

Hunting the Sea-Snipe

Jack McCourt – Nov 2017

Eight bells rang quite clearly, as the crew stumbled nearly
On the path from their racks to the stern
Time for morning quarters, past the ship's laundry sorters
To convene for their orders to learn.

The crusty old chief, well he started his brief
In his salty, time-honored squid-speak
“We'll scrub down the decks, then take time to inspect
That the hull of this ship has no leaks.”

He sounded his pipe, to dismiss the deck-types
To begin the work that he announced
They went fore, they went aft, on this large naval craft
With a jaunt and a gait most pronounced.

The port team was led, by a boatswain named Ed
Who had ten rated seamen in tow
But in with this mix was a Midshipman named Ricks
Who could not fathom the stern from the bow.

So, Ed, who was devious, altogether mischievous
 Could not pass up a chance for a hoot
He gathered the others, his navy deck-brothers
 And proposed having fun with the “boot”.

Bosun Ed called to “Ricky”, “I’ve a mission that’s tricky
 And dictates the gifts you possess
It demands patience and skill, and a sharp eye to fulfill
 The challenge you are about to address.”

“The sea you may know, boasts many creatures below
 Some are timid and do not pose danger
But then there are those, like the guileful sea-snipe
 Who’s a crafty and cunning shape-changer.”

“Sometimes it’s all scaly and it shifts colors daily
 So, to camouflage its form from its prey
And when it feels plucky, and exceedingly lucky
 It appears in a mysterious way.”

“Other times it is hairy, and perpetually scary
 Doubly so when it opens its mouth
For it scowls insanely, and one often sees plainly
 Jagged teeth that run north and due south.”

“You must capture this beastie, look both westie and eastie
Comb all compartments and spaces onboard
And when you’ve succeeded, with the sea-snipe conceded
Return hither to claim your reward”

Ricks spoke with dispassion, “I will give it a thrashin’
Every inch from its tail to its snout
I’ll tie it in knots, with whatever I’ve got
And pursue it from dawn til lights-out.”

Bos’n Ed then confessed, he was duly impressed
With this Midshipman’s commitment to task
Then offered direction, both clear and concise
And awaited Ricks forthcoming ask.

“Please tell me Bos’n Ed, before winding up dead
What tools I may need to subdue it
Need I a lasso and sack, and a hardy blackjack
To succeed with a chance to live through it?”

“Your instincts spot on, seems you are no moron
The tools that you seek are close by
Watch for the knee-knockers, then search boatswain’s lockers
To obtain the essential supplies.”

“And where shall I start”, said the Middy upstart
“In my quest for this artful phantasm
Shall I begin my brute search, from a high top-side perch?
Or, in the bowels of the engineer’s chasm”?

“It would seem to me, with a beast this cagey
To begin deep below”, Ed did sound
“I would start with the Cheng, and his sweaty A-Gang
In the bilges where snipes oft abound.”

Ricks began his descent, down four ladders he went
To the Chief Engineer’s space to inquire
“Sir, I’m here on a mission, from the ship’s Deck Division
And my quest, I’ll admit, is most dire.”

“Sir, don’t chastise me, but please advise me
Where a sea-snipe might logically hide
Like a surgeon I’ll remove it, for the ship’s health I’ll improve it
On this mission I won’t be denied.”

The Cheng looked distraught, as he gave it much thought
Then he gave Midshipman Ricks this advice
“Sea-snipes are predictable, and easily evictable
They repeat actions not once, rather twice.”

“There’s no time to waste, grab your gear and make haste
To the seawater cooling pump room
The sea-snipe was seen there, with plenty of fanfare
‘Twas a fortnight ago at full moon”.

More ladders descended, at shaft alley we ended
Just forward of the cooling pump room
When all of a sudden, out the hatchway came floodin’
The most egregious and pungent gas fumes

The aroma horrific, quite uniquely specific
A scent most uncommon to man
“Seems the stink of whale’s blubber, man the gas-masks, suck rubber
And be quick and as smart as you can”.

“It’s the smell of sea-snipe, and this one’s notably ripe
By any metric one might use to measure
It seems clear to me, if one thinks logically
He’ll seek grub at the galley, with pleasure”.

“Midshipman Ricks we must buster, with the Suppo we’ll muster
On the next phase of your chimerical task
If I’m not mistaken, the sea-snipe smells bacon
In that exquisite pork fragrance, he’ll bask”.

Back to deck O-two, past blue-tile areas they flew
Port-side forward at frame sixty-four
At the Suppo's stateroom, with a knock that went boom
Midshipman Ricks, with a gasp, did implore.

"Sir, I must have your thoughts, as the senior Pork Chop
On the subject of snipes pining bacon
Of this I am sure, you're the ship's connoisseur
And it's pork for which this sea-snipe is aching".

