

Poll Pirate **Ron Singer**

Awk awk. Yo ho, ho, mateys, and a baba au awk awk rum! I bet you thought parrots were some kind of awk awk pirate accessory, like wooden legs, eye patches, or those stupid awk awk hats and flags with the old skull-and- awk awk -crossbones.

Well, think again, me awk awk buckos! If you believe that sort of awk awk guano, you're a bird- awk awk -brain, yourself. And you might as well go walk the awk awk plank right now, since you belong in D. Jones' awk awk locker.

And you probably awk awk also believe that the awk awk bilge rat Long John awk awk Silver, was a real pirate. The awk awk fact is, Sheldon awk awk Silver is more of a pirate than Long John awk awk ever was. Ha, ha awk awk! But maybe some awk awk real pirate wore awk awk long johns, rolled up beneath his panta- awk awk -loons.

Yes, the awk awk truth --the awkward awk awk truth-- is that it's all the fault of that awk awk dirty liar (may his awk awk pantaloons catch fire), okay, awk awk, myth-maker, Robert Doofus awk awk Stevenson.

You've all heard of awk awk him, right? Well, okay, the man did sport a big pirati- awk awk -cal mustache. And he did awk awk travel exten-awk awk -sively, but solely for awk awk reasons of awk awk health, eventually so- awk awk --journing in exotic awk awk climes.

Born in awk awk Scotland, RL awk awk S moved around a lot, including to awk awk France, Saranac awk awk Lake, New York, and awk awk Colorado. And then he sailed, awk awk on an awk awk cruise to the South awk awk Pacific, where he met King Kalaka-awk awk -kua of Hawaii.

Then, on to New awk awk Zealand (but not to awk awk Auckland), and so awk awk on, until he reached awk awk Samoa, where he awk awk settled and finally awk awk died.

Samoa, where no real awk awk pirate of awk awk record is known awk awk to have ever set awk awk foot, let alone awk awk lived. It was awk awk here that R. L. awk awk S. settled his entour- awk awk -age, meddled in awk awk politics, and died awk awk in his middle- awk awk -forties.

Now would you awk awk call *that* the life of an awk awk pirate? Sort of, I guess. Peripa-awk awk -tetic, at least.

Let us now awk awk turn to awk awk actual histor- awk awk -ical pirates, **who, to the last awk awk man or woman, awk awk never owned a single awk awk parrot.** Shall I say their awk awk names?

I start with the *awk awk* also rans (or saileds), like Madame *awk awk* Cheng and Calico Jack (aka *awk awk* John Rackam). We note *awk awk* , as well, the *awk awk* better-knowns: Red Beard (aka *awk awk* Barbarossa); Sir Francis *awk awk* Drake (whom Queen Elizabeth the *awk awk* First called “my *awk awk* pirate”);

and the notably *awk awk* brutal Sir Henry *awk awk* Morgan (who became *awk awk* Governor of *awk awk* Jamaica, and went on to *awk awk* pass anti- *awk awk* -pirate laws); and Captain *awk awk* (William) Kidd (who killed one of his *awk awk* mateys with a wooden *awk awk* bucket); and finally, Black- *awk awk* –Beard, himself (aka *awk awk* Edward Teach), who died *circa* 17-*awk awk* -17.

That was *awk awk* just before the *awk awk* end of the so-called *awk awk* Golden Age of Piracy, thereby *awk awk* becoming *awk awk* grist to R. L. *awk awk* Stevenson’s *awk awk* mill, not to *awk awk* mention that of *awk awk* Jack Sparrow (aka *awk awk* Johnny Depp), in *awk awk* “Pirates of the *awk awk* Caribbean.”

Enough of that bilge- *awk awk* -water! Now where does all this eso- *awk awk* –teric infor- *awk awk* -mation leave us actual *awk awk* parrots? With an *awk awk* bum rap, as if we were *awk awk* lovable *awk awk* sidekicks, like those *awk awk* fat guys in *awk awk* oaters. But enough myth-*awk awk* -ologizing. What are *awk awk* parrots really *awk awk* like?

Well, I can only *awk awk* squawk --that is, *awk awk* speak-- for myself. I’m an Antipodes *awk awk* Green Parrot, by name Andrew *awk awk* Walter Kaka (*awk awk*, really: “kaka” is *awk awk* Maori for *awk awk* “parrot”). So please don’t *awk awk* call me “Poll,” especially not “Poll Pirate.”

