***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 15:***

# *The Man of the Island*

***Brief Summary:***

* Jim sees a shadow (either monkey or human) jump behind a rock.
* Jim tries to retrace his steps back to the beach and the Hispaniola.
* The dark figure reappears and catches up with Jim.
* Jim is so afraid of Long John Silver that he decides not to call for help; instead, he turns to face the figure.
* Jim is totally surprised when the figure throws himself to his knees as though begging Jim for mercy.
* The figure introduces himself as Ben Gunn. He has been marooned alone on this island for three years, living off oysters, berries, and goat meat. All he wants is a bit of toasted cheese.
* Ben tells Jim that he's become a god-fearing man again after all this time on the island.
* Ben promises Jim that he'll give him riches if he helps him.
* Ben asks Jim if he has come to the island on Flint's ship.
* Jim says no, but some of the men on the ship were Flint's men.
* Ben asks if one of them is a man with one leg, Long John Silver.
* Jim says yes, and Ben asks if he is on Long John Silver's side or not.
* Jim realizes that Ben may be an enemy of Long John Silver, so he explains the whole story of the Hispaniola's voyage.
* Ben promises to help in exchange for 1,000 British pounds of the treasure and free passage home.
* Ben tells Jim that he was sailing with Captain Flint when Flint buried his treasure on this island.
* Somehow Flint managed to murder six sailors single-handedly in order to keep the treasure's burial place secret.
* Billy Bones (the captain at the Admiral Benbow Inn from the early chapters of the novel) and Long John Silver were both on the ship at this time.
* Three years ago, Ben was sailing aboard another ship when they passed this island.
* Ben suggested that they stop and look for Flint's treasure.
* The captain of the boat wasn't happy about it, but the men insisted.
* They spent twelve days looking for the treasure but couldn't find it.
* After wasting almost two weeks, the sailors turned on Ben Gunn.
* They marooned him on the island along with a gun, a spade, and a pickax so that he could keep looking for Flint's treasure by himself.
* Having spent three years on the island by himself, Ben seems to have gone a little nuts.
* Still, he asks Jim to put in a good word for him with Squire Trelawney.
* Jim asks how he's supposed to get back on board the Hispaniola.
* Ben says he has a small boat and suggests that they try using it to row to the Hispaniola after dark.
* Ben and Jim hear the sounds of a fight breaking out.
* They run over quietly to see what's happening.
* They hear the sound of a cannon going off, followed by gunfire.
* There is a pause, then Jim sees the Union Jack (the British flag) flying over the forest.

***Synopsis:***

Fleeing the pirates, Jim sees a human figure in the woods, and he fears that it is a cannibal. Suddenly remembering he is armed, Jim gains courage and walks briskly toward the man, who is hiding behind a tree. Jim asks the man his name, and the man replies that his name is Ben Gunn and that he has been on the island for three years. Jim asks Ben if he was shipwrecked, and Ben answers that he was marooned. Ben speaks in a deranged manner, making many religious allusions. Jim suspects that Ben may be mad.

When Ben asks if the ship moored on the shore is Flint’s, Jim realizes the wild man may have useful information. Jim learns that Ben once served on Flint’s crew and thus knows all the current mutineers. Ben was left behind on the island after a failed treasure hunt three years ago. Jim learns that Flint buried his treasure and killed the six men who helped him bury it. Ben also mentions that he made a boat, which he hides under a white rock. He assures Jim that he can locate the treasure in return for safe passage home, and guides Jim to his dwelling. On the way there, Jim is startled to see the Union Jack, the gentleman sailor’s flag, proudly waving in the distant woods.

***Notes:***

Jim is not sure who or what is hiding in the trees. He thinks it might be a cannibal or a monster, so he turns back toward the pirates, reasoning that a danger he understands is better than one he does not. The mysterious figure follows Jim, hiding behind one tree after another. He catches several more glimpses of it and becomes sure that it is a human being. He also remembers that he is carrying a pistol. This makes him feel a bit more confident, so he decides to approach the strange person. The person turns out to be a former sailor, Ben Gunn, who was marooned—left alone to fend for himself or die—on the island three years ago. Ben used to be a member of Captain Flint’s crew, so he knew that Flint had buried treasure on this island. After Flint’s death, Ben returned with another group of sailors to look for the gold. When he was unable to find it, his fellow sailors grew angry at him and sailed away without him. He has been alone, living on goats and oysters, ever since. He says he is hungry for “Christian diet” and asks hopefully if Jim has any cheese. Jim does not, but he promises to give Ben a piece of cheese if they ever get back on board the Hispaniola. Jim tells Ben about his adventures with Long John Silver. Ben is scared when he hears that many of Flint’s former men are on the island. Ben knows the pirates will kill him if they see him, so he offers to fight on Jim’s side in exchange for a share of the treasure and a ride home. Jim says he is sure his friends will accept this arrangement. The group is planning to share the treasure equally in any case, and they need more men who can fight and sail. When Jim says he does not know how to get back to the Hispaniola without getting murdered by mutineers, Ben suggests using a little boat he has built. During this conversation, they hear the sound of a cannon. The battle has begun. Jim, hoping to see what is going on, leads Ben back toward the pirates. As they walk, Ben talks nonsense, a habit that he seems to have developed in his time alone on the island. Amid the gunshots, Jim sees a flag raised above the woods. It is the British flag, the Union Jack.

