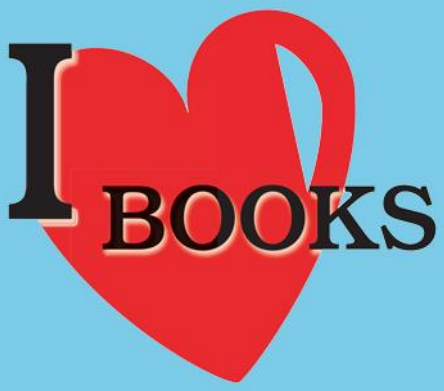


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Opening extract from

Eddy Stone and the Epic Holiday Mash-Up

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The noise that interrupted Eddy Stone's breakfast was like a cow falling off a wardrobe.

"What the—?"

Eddy thought he knew every strange sound in his gran's old seaside cottage – the hot-water tap that coughed like a cat with a furball, the fizzle of the dodgy light switch on the landing, the moaning wind that blew through the crack in his bedroom wall. But this was something new – a deep bellow and a heavy THUMP

that rippled the milk in his cereal bowl and rattled the cups on the kitchen dresser as it rumbled from the floorboards to the rafters. He didn't know it yet, but that noise meant that nothing was ever going to be the same again for Eddy.

Or for the little lump of plaster on the kitchen ceiling.

For over three hundred years, the little lump of plaster had quietly hung around, while generations of people had gathered beneath it to laugh and to argue, to choke on stray fishbones, or to ask if there was any more custard. Dogs had snaffled scraps from unguarded plates, cats had chased mice between chair legs, and on one rainy Thursday afternoon a boy called Walter had removed all his clothes, painted himself green, and told his mother that when he grew up he was going to be a frog. In all that time, the little lump of plaster had done absolutely nothing.

But today was going to be different. Today, this was going to be the little lump of plaster that *could*.

Over the years, it had gradually loosened its grip on the boards above, until only a crust of paint and a smear of old cobweb were holding it in place. And this was its moment. With that mighty thump that had so surprised Eddy, the little lump of plaster broke free.

Down it tumbled.

Down towards excitement.

Down towards adventure.

Down towards Eddy Stone's head.

"Ouch!"

Eddy reached up to rub the bump where something had just…

"Urgh!"

The something landed in his cereal, splashing milk onto a picture of a galleon in the book that he was reading.

"Oh, great."



What Eddy wanted for his breakfast was a delicious bowl of Choccy Puffs (with extra added vitamins). What Eddy now had for his breakfast was a not-so-delicious bowl of Choccy Puffs with extra added ceiling – a dirty great chunk of it, oozing flakes of paint and matted strands of spider's web. The milk had already turned a dingy, dodgy shade of grey.

The little lump of plaster's adventure was over. But if you had asked it whether that brief moment had been worth waiting for, what do you think it would have said?

It would have said nothing at all, of course. Because it was just a little lump of plaster.

This summer holiday is rubbish, Eddy thought. *Why did Mum and Dad have to send me here? I've only been in Tidemark Bay for four days and it's a total disaster. I mean, could it get any worse?*

The world took a second to come up with an answer to Eddy's question. And then half the plaster on the kitchen ceiling fell down.

Eddy peered through a cloud of dust at the bare beams and exposed floorboards overhead. And then, he heard the voice. A deep, stranger's voice, where no

voice should be, singing about a-heaving and a-hauling where the south winds blow-oh! It wasn't a some*thing* that had made that great thump, Eddy realized. It was a some*one*.

Ever so slowly, and ever so quietly, Eddy crept upstairs. The singing was coming from the bathroom.

Ever so carefully, and ever so gently, Eddy pushed open the bathroom door. The someone was sitting in the bath – with no water, and no bubbles, but with a full set of clothes. Very unusual clothes.

Ever so "Oh my gosh!" and ever so "What the heck?" Eddy stood and stared. It was a pirate.

There was a pirate sitting in the bath.

"But. What? How? Wow!" Words came tumbling and jumbling out of Eddy's mouth – along with a fountain of half-chewed bits of Choccy Puffs.