My call sounds like “kok” *awk awk* “kok kok.” Guess what I *awk awk* eat? *Awk awk* leaves, and if I happen to *awk awk* chance upon some frag- *awk awk* -ments of *awk awk* penguin or other suit-*awk awk* -able avian *awk awk* carrion, why, just like *awk awk* that, I can turn canni- *awk awk* -bal. Hey, why *awk awk* not?

Where do I origi- *awk awk* -nate? New *awk awk* Zealand, but not in Auck *awk awk* land. Guess my height? *Awk awk* about a foot tall (or is it *awk awk* “long”)? Weight? I’ve never set *awk awk* claw or *awk awk* feather on any *awk awk* scale.

Now *awk awk* I’m sure you’ve all been *awk awk* wondering about *awk awk* parrot speech. First, then, that “*awk awk*” I’ve been tormenting *awk awk* you with? It’s a sort of verbal *awk awk* tic with us. Not to get too tech- *awk awk* -nical, but its’s a function of our *awk awk* speech-producing mecha- *awk awk* -nism. Since I’m sure, by now, that you’re sick and *awk awk* tired of all this *awk awk* *awk-awking*, I’ll bid it *awk awk* a fond farewell...

That's better, isn't it? Okay, so here's the skinny on parrot talk, about which you may think you already know a bit. Somewhat like humans who learn no language as their first language, we communicate with you imperfectly, mixing bad parrot with bad human.

Take that iconic utterance, "Polly want a cracker." Besides the absent morpheme, "s," on the end of the verb, we may produce this utterance when we don't even mean it, such as right after you've given us said cracker, or when we know you can't give us one, because you've just said, "Sorry, Polly, we're all out of crackers."

Next point: As you may know, parrots are very emotional. "Egad! I'm dying!" we may declare, seemingly out-of-the-blue. Also, not to be obvious, but we learn the language we hear. As I write this, parrots around the world are speaking, sort of, Eskimo, Finnish, Chinese, Xhosa, *und so weiter*. (My partner –I'll get to him soon—is a polyglot, whose languages include German. I suppose you could call me a Polly-glot.)

Although within narrower limits, we learn language a lot like you do: babbling, imitation, re-enforcement, repetition, the whole nine yardarms. So here's the poop: my species can say anything from "Hello" and "Curse you!" to "It's a rare pleasure to cast eyes upon you once again, my dear friend," and "Why don't you stop pulling my beak, you ignorant, ugly, foul-breathed, fool!" (If my language seems temperate for my stereotypically profane species, I came up in a very proper "Kiwi" family.)

Let's cut to the chase: did you know that parrots play tricks on their so-called masters? Take the clever fellow who pretended to answer the phone. Whenever the sucker rang, the feathered prankster would call out, "I got it," each time using the voice of a different family member. Pretty funny, eh?

Time for a big "Gotcha" of my own! I was just having you on with all that pirate stuff. Yes, Virginia, sometimes, pirates do, indeed, keep parrots –or vice versa. In fact, I, myself, Andrew Walter Kaka, am part of a limited (very) partnership with an industrious Somali pirate-entrepreneur by the name of Abu-Wasa (not the crackers, which this Polly don't want.) Our gross revenues for 2015 were U.S. \$26.3 million, and since we run a very lean operation, our net was \$18.9. How was that possible?

Personnel. Without giving away too much, let's just say my job is to make our tiny crew sound large and formidable. When we board a target vessel, I fly unseen, from crow's nest to brig, from prow to aft, uttering threats and instructions, e.g. "You are surrounded... surrender now, or die... slowly lower your weapons... lock your hands behind your neck... put your hands where I can see them... drop to the deck, suckers!" And, to mask my parrot voice, I use a personal megaphone, tied around my chest. But the hysteria comes through loud and clear –and scary.

Why, then, at the beginning of this business, did I dish out all that *mierde* about parrot-less pirates? Let's just awk awk say I was having a little awk awk fun at your awk awk expense, my anthropo- awk awk --morphic mateys? Well, then, good- awk awk -bye for now!

(1,510 words)

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