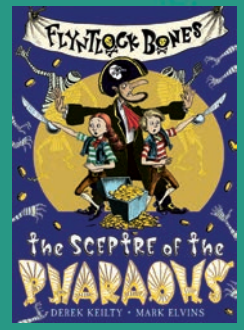




The Countess of Bohemia's jewels have been stolen by a ghost. Not just any old ghost, but the ghost of Captain Scarletbeard, the scariest pirate who ever lived! Flynn and the crew of the Black Hound descend the murky depths to Davy Jones's Locker, where they uncover a ghoulish plot that threatens the survival of the Seven Seas...



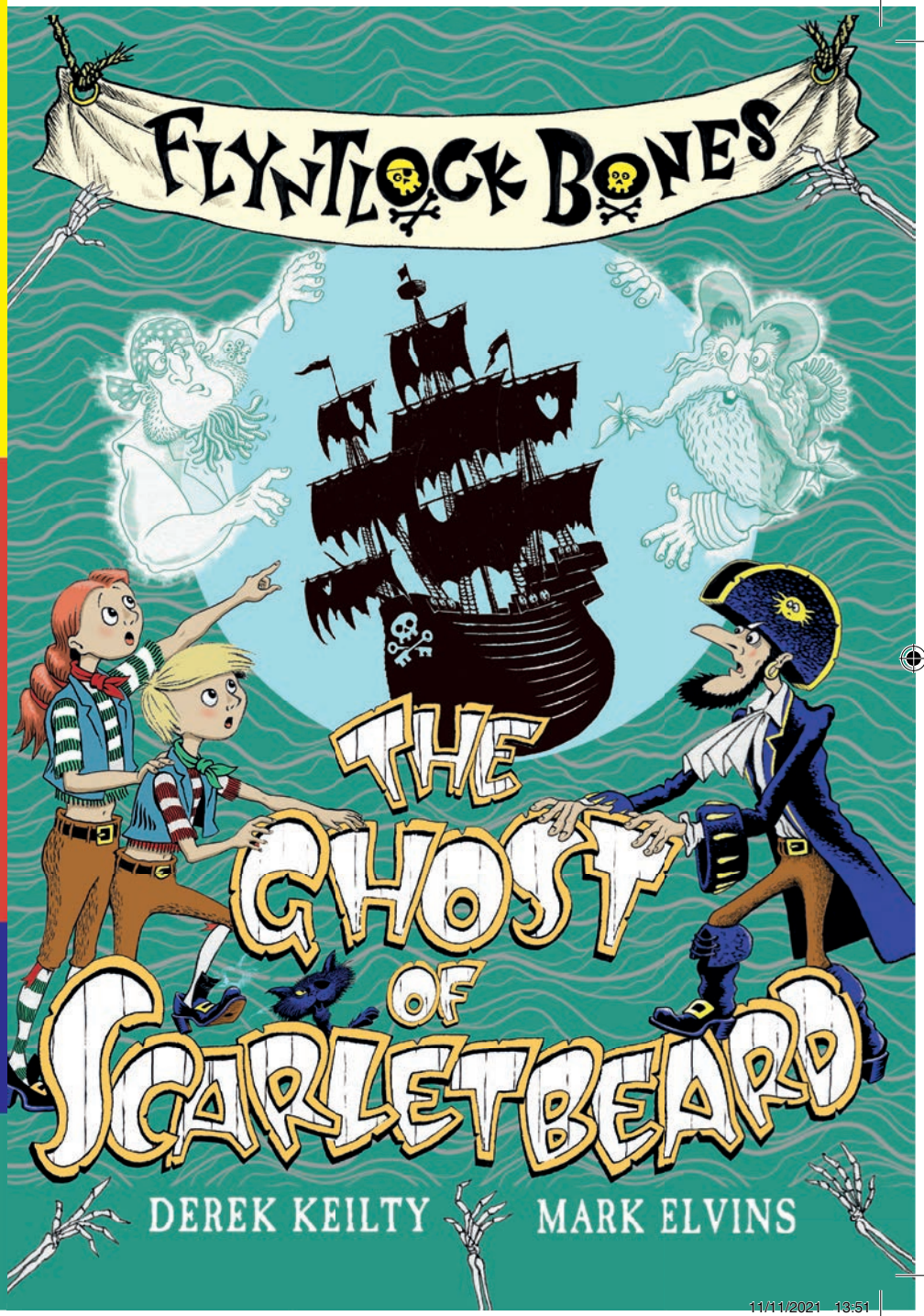
The Sceptre of the Pharaohs was longlisted for the **Spark! School Book Awards**, nominated for the **Fantastic Book Awards** and was chosen as one of *The Times* 'Best 20 Children's Summer Reads'.