The pirate took off his three-cornered hat and blew the bits of Choccy Puffs away. Then he scraped the bits of Choccy Puffs out of his tangled black beard, flicked the bits of Choccy Puffs off the gold braid on his green coat, picked the bits of Choccy Puffs out of the tops of his long black boots, and brushed the bits of Choccy Puffs from his red and white striped breeches.

"Are you really a pirate?" asked Eddy.

The pirate coughed a single Choccy Puff from his throat and spoke in the slow voice you might use if you were trying to explain long division to a particularly stupid goat.

"No," he said. "I'm a fairy princess! Swab me down with a bucket of bilge water, what does it look like?"

"Pirate," said Eddy.

"And now that's sorted," said the pirate, "I've got a question for you. How can anyone sleep in this metal bed? It's harder than a stale ship's biscuit."

"It's not a bed," said Eddy, "it's a bath."

"Stinky fish!" shouted the pirate, jumping up and banging his head on the sloping bathroom ceiling. "I swore that I'd never set foot – or any other bit of me – in one of those things. 'T'ain't natural."

He hopped over the side of the bath.

"Be careful where you put your feet," Eddy warned him, "the floorboards are a bit iffy."

But he was too late. The pirate's left boot hit the floor. The floorboard gave a soggy shrug and got out of the way. The boot carried on straight through, followed by the rest of the pirate's leg.



"Look out below!" shouted the pirate. "That wood is as rotten as last Christmas's kippers. How did you let it get so bad?"

Eddy perched on the side of the bath. "Not me. It's my gran's place. My mum and dad said they were far too busy at work to look after me all summer, so they packed me off here to get rid of me. They said I'd have lots of fun and fresh sea air. Well that was a load of rubbish. There's no fun – not unless you count the local kids throwing sticks and apple cores at me. But Mum and Dad were right about the fresh sea air – there's masses of it blowing in through the missing windowpanes. My gran has let the cottage get into a

terrible state," explained Eddy, picking at a patch of rust on the bath. "I think the whole place is going to fall down soon."

"And this floor is making an early start," said the pirate, struggling to pull his leg out of the hole.

"Gran doesn't even notice how bad it is," said Eddy. "She doesn't notice anything these days. She's got really scatty. Last night she put gravy granules in my hot milk instead of cocoa. Sweet and meaty – urgh! I can still taste it. But even if she did notice how bad the house is, I don't see what she could do. Putting all this right would cost a fortune."

"A fortune!" the pirate yelled. "That must be why I'm here! To save this cottage!"

With an almighty heave, he freed his leg from the hole in the floor – and from his boot, which stayed behind, dangling down into the kitchen below. He toppled onto his back, legs in the air. A grubby big toe, sticking out of the end of a moth-eaten sock, wafted under Eddy's nose.

"I had a dream last night," the pirate continued, "and that dream told me that I would meet someone who had need of a fortune, then set out on a quest. And in

my dream I found a map. And not just any old map – a treasure map!"

"Treasure?" said Eddy. "I like the sound of that!"

"And not just any old treasure map. Oh, no. A word appeared in my dream, a word written across the sky in letters of fire. And that word was a name. And that name was…" The pirate leaned forward and said in a long, low whisper, "…Grungeybeard! And I don't need to tell you what that means."

"Well," said Eddy, "you could give me a clue."

"You can't mean you've never heard of the richest pirate who ever was?"

"I've read loads of books about ships and pirates," said Eddy, "and I'm sure none of them ever mentioned a Grungeybeard."

"Never mind your books. We are going to find his buried treasure!"

"We!" said Eddy. "You mean – me?"

"I'll need a good cabin boy. Instead of having no fun here, why don't you come and have buckets of fun with me? Have you got the guts and the gumption for an adventure? And if we're really lucky, maybe we'll get to fire a massive cannon and explode a few things while

we're about it."

"Adventure! Treasure! Explosions! No more beefy cocoa! You bet!" said Eddy. Suddenly the summer holiday didn't seem so terrible after all. "Oh, but I suppose I'd better ask my gran first."