasses!’

‘The Spanish Main!’

‘The ship’s biscuits!’

One of the pirates pulled a special face to show exactly what he thought of this last comment, and soon all the pirates were fighting. With a sound like a bat hitting a watermelon, pirate fist connected with pirate jaw and a gold tooth bounced across the deck. The pirate with gout found himself run through in a grisly manner, and one of the cabin boys accidentally got a shiny pirate hook in the side of the head. It would probably have gone on for hours in this fashion, but both of the heavy wooden doors that led to the downstairs of the boat crashed open, and out onto the deck strode the Pirate Captain himself.

The Pirate Captain cut an impressive figure. If you were to compare him to a type of tree – and working out what sort of tree they would be if they were trees instead of pirates was easily one of the crew’s favourite pastimes – he would undoubtedly be an oak, or maybe a horse chestnut. He was all teeth and curls, but with a pleasant open face; his coat was of a better cut than everybody else’s, and his beard was fantastic and glossy, and the ends of it were twisted with expensive-looking ribbons. Living at sea tended to leave you with ratty, matted hair, but the Pirate Captain somehow kept his beard silky and in good condition, and though nobody knew his secret, they all respected him for it. They also respected him because it was said he was wedded to the sea. A lot of pirates claimed that they were wedded to

the sea, but usually this was an excuse because they couldn't get a girlfriend or they were a gay pirate, but in the Pirate Captain's case none of his crew doubted he was actually wedded to the sea for a minute. Any of his men would have gladly taken a bullet for him, or even the pointy end of a cutlass. The Pirate Captain didn't need to do much more than clear his throat and roll his eyes a bit to stop the fighting dead in its tracks.

'What's going on, you scurvy knaves!' he bellowed. Pirates were often rude to each other, but without really meaning it, so none of the brawling pirates took being called a 'scurvy knave' too much to heart.

'We were just discussing what the best bit about being a pirate is,' answered the pirate dressed in green, after a bit of an awkward pause.

'The best bit about being a pirate?'

'Yes sir. We couldn't quite decide. I mean, it's all good ...'

'The best bit about being a pirate is the shanties.'

And, with the argument settled, the Pirate Captain strode back into the galley, indicating for the pirate with a scarf to follow. The rest of the crew were left on their own.

'He's right. It's the shanties,' said the albino pirate thoughtfully. One of the other pirates nodded.

'They *are* really good. Shall we sing a pirate shanty?'



The Pirate Captain was secretly relieved when he heard the strains of a rowdy shanty coming through the roof of the galley. Just recently he had been worrying about discipline on board the pirate boat, and there was an old pirate motto: if the men are singing a shanty then they can't be up to mischief.¹

'Come into my office for a moment,' he told the pirate with a scarf, who was his trusty second in command. The Pirate Captain's office was full of mementoes from the previous pirate adventures. There was a ten-gallon hat from *The Pirates' Adventure with the Cowboys*, and some old bits of tentacle from *The Pirates' Adventure with Squid*, as well as several Post-It notes reminding the Pirate Captain to say things like 'Splice the mainsail!' or 'Hard about, lads!'. On the walls there hung several fantastic paintings of the Pirate Captain himself – one of them showed him looking anguished and cradling a dead swan: this painting was titled WHY? Another was of the Pirate Captain reclining naked except for a small piece of gauze. And a third pictured the Pirate Captain sharing a strange futuristic-looking drink with a lady who seemed to be made from metal. There were also

¹ 'Shanty' probably derives from the French word 'chanter' meaning to sing. Most shanties tended to be about frisky mermaids who loved putting out for sailors more than anyone.

quite a lot of nautical maps and charts about the place, and even an astrolabe. The Pirate Captain wasn't 100 per cent sure what the astrolabe did, or whether it was actually an astrolabe rather than a sextant, but he enjoyed fiddling with it when he got bored nonetheless. Right at the moment boredom was an issue that weighed heavily on the Pirate Captain's mind.

'Care for some grog?' he asked politely. The scarf-wearing pirate wasn't very thirsty, but he said yes anyway, because if you start turning down grog when you're a pirate it doesn't help your reputation much.

'Ship's biscuits? I've got ship's custard creams, and ship's bourbons,' said the Pirate Captain. He held out a tin that had a boat painted on it and the pirate with a scarf took a bourbon, because he knew custard creams were the Pirate Captain's favourites.

'What do you think all that brawling was about, number two?' asked the Pirate Captain, absent-mindedly seeing how fast he could spin the astrolabe using just one finger.

'Like the men said ... it was just a friendly discussion that got a bit out of hand,' replied the scarf-wearing pirate, not entirely sure where the Pirate Captain was going with this, but amazed as always that he could carry on a conversation whilst doing complex calculations with an astrolabe. That sort of thing was why the Pirate Captain was the Pirate Captain, the pirate with a scarf reflected.