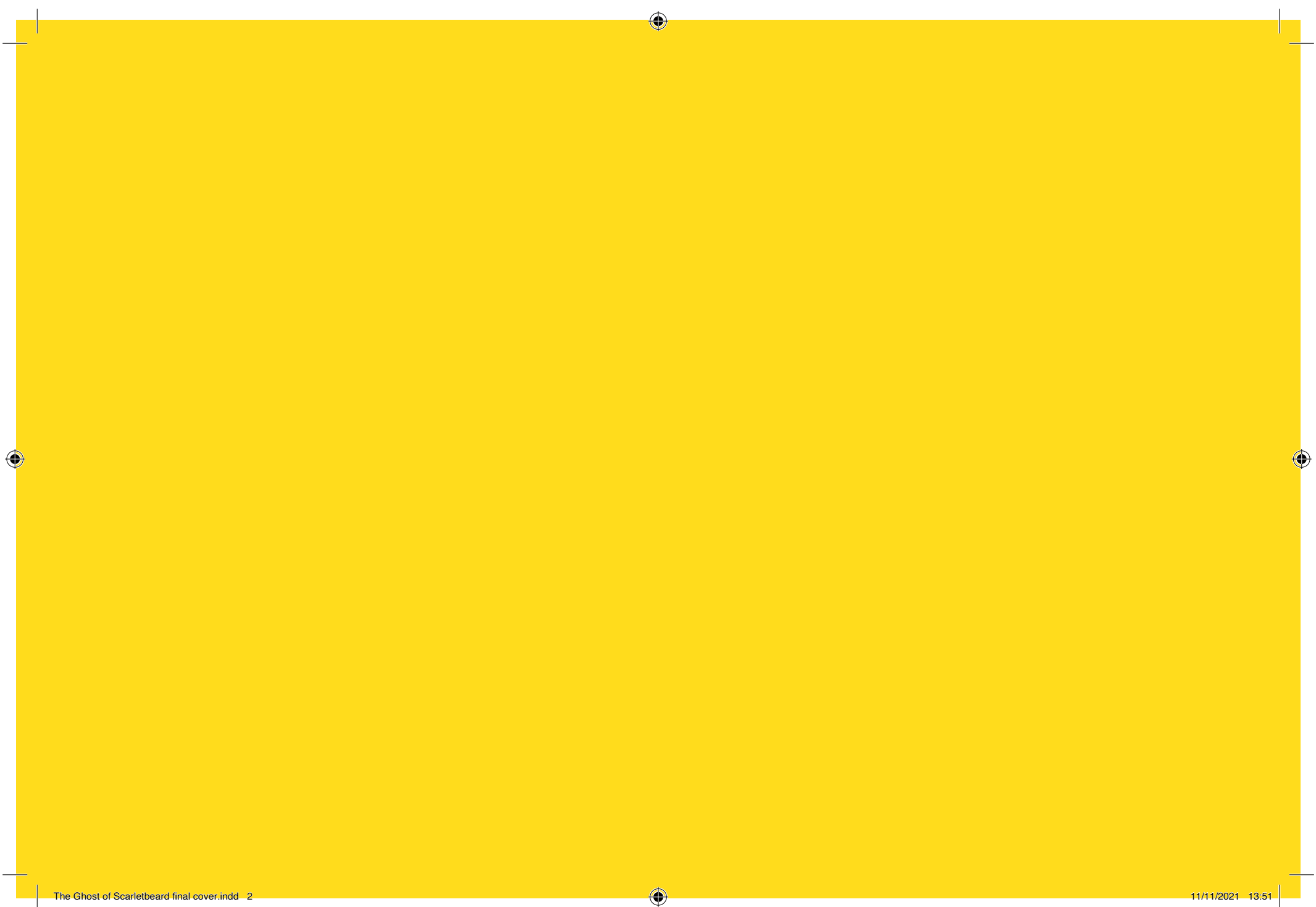
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THE
GHOST
OF
SCARLETBEARD



