

SOME NOTES ON THE VOYAGE

Mostly concerning morale.



Captain Bliss. Sheep Island. 3 September, 2015.

Twice on this journey the Captain misplaces something. Both times he feels fairly certain the item is lost to the sea, meaning completely and utterly lost, forever. The first thing, which is a non-essential component of the ship's navigation system, comes back to him in the hands of a member of the Crew. It was picked up during routine cleaning and maintenance operations, and presumed to be refuse of some sort, but why not check with the Captain just in case, was the thinking. And lucky that, because this first thing was something

borrowed from another Captain and it would have been a real ordeal to replace, once back Stateside.

The second thing he comes across himself, whilst aimlessly wandering through the lower decks. It's not technically the thing that he lost, but actually a much better version of it, which was aboard all along, though dreadfully mislabeled. Months later the fact that it was labeled *'Best Guess - Some type of Polypore - Red Belted?'* will make more sense to him, but it is not necessary here to dwell on the particulars of the items lost or the details of their

finding. What is significant is the effect that both the losing and the subsequent finding can have on morale. It has been the Captain's experience that things tend to get lost when everything else has already gone awry; a typical Bad to Worse pattern. And those things return, if at all, when you've already solved the other problems and have all but forgotten about what you lost in the first place.

That first part holds absolutely true on this voyage, but what ends up being miraculous is that both things lost are found in time to still be useful, and even

lifesaving. That's not to say that there was necessarily a real and true risk of loss of life, but from the perspective of morale it really was a game changer, for the Captain anyhow.

The Captain is not a hard man. Nor would his life be described as a terribly hard one, by most contemporary standards. The Captain is, however, hard on himself. It is when he is on the vessel that he thinks about this hardness, feels his thoughts push up against its edges, the flat unmovable surface of disappointment in oneself steadily pushing back. Luckily, on voyages such as this one, time tends to pass quickly. And even more luckily, the Crew are all gifted at snapping the Captain out of woeful thoughts and self loathing.

In Particular, on this journey: First-rate chow and a lively atmosphere in the galley and mess hall; Gifted Science Officers, always willing and excited to share recent findings; A notable high quality of storytelling and conversation, often stretching on into the late hours; Exemplary levels of camaraderie and collaboration, regarding projects both essential and frivolous; A surplus of fair weather and magnificent views, the importance of which the preoccupied

mind is apt to overlook; A general sense of confidence in the Captain and his abilities from everyone aboard (It should be noted here that confidence in one's Captain is a hallmark of any halfway decent member of a Crew, but this group really went above and beyond in making the Captain feel appreciated. In other words, no Captain expects The Three Cheers, but it really does warm a sea weary heart when it happens); And a bunch of other things too, which are harder to put into words.

The Captain's regular First Mate was promoted to the command of her own vessel just weeks prior to departure, so this abrupt change may have also contributed to his state of mind and by extension to the hardness upon himself. He keeps her in mind though, both for her excellent decision making and thoughtfulness in all circumstances, and for the comfort that keeping her in mind affords him.

There is a particular spot from which one can truly take in the entire scope of the vessel and its goings on. The Captain has managed still to keep this spot a secret from all aboard, which is essentially a pretty selfish act, because the view really is a tremendous one, and surely worth sharing. (But maybe

that is just a perk of being the Captain. He has, after all, spent a lot more time on this old heap than anyone else.) There is a moment, not long before the dinner bell one evening, when from this spot the Captain can see all twelve of his shipmates busily going about their various concerns, tasks and experiments. In this moment he experiences a rare and exquisite stillness. He will later reminisce that this moment was his mind at Slack Tide, but nothing so poetic occurs to him then. What does occur to him, not in a wishy-washy or particularly spiritual way, is that he feels quite fortunate.

Fortunate for each cut and bruise, blister and burn, all healthy and stinging reminders of the day's small failures. Fortunate to be sharing the clock of the tides with these twelve oddballs, each of whom seem to be holding, in waterlogged fingers and under salt-caked hats, their own private and beautiful map for this adventure. And fortunate for the vessel itself, its edges shaped by the slow violence of the sea. All the hardness now gone for a moment, the Captain knows his command only lasts an instant in the long life of this ship, and for this instant he is grateful and fortunate. Very fortunate indeed.