***Analysis Ch 15:***

In his flight from the pirates (Chapter 15, "The Man of the Island") Jim encounters a wild, ragged Englishman, half-crazy, who says he is Ben Gunn, marooned on the island for three years. He has been living on goats, berries, and oysters; he asks for a piece of cheese. Speaking knowingly of the pirates, Ben Gunn convinces Jim (almost) that he wants to be of help to the squire's party in return for passage back to England — and that he'll be able to help. He tells Jim that he was part of Flint's crew when the treasure was buried, and was marooned by later shipmates, to whom he had told the story, when they were unable to find the treasure. Gunn also says that he is rich, a statement he does not explain and which Jim apparently takes as more of the man's almost incomprehensible raving. But just as Gunn has told Jim where his boat is hidden, by which he says they may make their way to the ship after dark, they hear cannon fire from the ship, then small arms fire, and then, soon, Jim sees the British flag flying on the island over the tops of trees.

In this part, the reader's first concern is to get a clear picture of the island's geography and the ship's position in that context. Much of this is discussed in Chapter 17 as Silver explains the chart to Smollett, and more is discussed in Chapter 18. Treasure Island, as Jim's description of Billy Bones' chart shows it in an earlier chapter, is a roughly rectangular or oval piece of land, narrower at the northern and southern ends than in the middle, and about five miles wide by nine miles from north to south. The ship has approached it from the northeast at the end of Part II. The three hills that the men see at that time are called after the three masts of a ship as seen from off the bow, "Fore," "Main," and "Mizzen"; the central one, "Mainmast," is also called "The Spy-Glass" because it is the tallest and it was from here, Silver says, that a watch was kept when earlier pirates stopped at the island. During the night, the Hispaniola continues to sail in a southwesterly direction, so that when Jim wakes in the morning he sees the eastern shore of the island from a point somewhat south of its center.

Captain Smollett, following Silver's direction, has decided to go to the southern tip of the island, which is separated by a strait a little less than a mile wide from an islet (called "Skeleton Island"); the strait is so shallow that at low tide this islet is all but connected to the main island. Silver says there is a strong current moving westward across the southern end and then moving northward up Treasure Island's western shore, but there is no current in the strait, so it is in the shallow strait that they will take the ship to be anchored. As there is no wind this morning, they cannot sail into the strait. Thus the men have to get in boats and row, towing the ship a few miles farther south, around the southeastern corner of the main island, and then westward into the strait to the anchorage.

When they get to the strait, Silver directs the man at the tiller to steer through the deepest part of this channel; another sailor, taking soundings from the bow to determine the depth of the channel, finds that the water is always deeper than is indicated on the chart, and Silver explains that the ebb tide, as it rushes out, scours the bottom of the channel, carrying some sand with it and deepening the channel slightly each time. Forming a clear picture of all this is useful not only in reading Part 3 but also in later chapters, when the position of the ship changes.

As in Part II, character development is important here. Squire Trelawney has already (in Chapter 17) admitted his foolishness and apologized to Captain Smollett for it, and Smollett for his part has responded by taking part of the responsibility upon himself. Now the captain shows his cool head and good judgment, first by trusting Silver (whom he now knows to be planning a mutiny) to navigate the ship into the anchorage and then by suggesting that Silver take the men ashore, where he believes the sea-cook will do his best to prevent them from beginning the mutiny too soon. Smollett knows that this is in the mutineers' best interest, for they do not have the original chart, which could be destroyed quickly in the event of an immediate uprising, leaving them no better off than they ever were, for they cannot find the treasure on their own. And Smollett trusts Silver to gain control over his men — as no doubt he would do, except that some of the men in the shore party have not yet assented to join the mutiny and, while Silver is trying to persuade one of them, another of the pirates kills a second man. After Alan's scream, obviously a death-cry, no one on the ship can pretend that they do not know the situation, nor can Silver or any of the rest of the pirates delay the revolt any longer.

