

Piracy

Matthew Baker

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I buried the chest there, alone in the moonlight on the beach. A shadowy figure in a black hat with wild dark hair and a gnarled tangled beard, wearing a baggy black trenchcoat over a black shirt and some black pants and black combat boots, digging with a shovel in the sand. American pirate. I'd been carrying the gold in that chest for a decade. A cursed pirate treasure. Almost ten thousand bitcoins total. Binary doubloons plundered from what had once been the most notorious black-market site on the net. Treasure stolen from other pirates. Rogues and smugglers and bandits and thieves. A decade earlier that treasure had already been worth over one million dollars. A decade later that treasure was now valued at over one billion dollars. A legendary fortune. I would've been one of the richest people on the planet if I could've exchanged those BTC for USD without getting v&, and there had been a time when I'd believed that was possible, when I'd believed crypto was anonymous, when I'd believed crypto was incognito, when I'd believed crypto was untraceable, when I'd been that naive. The treasure I'd stolen was cursed with a hex. Ultimately every link in the blockchain was traceable. Until the day that America ceased to exist, America's soldiers would be hunting for the treasure in that chest, ready to hang whoever was in possession.

By daybreak the chest was buried. I sank to the sand, sitting there alone on the beach under an indigo sky, trembling with exhaustion. My nails were rimmed with dirt and my

fingers were streaked with dust and the palms of my hands were stinging, scraped raw with blisters from the handle of the shovel, smudged with blood, and my shirt was sticky with sweat and my pants were damp with sweat and my boots were spattered with mud. I was breathing. I became aware of the briny scent of the breeze. Saltwater and guano and barnacles and mussels and kelp. The sky became violet and then pink and then orange and then a bright radiant gold as the sun rose above the glittering sea. Waves splashed ashore, surging in ripples across the sand before streaming back into the sea, glimmering. Parakeets were chirping. Without the crypto, I was now in possession of exactly \$539. I was thirsty. I reached into a pocket for the canteen. I twisted the lid off. I drank, gulping some water down, grunting. I screwed the lid on. I slipped the canteen back into a pocket. The water was cold and fresh and pure. I could feel drops of water dripping from the gnarled clumps of my beard. Drink up, me hearties. I glanced back at the sea, thinking about something Anakata had once said, thinking about something Nachash had once said, thinking about something Drunkfux had once said, then suddenly laughing, remembering Dread Pirate Roberts's book club. The glorious absurdity. Wondering what Avunit was doing at that exact moment. Far out on the sea a white-sailed boat was drifting through the shimmers of sunlight on the water. A seagull soared past the cove. A seagull flapped past the cove. Waves splashed ashore. I remembered the hotel had a complimentary breakfast. Bacon charred to a crisp. Fried tomatoes. Roasted potatoes. Mango. Lychee. Guava. Papaya. Rice pudding with coconut. I remembered the hotel had an onsen. I remembered the hotel had a sauna. I remembered how the concierge with the septum ring had flirted with me the night before, faintly blushing while activating a keycard, chatting about impressionism. I was happy. Yo-ho. I rose from the sand, humming a tune in the key of C/C#/C++, strolling back off down the beach with the shovel, hoping that someday, in some future century or some future millennium when those bitcoins would finally be

safe to claim, that treasure would be discovered by another hacker. H/P/V/C. I decided to leave a map behind. A map that only another hacker would know how to read.

About The Author

Matthew Baker is the author of the graphic novel *The Sentence*, the story collections *Why Visit America* and *Hybrid Creatures*, and the children's novel *Key Of X*. Digital experiments include the temporal fiction "Ephemeral," the interlinked novel *Untold*, the randomized novel *Verses*, and the intentionally posthumous *Afterthought*.

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