"On the subject you speak", the ship's Suppo did squeak
"I've devoted much time to imagine
Would a sea-snipe taste best, when cooked fully-dressed
Seasoned lightly with queso and bacon"?

"No time to share menus, we much search all ship's venues
Where most likely a sea-snipe we'll find
To the mess-decks below, that is where we must go
For this interloper must be confined".

To the mess-decks they flew, amidst a hullabaloo
That erupted aft of the ship's galley
Pots and pans they all clanged, as the mess-chief harangued
While a specter vanished down Pork Alley.

“It’s that fiendish sea-snipe, and it’s the rare boojum type
That can appear in two places at once
By the tail first you grab it, and when you think that you have it
It is gone and you emerge quite the dunce”.

“But did you actually see it, of its shape guarantee it
So, to warn our five-thousand shipmates
They must be on the lookout, lest it seek a strong redoubt
Vital action is what this dictates”.

The mess-chief situated, his chase capitulated
He searched for the words to express
“It is my utmost belief, that the snipe gained relief
His pork cravings now duly suppressed”.

“This beast is sly like a fox, a maritime paradox
For it boasts the small-pocks of a leopard
And what makes it perverse, is it moves best in reverse
Don’t know why but I call it Fat Leonard”.

“Up on deck it will go, as it flits this bateau
It must dessert on the salt-water midge
Now you must hasten your search, to the Gator’s top-side perch
For a view from the Captain’s own bridge”.

The many ladders they climbed, were by the sea-snipe green slimed

But, the group resolute on their mission

On the bridge they appeared, but were quite unprepared

The dreadful sight viewed beyond their position

The bridge watch in duress, and it was anyone's guess

What had caused this navigational commotion

But it was clear to the watch, ship's standing orders were botched

They had lost control of the ship on the ocean.

The Officer-of-the-Deck, his veins bulging from his neck

Shouted orders to the helmsman quite clearly

"Get us back on our course, mind your helm and use force

Or, the ship's fate will most likely cost dearly".

Midshipman Ricks looked around, nothing odd had he found

So, he spoke to the watch-bos'n close by

"Did a sea-snipe interfere, with the watch-crew mustered here?

Prompting this large ship to transit awry"?

"I don't really understand it, though I witnessed first-hand it

A most peculiar event in the making

Seems a strange whirling dervish, caused this big ship to swervish

Resulting in the course that we're taking".

Then heard from the Gator, "Avoid that big freighter
Come hard starboard with full speed ahead
If we do not act timely, and navigate sublimely
There's a chance we may all wind up dead".

The ship heeled acutely, the helmsman astutely
Handled ship's movements with nary a thought
Achieving stability, through skill and agility
The OOD slowed the ship's speed to ten knots.

With a thunderous blast, as the watch turned aghast
The ship's Captain arrived on the scene
His nostrils were flared, at the Gator he glared
As he shared salty speech most obscene

"I will have all your heads, you'd be better off dead
When I enforce my time-honored discretion
The penalties are most serious, for your actions deleterious
Sound-off and defend this transgression".

Before the Gator could rally, express the thoughts he did tally
Midshipman Ricks in a manner undaunted
Interrupted the discourse, with not a whit of remorse
To the Captain his declaration, he flaunted

“Oh, my dearest Commander, may I say with all candor
The bridge-crew, if all truth be told
Obeyed standing orders, shown by ship’s recorders
Until bedeviled by a snipe uncontrolled”.

“Oh Captain, My Captain, my shipmates are trapped in
An untenable quandary of sorts
And I will attest, ‘twas an unwanted guest
Whose actions confused starboards with ports”.

“For this bridge-crew present, did a collision, prevent
By maneuvers performed oh so deftly
“Please consider the results, amidst all this tumult
When you pronounce judgment, either rightly or leftly”.

The Captain taken aback, by this Midshipman’s attack
On behalf of those men on his bridge
Momentarily outgunned, on his own ship he was stunned
But he altered his tone just a smidge.

“Now I am giving the orders, search the ship for all boarders
Who interfere with all Navy operations
And when you achieve it, I’ll be inclined to believe it
At which time I’ll address allegations”.

But before crew could react, there was heard a loud crack

All heads turned to the bow of the ship

The lookouts looking in, expressed fear and chagrin

For not warning the watch of this slip.

Through the bridge window glass, they saw red-shirts en masse

Just abaft of Cat One JBD

“Looks like an errant Sidewinder, slipped from the skid of its minder”

Mandating a naval audit, safety.

Ricks and faithful shipmates, those with various rates

Led the team on this sea-snipe search party

Zooming to the flight-deck, for this crime to inspect

Like Sherlock Holmes searching for Moriarty.