Jim's impulsive joining of the shore party is necessary for the plot (for he must discover Ben Gunn) and also for the further revelation of Silver's character, as Jim witnesses his cold-blooded killing of the reluctant sailor, Tom. But his action helps to reveal, too, the youthful aspect of Jim's character. His reason for jumping into the boat and going ashore at the last minute seems to be nothing but a combination of curiosity and of simple restlessness. He has been at sea for months, and he is sick of the ship. He knows that the six men he leaves behind (Smollett, the doctor, the squire and his group) will not need him in order to deal, if they must, with the six crewmen left behind by Silver; and he can be sure that Silver will not suspect him even when he runs away from the others as they reach shore, for this is the impulsive action of a boy. Of course, after Alan is killed, Jim, too, can no longer pretend not to know what's going on.

Jim's impulsive action also foreshadows a later, similar decision he makes for apparently similar motives — restlessness, curiosity, and a simple dislike of being confined. His leaving of the ship now is not as serious or (as the reader may see it) as dangerous as his act of escape that comes in Part V, but it is necessary in order that his later impulsive decision seem credible and in character.

An important new character is introduced here — Ben Gunn, the marooned man left on the island three years before by vindictive shipmates whom he has told about Flint's treasure but who cannot find it. Ben, a pirate himself when he sailed with Flint, has in his solitude returned to the piety of his youth; his mother warned him long ago (he tells Jim) that evil ways would bring him to grief, and he sees that they certainly have. Ben has gone a little crazy in these three years, but he is still shrewd enough to see a way for him to get off the island with some of the treasure and to be treated "liberally" by those he helps to find it. He does not lose any time in arranging to negotiate his return to England and his reward. And Ben's claim that he is rich, which Jim ignores here, gives the reader (although not Jim, apparently) a clue to a mysterious circumstance that puzzles both Jim and Silver in a later chapter.

rolling scuppers under . . . Scuppers are openings in the sides of the ship that allow water to run off the deck; the Hispaniola's position and motion of the sea are causing it to roll back and forth sideways until the scuppers are under water.

booms spars extending from the masts to hold the bottoms of the sails outstretched.

blocks pulleys or systems of pulleys (in this case, for manipulating the sails).

manufactory factory; manufacturing plant. (The sort of factory Jim may have had in mind, in the eighteenth century, would have been something like a fabric mill, whose heavy looms operated with much noise and shaking.)

backstay a stay (heavy rope or cable used for support) extending aft (toward the rear) from a masthead to the side or stern of a vessel.

the ship [had to be] warped . . . To warp a ship is to move it by hauling on a line fastened to a pile, dock, anchor, and so on; in this case, the lines were fastened to the ship's boats and the ship hauled by its oarsmen.

conned the ship . . . To conn a ship is to direct its movements, specifically by giving directions to the helmsman, who operates the tiller and actually steers the ship.

the man in the chains . . . the crewman using fathoming lines to measure the depth of the water on either side of the ship's bow.

a strong scour with the ebb . . . To scour is to wash or clear as by a swift current of water; here the ebb (outgoing) tide is very strong and has cleared away a channel deeper than it was when the chart was drawn.

grog diluted alcoholic liquor, especially rum.

pikes weapons, formerly used by soldiers, each consisting of a metal spearhead on a long wooden shaft.

we'll fight the ship . . . we'll fight from the ship, using its weaponry.

gaskin a legging or gaiter (a cloth or leather covering for the instep and ankle).

by the stone A stone is a British unit of weight equal to fourteen pounds; hence, Jim is saying Ben Gunn may have all the cheese he wants.

catechism a handbook of questions and answers for teaching the principles of a religion.

chuck farthen on the blessed gravestones Chuck-farthing is a game, usually called "penny-pitch" in the United States, in which small coins are tossed or chucked to bank off a wall or obstacle of some kind, with the player whose coin lands closest to the obstacle winning and taking the others. Ben Gunn is saying his career in vice began with this mild form of gambling, apparently using gravestones in a churchyard as backboards. (Later, in a conversation with Livesey, Silver will use "playing chuck-farthing with my life" to mean gambling with his life.)

clove hitch a kind of knot used to fasten a rope around a pole, spar, or another rope; used figuratively here, it means a tight spot, a very difficult situation from which there seems to be no escape.