For my wife, Elaine
D.K.

For my mum
M.E.

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THE GHOST OF SCARLETBEARD

By Derek Keilty

Illustrated by Mark Elvins



Scallywag Press Ltd
LONDON



The Seven Seas

Frozen Sea

Boy Islands

Baskerville

Bellgrayan Sea

Bellgranya

Gypsum Sea

Isle of Gut

Skull Sea

Dire Straits

Crystal Island

Mystic Sea

Skull Cove

Thornbury Hall 2

Bohemia

Cutlass Sea

Floating Palace

Shark Sea

Calcutlass Island

Sharktooth Island

Gallery of Characters

The Crew of The Black Hound



Flynn



Red



Cap'n Watkins

The rest



The Countess of Bohemia



Marley



Queen Zora



Briggs



Grethel



Hudson



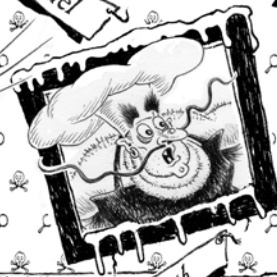
Molly Macbeth



Davy Jones



Scratch



Mogdrod



The Twins



Fishbreath



Skull Cove

Whirlpool

Davy Jones' Locker

The Flying Dutchman

The Sniggering Shark

The Eighth Sea



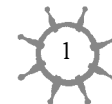


CHAPTER ONE
A VISITOR

Rumble! Splosh! Creak!

The Black Hound rocks and creaks in Bohemia Harbour as a ferocious sun beats down. Behind the harbour, the bustling town of Bohemia sprawls up the hillside, with its huddled houses and tall, colourful domes.

On deck, Captain Long John Watkins is pacing up and down. He is stroking his pointy chin,





the way he always does
when he is fretting
about something.
Red and I are
swabbing the deck,
though truth be
told, neither of our hearts are
much in it. We're worried too.

'Ya checked the crow's nest for a parrot,
young Flynn?' barks the Captain, for the
umpteenth time this morning.

I straighten up, mop in hand. 'I checked
five minutes ago, Cap'n, an' not so much as
a feather.'

It has been weeks since we last had a
parrot fly in with a new case. The Captain says
it happens from time to time, which is most
unfortunate. Put simply, it means nobody is
missing any booty they need us to find and
bring back. I can't for the life of me think this is

because everything's fine and dandy on the Seven
Seas. Goodness knows, in my time as a cabin
boy aboard the Black Hound, I've met more than
a few crooks and got into some terrible scrapes.
No, I reckon the cases are out there, but we're just
not getting to hear about them. I mention this to
the Captain, and he says I might have a point.

'Supplies are really low,' Red groans. 'I hear
Fishbreath is thinking of putting ship critters
in the grub. Says that pretty soon he's gonna
be serving weevil waffles and crow's nest
soup.' Fishbreath is the ship's cook and has a
reputation for using rather inventive ingredients.

'Long as it's not *rat-atouille!*' I joke, watching
a rat scuttle across the deck.



‘Who goes there?’ Briggs booms, barring his way.

‘Captain Black, sir,’ comes a voice muffled by a beard. ‘I’m a merchant from Bohemia, and I have a business proposition for your captain.’

‘Bring him aboard, Briggs,’ Watkins calls, waving the newcomer onto the ship. ‘I’ll see this gentleman in my cabin. Flynn, fetch us some grog, please.’

The Captain disappears into his cabin while I squeeze two cups of watery grog out of Fishbreath. Even when I tell him it’s the Captain’s orders, he still complains.