“I tell you no lie, this strange creature whizzed by”

Shrieked the airman in charge of the missile

“I nearly lost all control, there’d be a Titanical hole

If the warhead of the missile, were fissile”.

Ricks consumed this remark, “is not a snipe like a snark?

If one mulls in a mode metaphorically

So, it would seem to me, thinking deductively

We can out-snark this snipe categorically”.

“What was it he said, Lewis Carroll now dead

In his poem of *Hunting the Snark*?

In the way that you catch it, but not Bandersnatch it

When it appears at full moon after dark?”

“We must seek it with thimbles, we must seek it with care

We must pursue it with forks and with hope

We must threaten its life with a railway-share

Then charm it with smiles and with soap!”

The search party now wearied, were confused but they queried

“Ricks have you been too long at sea?

This nonsense you frivol, tis such meaningless drivell

Off you go to the dispensary”.

“To the Doc you must go, and he’s ten decks below

But we can carry you there in a flash

Your mind is obsessed, by this snipe you’re possessed

Your skin shows the pox of the snipe-rash.”

Sailors grabbed Ricks expertly, and made haste most overtly

On a tortuous trek to sickbay

In this cavernous craft, they went forward then aft

Searching for the correct passageway.

They arrived at Doc's door, "what is this Middy here for?"

Chimed the ship's healer of all things mysterious

"He's beset with snipe fever, though he is one true believer

Still his fervor makes him so delirious".

"We must stick him with needles, we must soak his dulled brain

In cod liver oil, and then do it again.

He must sweat in the sauna until near fully steamed

Then lathered in butter until his psyche's redeemed."

Ricks opened his eyes, as to no one's surprise

And considered the treatment proposed

He rose unexpectedly, then offered dejectedly

"This cure includes leeches, I suppose"

Ricks leapt from the gurney, and continued his journey

To capture the fanciful being

But to Ricks it was real, as he displayed with such zeal

He would succeed, if even not for seeing".

"I have it, I have it, on to the ship's davit

The one by the Captain's own gig

The riddle is solved, don't let this moment devolve

I must succeed before I'm put in the brig."

Rick's propelled by one thought, that this snipe must be caught
Was off again steering south-by-southwest
If his logic was precise, then his actions would suffice
Ridding the ship of this unwanted guest.

At the Captain's small boat, Rick's did preen and did gloat
For he knew what he'd find in plain site
Then he climbed on the craft, while letting out a strange laugh
Entering the cabin with glee and delight.

And there he'd behold, in bright blue and bright gold
The most extraordinary creature conceived
Exhibiting brilliance, and exquisite resilience
A sight so unreal as to not be believed

But more amazing than that, was the creature that sat
Just a squid's-length away from the snipe
Its body bedecked, with fish scales it was flecked
Not the bland marine stereotype

It was King Neptune with Trident, his conch shell-blast so strident
As he summoned his court to the surface
The waves gave way, to the sea creatures that day
A sea detail with a singular purpose.

There were dolphins, blue whales, octopi with eight tails
A mélange of fish-schools of all types
Up came the crustaceans, with all their relations
All swam to the sound of his pipe.

“My seafaring delegation, I say with no hesitation
Join me in admiration, aplenty
We are honored this eve, by this Midshipman named Steve
So, clap your fins seven-score minus twenty”.

Midshipman Ricks was astounded, one might say clearly dumbfounded
As King Neptune approached him confidently
Neptunus Rex and his scribe, Davey Jones at his side
Bellowed “You achieved your snipe-search competently”

“Be it known by all men, and fellow sea denizens
Midshipman Ricks was the first to attain
While crossing the equator, using projections Mercator
Snipe success in my eminent domain

“It is hereby recorded, that you are aptly rewarded
As I knight you this day with my Trident
Snipe-hunter first class, wear this crown of eel-grass
To honor your matchless achievement

And in an unfathomable flash, they dove with nary a splash
Below the waves of cerulean blue
Ricks peered over the side, as he watched Neptune subside
A sight accorded to only a few.

Just by odd coincidence, with fawning beneficence
Bosun Ed loomed above the catwalk
His face pale as a ghost, he no longer did boast
His tongue entwined in a bowline knot.

“I must be sea-sick, greasy pork-chops so thick
Galley chow it can make one so nauseous
Cause it’s fried in a vat, with extra bacon fat
In the future I must be more cautious”.

“Cause, what can’t be construed, is the sight I just viewed
Not a moment ago in the ocean
A collage of sea creatures, with supernatural features
Such a whimsically, fanciful notion”

Ricks displayed a big smile, as he thought for a while
Of the lessons he learned from his mission
Patience, trust, perseverance and conscientious adherence
Would now influence his every decision.

And throughout his career, on seas both far and both near
Captain Ricks will always be hunting
For that guileful sea snipe, of the rare boojum type
That he will likely again be confronting.