Union Jack the national flag of the United Kingdom.

***Critical Study:***

Still terrified from this recent-witness of the murders, Jim catches sight of a dark, shaggy creature and doesn't know if it is a human or an animal. Jim decides that he is more afraid of the creature than of the pirates, and so begins to make his way back to the general directions of the boats. Unfortunately, when he goes to make his retreat, the creature runs and catches up with him. Soon, Jim realizes that he is actually a man and for some reason, that makes him feel a bit better. Realizing that he can protect himself with his pistol, he walks towards the man who falls to his knees before Jim.

Jim soon discovers that the man, who is dressed in rags, name is [Ben Gunn](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#ben-gunn) and that he has been alone on the island for three years, marooned by fellow pirates to live or die. A Christian (he makes very clear), Gunn is extremely excited to see another human being and touches Jim and looks at him with pleasure. Finally, he proclaims to Jim that he is extremely rich.

Jim explains to Gunn that Flint is dead, and then also tells the strange an the predicament that the honest men on the ship is, facing mutineers led by the dreaded Long John Silver. Scheming, Ben asks that if Jim thinks that the squire will give him a thousand pounds and passage back to civilization if he agrees to help them. Excited, Jim reports that all men who participate will receive a share of the treasure and they will most certainly need men on the return journey.

Satisfied with this assurance, Gunn tells the young narrator that he was aboard Flint's ship along with Billy Bones and Long John Silver, and was with them when they buried the treasure. Later, on a different pirate ship, Gunn convinced those with him to land on the deserted island and search for Flint's treasure. After only 12 days, the men quit and left Gunn stranded, with only a musket, spade, and pickaxe.

Luckily, Gunn tells Jim that he has built a boat and that they could use it in order to try and get to the Hispanolia after dark. Unfortunately, the roar of a cannon interrupts their conversation, and perceptively, Jim realizes that the fight between the honest men and the pirates has begun. Gunn and Jim head towards the shore, while Gunn shows Jim how to stay beneath the cover of the trees. On the way towards the shore, they pass a cemetery, where Flint has buried his victims. At the conclusion of the chapter, Jim hears some gun shots and then sees that a British flag has been raised on land.

The humor by Ben Gunn provides comic relief in the middle of the novel, a much needed break from the stressful situation of the young Jim Hawkins dealing with the pirates, and the many deaths and cunning behavior that has been witnessed by the narrator. By using spellings that are incorrect (for example, cemetery for cemetery or chapling for chaplin), Stevenson has Gunn mispronounce words, which makes him a less-serious aspect of the novel. Another example is having the strange man fall down at the sight of Jim, or making comments (when talking about his Christian background), that he could recite his catechism so fast that you "couldn't tell one word from another," making fun of some priests who would do the same thing.

Once again, the description of the island in this chapter is one of the highlights of the book. The particularity of Stevenson's description has caused many critics to claim that it is one of the "significant contributions" to the desert island' myth that has haunted English literature since the publication of [Robinson Crusoe](https://www.gradesaver.com/robinson-crusoe) in 1719. It has the ideals of all desert islands: remote, mysterious, isolated from human contact. [Treasure Island](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island), like William Golding [Lord of the Flies](https://www.gradesaver.com/lord-of-the-flies), John Fowles' [The Magus](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-magus), or H.G. Well's [The Island](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-island) of Doctor Moreau, has the ability to place the characters in a setting where they can be seen in isolation, and thus explore their inner strength. The effect is to focus the reader's attention on to a limited number of individuals confined within a finite geographical area (the island, the inn, or the boat) and all extraneous influences are removed. Thus, when reading the book, the characters are suspended in space and time and the reader can peer into another world.

Continuing another theme of the novel, Ben Gunn again can be viewed as a surrogate father for Jim Hawkins. He rescues him from the unknown of the island and provides direction, all the time, however, the limitation of this father figure is that he is a practical joker. In this case, however, this is precisely the behavior that Jim needs, someone to make him laugh and forget the horrific events that he has witnessed on the island.

***Critical Analysis:***

Someone or something is following Jim. When he first spies the creature, he's unsure if it is a bear, a man, or a monkey. Remembering that he has a gun, he confronts the creature, who is indeed a man. In a voice "like a rusty lock," he says his name is Ben Gunn and he's been marooned on this island for three years.

Gunn explains that he was a member of Flint's crew, sailing aboard the *Walrus*, when Flint buried his treasure on the island. Flint took six men ashore with him to help, but returned alone, having murdered the others. Gunn goes on to say that he later came across the island while serving on another ship. He told his shipmates about the treasure, but, though they searched for 12 days, no treasure was found. Furious, his shipmates left Gunn marooned with only a musket, a spade, and a pickaxe. He also discloses that he is rich.