'I'll tell you what it was about,' said the Pirate Captain. 'It was about bored pirates! I've made a mistake. We've been moored here in ... in the ...' The Pirate Captain rubbed his nose, which he liked to think of as a stentorian nose, even though stentorian is actually a tone of voice, and squinted at one of the charts.

'The West Indies, sir,' said the scarf-wearing pirate, helpfully.

'Mmmm. Well, we've been here too long. I thought that after our exciting adventure with those cowboys, we could all do with a break, but I guess us pirates are only really happy when we're pirating.'

'I think you're right, sir,' the scarf-wearing pirate said. 'It's nice enough here, but I keep on finding sand in my grog, from all that lying about on the beach. And those native women, wandering about with no tops on ... it's a bit much.'

'Exactly. It's time we had another pirate adventure!'

'I'll let the other pirates know. Where will we be heading for? Skull Island? The Spanish Main?'

'Oh, Lord, no! If we plunder the Spanish Main² one more time, I think I'll tear out my own beard,' said the Pirate Captain, trying on the ten-gallon hat and narrowing his eyes like a cowboy as he studied his reflection in the mirror.

² It was Francis Drake who had first made the Spanish Main a popular target, back in 1571. A replica of his boat, the *Golden Hind*, can be found today next to London Bridge.

‘So what were you thinking?’

‘Something will come up. It usually does. Just make sure we’ve got plenty of hams on board. I didn’t really enjoy our last adventure much, because we ran out of hams about halfway through. And what’s my motto? “I like ham!”’

‘It’s a good motto, sir.’



Back on deck, the other pirates had finished their shanty – which had been about how a beautiful sea-nymph had left her rich but stupid Royal Navy boyfriend for a pirate boyfriend because he was much more interesting to talk to and could make her laugh – and now they were roaring. This was another common pastime amongst the pirates.

‘Rah!’

‘Oooh-Arg!’

‘Aaaarrrr, me hearties!’

It didn’t mean much, but it filled a few hours. They all stopped when they saw the pirate with a scarf had come back from his meeting with the Pirate Captain. He almost slipped in a pool of the cabin boy’s blood that was left over from the fight.

‘Can somebody swab these decks?’ he said, a little tetchily. Left to their own devices the pirates tended towards the bone idle.

‘It’s Tuesday! Sunday is boat cleaning day!’

‘I know, but somebody could get hurt.’

The diffident pirate gave a shrug and went off to find a swabbing cloth, whilst the remaining crew looked up expectantly from where they were sprawled. The scarf-wearing pirate gazed out across the sparkling water, and at the tropical beach with its alabaster sands, and the forest of coconut palms behind that, and then he noticed one of the pretty native ladies and so he quickly looked back down at his pirate shoes.

‘Listen up, pirates,’ he said. ‘I know all this endless wandering up and down the beach ... and our interminable attempts at trying to choose which sort of mouth-watering exotic fruit to eat ... and all these wanton tropical girls knocking around ... I know it’s been getting you down.’

A couple of the pirates muttered something to each other, but the scarf-wearing pirate didn’t quite catch what they said.

‘So you’ll be happy to know,’ he went on, ‘that the Pirate Captain has ordered us to put to sea, just as soon as we’ve collected some hams for the journey.’

A buzz of excitement ran around the deck.

‘Perhaps we should cook the hams first, before setting off?’ asked the pirate dressed in green.

‘That sounds like a good idea,’ said the albino pirate.

‘Do you think roasting is best?’ asked the pirate with a nut allergy.

The scarf-wearing pirate sighed, because he knew how seriously the pirates took their ham, and he could predict how this was going to end up. He tried to look hard-nosed, which involved tensing all the muscles in his nostrils, and with as much authority as he could manage he said, 'Yes, roasting is good. It allows the free escape of watery particles that's necessary for a full flavour. But we've got to make sure it's regulated by frequent basting with the fat that has exuded from the meat, combined with a little salt and water – otherwise the hams will burn, and become hard and tasteless.'

'Roasting?' 'Are you sure?' asked the surly pirate who was dressed in red, barely concealing his contempt. 'What about boiling? I always find a boiled ham becomes more savoury in taste and smell, and more firm and digestible.'

'Ah, but if you continue the process too long, you risk the hams becoming tough and less succulent,' said the pirate in green.

'But the loss from roasting is upwards of 22 per cent of the ham! The loss from boiling is only about 16 per cent. More ham for us! That can only be a good thing.'

'We need to dust the hams with bread raspings if we're going to boil them. And we should dress the knuckle bone with a frill of white paper.'

³ In those days, roasting would have meant spit-roasting. A popular craze in the early part of the nineteenth century was to use a small dog fastened to a treadmill to turn the spit, freeing up the cook to prepare other dishes.