As I enter the cabin, the stranger stares at me rudely.

‘Yer cabin boy’s a bit on the scrawny side,’ he remarks.

‘We all are, I’m afraid, Captain Black,’ Watkins answers. ‘Sailing through a bit of a lean patch at the moment, we are.’

The visitor nods. ‘I can well believe it. Actually, that’s why I’m here. I heard a rumour that pirate investigating en’t making so much of a profit these days. Perhaps you might be thinking it’s not such a good career after all.’

Watkins frowns. ‘That’s for me to decide,’ he says. ‘Look, I’m a busy man. What is it you want?’

‘I’ll get to the point,’ Captain Black replies. ‘I’m a merchant sailor in need of a good ship. My own has seen better days, and the Black Hound fits the bill. She’s got some strong, solid timbers in her. I’ll pay you good money.’ The bearded stranger slaps a bag of gold on the table.



My hand quivers as I set down the grog. I notice the Captain eye the gold and fear he might be tempted by it, or even worse, return to his pirating ways. I wait to see how the Captain will respond to this bold offer.

Watkins sighs. ‘The Black Hound en’t for sale, least not that kinda sale, anyways,’ he says. ‘We’ll be setting sail on the Seven Seas as soon as we get a new case.’

Captain Black looks unconvinced. ‘Ya reckon things are gonna pick up, but what if they don’t? And yer skinny crew here just get hungrier?’

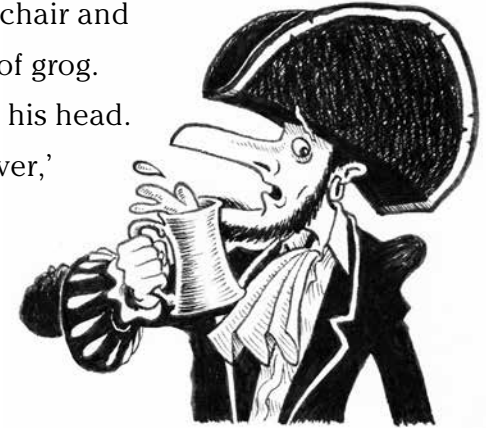
‘The crew and I will be fine,’ Watkins says, irritated. ‘I expect a parrot to fly in with a new investigation any day now.’

But Captain Black won’t leave off. ‘Maybe you’re of a mind to take up pirating again?’ he asks.

The Captain’s cheeks flush, like he is finding all these questions uncomfortable.



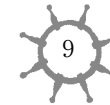
He shuffles in his chair and gulps a mouthful of grog. Finally, he shakes his head. ‘Those days are over,’ he replies. ‘I’m an investigator now, en’t that right, young Flynn?’



Proud to be consulted, I am quick to reply. ‘Aye, Cap’n, yez the finest on the Seven Seas.’

Captain Black turns to me, as if to get me on his side. ‘Maybe young Flynn would rather be a pirate. Have ya ever considered that, boy?’

‘Actually, I’d rather be a pirate investigator,’ I say firmly. I don’t like this stranger, and the more I stare at him, the more I decide there’s something not quite right about him. Unlike the nasty wart on his nose, which is very real, Captain Black’s bushy beard looks... well, fake.



‘What are you staring at, boy?’ he demands.

‘You undercover or something?’ I blurt out.

‘Cos I reckon that’s not a real beard!’

He lunges forward and grabs
my nose, squeezing it hard.

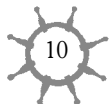
‘Well, maybe that’s not
a real nose.’



‘Ouch!’ I squeal, pulling away.

The stranger laughs. ‘Inquisitive lad you’ve got there, Captain,’ he says, draining his grog before rising to his feet. ‘I reckon that must be why you’ve got him aboard.’

‘He’s clever alright. Fits in just fine with the rest o’ the crew,’ says Watkins, patting me on the shoulder.