Jim assures Gunn that Flint is dead, but his old crew, including Silver, is here and after the treasure. He explains his predicament, and Gunn promises to help him in return for some of the treasure and safe passage home.

Suddenly, the thunder of a cannon and responding gunfire alerts Jim that fighting has broken out. Jim and Gunn set off, running for the shore.

Further consequences of greed are highlighted when Jim meets Ben Gunn: isolation and madness. Gunn was a participant in the greedy plundering of ships and settlements that built up Flint's treasure. Later, he is marooned when his new shipmates' lust for gold is not satisfied. Now, he hints that he is rich, which suggests that he has found Flint's treasure, but it clearly is useless to him on an island. Half-mad with loneliness, he will give up the gold for safe passage home to England and a bite of toasted cheese.

Ben Gunn is one of several characters—first the doctor, then the squire, then Silver, and now Gunn—who take a liking to Jim, and in a sense adopt him. Gunn blesses Jim for being the first to find him, calls him a good boy, and swears, with all his riches, that he'll make a man of him.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

From the side of the hill, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) has caught sight of a dark, shaggy figure. He’s now cut off on both sides, and [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) suddenly seems less terrifying than this unknown figure. Little by little, the man approaches, and then at once falls to his knees and clasps his hands in front of Jim.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Caught between two equally frightening figures, Jim finds the unknown to be even more terrifying than the known. But the stranger’s gesture of supplication helps to reassure Jim of his harmlessness.

***Summary part 2:***

The man says he’s named [Ben Gunn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn), and hasn’t spoken to a “Christian” in three years. He is ragged, clothed in tatters. He says he’s been marooned—a common punishment, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) knows, for pirates—and has since lived on goats, berries, and oysters. He begs Jim for a piece of cheese, which he’s been dreaming about. Jim promises it if he can ever get back aboard.

***Analysis Part 2:***

“Maroon” is the term for abandoning someone, on an island, for instance, while the rest of the ship continues on its way. Ben Gunn looks wild, but it’s clear that he hasn’t forgotten many elements of his former life that he once treasured.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Ben Gunn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn) tells [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) that he had a pious mother, though you couldn’t tell it from his appearance, and from his stay on the island he’s learned once again to be pious and believe in Providence. Now, with Jim’s arrival, he swears to be good. He also whispers to Jim that he’s rich, and that he’ll reward Jim for finding him. He asks if Jim is on [Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint)’s ship: Jim decides to tell the truth and says he’s not, but some of Flint’s crew are aboard—including a man with one leg. At this Ben gasps, but he tells Jim to trust him.

***Analysis Part 3:***

It appears that Ben Gunn is a kind of reformed pirate, a change explained in this passage by his newfound religious faith. The suggestion about Gunn’s wealth passes, for now, unnoticed (or perhaps taken for insane). And like Billy Bones, Gunn too finds Silver terrifying—but now, months later, Jim is finally equipped to understand why.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Ben](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn) tells [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) that he was in [Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint)’s ship when the treasure was buried by him and six seamen. Flint paddled back from shore to the ship, and had murdered all six. Then, three years ago, Ben Gunn was in another ship when they saw Treasure Island: for twelve days the crew looked for the treasure, but never found it—finally, the crew abandoned him, telling him to find Flint’s money for himself. Now, Gunn asks Jim to tell the [squire](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/squire-trelawney) that Gunn is more a real gentleman than a “gentleman of fortune,” and that most of the time he spent on the island was taken up with an important, confidential matter (though Jim can’t understand what he’s talking about).

***Analysis Part 4:***

Ben Gunn begins to explain his history and situation to Jim. It seems that the hunt for Flint’s treasure is not a new one: Gunn too knew about it, and like both the pirates and their enemies, was equally committed to discovering it. Now, though, Gunn seems most eager to convince Jim that he shouldn’t face punishment back in England for his former acts. But it seems Gunn still has a few secrets to divulge, even if Jim can’t quite understand their implications.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) asks how he’ll get back aboard: [Gunn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn) says he’s built a small boat himself and keeps it under the white rock. Suddenly they hear the sound of a cannon, and Jim races towards the anchoring spot, crying out that the fighting has begun.

***Analysis Part 5:***

While Jim has grown afraid of Silver and the other mutineer pirates, he still wants to be in the thick of the battle, more so than he is interested in learning Gunn’s secrets.