

Ghost Pirates Ahoy! (by Ute Maria Sproulle)

Captain Scallywag was getting really, really annoyed with his first mate, Peg Leg. The captain had just put his telescope up to his eye patch and wondered why he couldn't see anything.

There was a sea monster out there in the big, wide, scary ocean - scary even to a pirate - and Peg Leg hadn't told him. What else were first mates good for if not to tell the captain that the ocean was a scary place where sea monsters lived - sea monsters that could, quite possibly, eat you?

Captain Scallywag got so angry that his long, black beard started curling around his neck. They had just come back from the North Pole where polar bears did try to eat you! His first mate had said they would be cuddly and cute but Peg Leg soon found out differently. That's how he got his peg leg! Serves him right, thought Captain Scallywag grumpily.

Now they were sailing around the Pacific Ocean, trying to look for treasure and avoid sea monsters. It was difficult to do both.

There was also supposed to be a Ghost Pirate out there - a cook who chopped people's heads off - and cooked them! Captain Scallywag didn't dare go down into the galley in case the ship's cook, Frankie Fryer, had been replaced by the Ghost Pirate. The Captain worried that, while he was eating his fried octopus, his head might end up in the fish stew. Shudder, shudder.

Then, suddenly, there was a shout from the crow's nest up above. "Ship ahoy!"

Up went the telescope and Captain Scallywag, with his good eye, surveyed the ocean blue. There, sailing towards him in the mist, was a triple-decker pirate ship. "All hands on deck!" the Captain called out. "Cutlasses at the ready!"

Not a moment too soon! Looming out of the blue mist was a huge Spanish galleon, the kind you just know must contain treasure. All the crew were getting really excited, thinking of what they would do with all

that gold. Some were going to go back on dry land and buy a house. Some were thinking of starting their own business: Frankie Fryer quite fancied a fish and chip shop.

And Peg Leg? Well, Peg Leg just wanted his own boat to sail away and maybe go fishing.

“Look out!” shouted Captain Scallywag. “Pay attention! Those pirates are getting ready to board!”

Then just as quickly as the ship had appeared, it disappeared! What did this mean?

“We’d better get our lunch,” suggested Peg Leg, who knew how much the Captain liked his octopus stew. And how grumpy he got when he didn’t get it. “And look for whatever-it-was later.”

“Might as well,” grumbled Captain Scallywag who wasn’t in a good mood on an empty stomach. Or at any other time.

The crew went below while Peg Leg helped the Captain to unbuckle his cutlass. Suddenly they heard screeching and screaming and shouts of horror!

A few of the crew rushed up on deck again, looking pale and terrified. “It’s , it’s the Gho - Gho - Ghost Pirate! He’s down below!” stammered one of the sailors looking for somewhere to escape.

“Ridiculous!” insisted Captain Scallywag. He, too, was frightened but he wasn’t going to show it. So he sent Peg Leg down to investigate.

Peg Leg did as he was told. He didn’t like it but what choice did he have? First mates had to obey orders and he was the first mate.

He hobbled down the ladder and looked round. All the crew had disappeared and in the corner, where Frankie Fryer should have been cooking something octopussy, was a strange, eerie creature. It looked more like a sea monster than a ghost. Big, bulging eyes, long flappy arms and legs and a wide open mouth was all Peg Leg could see. Had the octopus escaped from the stew?

“Hello?” the first mate tried. Maybe the creature was friendly?

“Don’t you ‘hello’ me,” snorted the beast. He seemed upset and was also stirring something in the pot.

“What’s in the pot?” asked Peg Leg out of curiosity and still trying to make conversation.

“Your Cook!” replied the whatever-it-was.

“Our Cook? Do you mean Frankie Fryer?” This really did make Peg Leg stop and stare.

“Yes, I mean your Cook. And your Captain is next!”

“Why?” Peg Leg thought he should ask.

“Because I’m fed up with everyone eating us octopuses. We’ve got feelings, too, you know.”

“Yes, yes, of course you do,” said Peg Leg, wondering how to get out of this. “So, you’re not a ghost pirate?”

The creature laughed. “No, that’s just a story we spread around the ocean so other pirates will keep away from our home. But your Captain has a taste for octopus and he’s always hunting us. It’s time he stopped. Or else.” He sounded very angry.

“Well,” Peg Leg thought long and hard. “If I persuade the Captain to stop hunting you, will you go back - home?”

The octopus looked at him suspiciously. “How are you going to do that?”

“Well, if I can find - with your help - that treasure ship that appeared and then disappeared again, he would be very pleased indeed. I could tell him that an octopus helped me and we must never, ever hunt them again. Or else.”

The octopus thought about it for a moment, finished stirring and agreed. "Look starboard in five minutes," he said before sliding, tentacles first, out the porthole.

Just as Peg Leg finished hobbling up on deck, he heard shouts and lots of "Ahoys!" and "Avast, me hearties!".

Captain Scallywag was pointing excitedly. "There, there, it's that ship again! The treasure ship! Prepare to board!"

The crew pulled up alongside the galleon, cutlasses at the ready. They swung from ropes and crashed onto the deck. They did battle and in no time at all had taken charge of the vessel and the treasure. Whoops and shouts of joy flooded the ship!

Peg Leg took the Captain aside and explained about the octopus helping them. He left out the bit about Frankie Fryer.

Captain Scallywag didn't want to believe him at first. And he didn't want to give up eating octopus. But when he saw the piles and piles of gold and silver at his feet, he was ready to be won over.

"Alright, then," he agreed. "No more octopus. From now on we eat spinach."

Peg Leg nodded. A wise move, he thought, besides being healthier.

"But before that," said the Captain, "I'm sure Frankie Fryer was still cooking up some octopus stew. I'll finish that."

Peg Leg smiled to himself as he replied, "Your order, Captain, is my command."