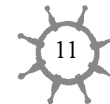
The visitor leers at me, then sighs. ‘Well, if I can’t persuade you, then I’ll not waste any more of your time.’ He walks to the door, then turns for one last try. ‘You’ll be wanting to keep an eye out for that parrot. Maybe I’ll check back in a few weeks, to see if I can change yer mind.’

After the stranger has left, the Captain scratches his head. ‘What a strange conversation,’ he says.

‘Strange person too, if you ask me, Cap’n,’ I say.

‘And an awful disguise. What a beard! You were quite right about that, Flynn. I wonder what he’s hiding from. Got me all unsettled he has, thinking all sorts of things...’

My heart sinks. Has the stranger made the Captain consider a return to pirating? I like the fact we help people. I don’t think it would suit us to be out robbing folks of their booty, instead of finding it for them.





With the Captain in a gloomy mood and not much else going on, Red and I decide to slink off ship for a bit of exercise. We walk along the harbour and watch the fishermen unloading the day's catch from their boats. Seagulls dive for the fish, which are glistening in their nets like silver booty. My tummy starts to rumble as I imagine them

cooking on the coals in Fishbreath's galley.

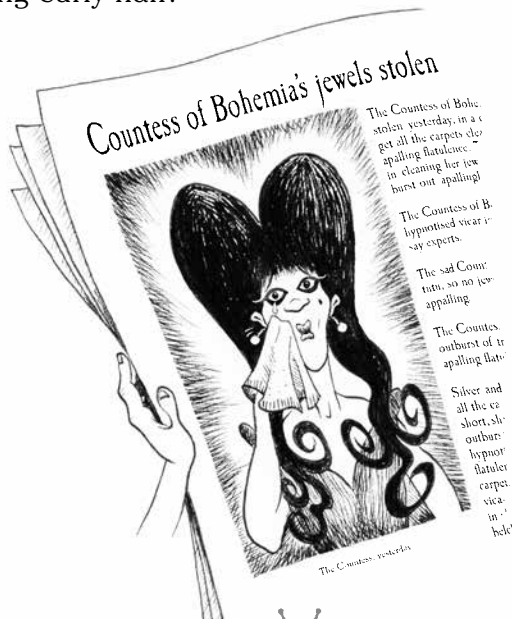
We pass a stall selling cockles, mussels and all kinds of seafood, but this time it's not the fish that catches my eye. There's a newspaper stand in front of the stall, and that's when I spot it. The headline on the front page of the *Bohemia Times*.

'Hang on, Red. Look at this!' I cry.

Red picks up the newspaper and reads the headline out loud.

Red beams. Grethel the sea witch has been teaching her to read on board the Hound, and Red loves to show off her new-found skills.

I lift a copy of the newspaper too, staring at the picture of a forlorn-looking woman with long curly hair.



'Well, I'll be. I don't believe it,' I say.

'You gonna buy those papers?' growls the stallholder. 'This en't a library, y'know.'

'What is it, Flynn?' Red asks, ignoring him. 'Wait a mo, that posh lady does look familiar.' She peers closely at the grainy picture.

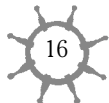
'I remember the Cap'n telling me about a case involving the Countess of Bohemia when I first boarded the Hound,' I say. 'It was his first case as a pirate investigator. D'you remember, Red?'

‘Now you mention it, yes,’ she replies. ‘But what are you thinking?’

I replace the newspaper on the stand, smiling apologetically at the grumpy stallholder.

‘I’m thinking we need to stop hanging about all day on the Hound, waiting for a parrot to arrive. If the countess hired the Cap’n before, then maybe...’

‘There’s a good chance she’ll hire him again!’ Red finishes excitedly. ‘Brilliant, Flynn. We need to get back to tell the Cap’n – and sharpish.’



CHAPTER TWO THE COUNTESS

‘Shiver me timbers!’ gasps the Captain. He is standing on the quarterdeck reading the newspaper. ‘The Countess of Bohemia has had her jewels nicked... again!’ On first hearing the news, he had immediately dispatched Briggs to purchase a copy of the paper, with all but the last of our money.

‘I remember you telling me about the countess when I first came aboard,’ I say.

The Captain smiles. ‘She were the reason

