



THE HAUNTED SEAS

1 Beyond the comfort and familiarity of our homes, the world is filled with many bizarre, unexplainable things. Our oceans are no strangers to such mysteries. For centuries sailors have told tales about gigantic monsters from the deep and of beautiful women who lure men to a watery death. But it is in hushed tones that they tell the eeriest tale — that of the ghost ship.

Ghost ship is the name for any boat or ship

that is found floating in the ocean without any crew or passengers. There are usually no signs of a fight. It is as if everyone on board simply vanished.

2 In the past, the appearance of a ghost ship was a sign of bad luck. Sailors were terrified that the ship had a crew of demons and dead pirates who would try and kidnap living people for evil purposes. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a famous British poet, captured this horror

in his poem *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which was first published in 1797. Another classic example of a fictional ghost ship is *The Flying Dutchman*, a doomed vessel that has appeared in poems, plays and even films throughout the years.

3 Ghost ships exist in reality as well, the most famous one being the *Mary Celeste*. She was found on December 14th, 1872, floating about 1000 km west of Portugal. The crew of another ship, *Dei Gratia*, spotted her tattered sails and sent two sailors on board to investigate. While they found that water had filled a lot of the cabins, the ship wasn't in danger of sinking. Her crew must have left in a hurry however, because food was still lying out for a meal. Only the lifeboat was missing. The captain's log revealed his last entry was written eleven days before the arrival of the *Dei Gratia*.

4 To this day no one really knows what happened to the *Mary Celeste's* captain, Benjamin Briggs, or the rest of the crew, but there are many imaginative tales. The most famous tale is by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, who added gruesome details such as a bloody cutlass and a kettle of tea that was still hot — evidence that someone else had been on board within the hour.

5 Even in the modern age of computer networks, satellites and high-powered radio communication, nautical mysteries such as these still occur. Two recent ghost ships both appeared in 2006.

The first was found floating in the Gulf of Carpentaria, to the north of Australia in March. Known only as the *Jian Seng*, coastguards



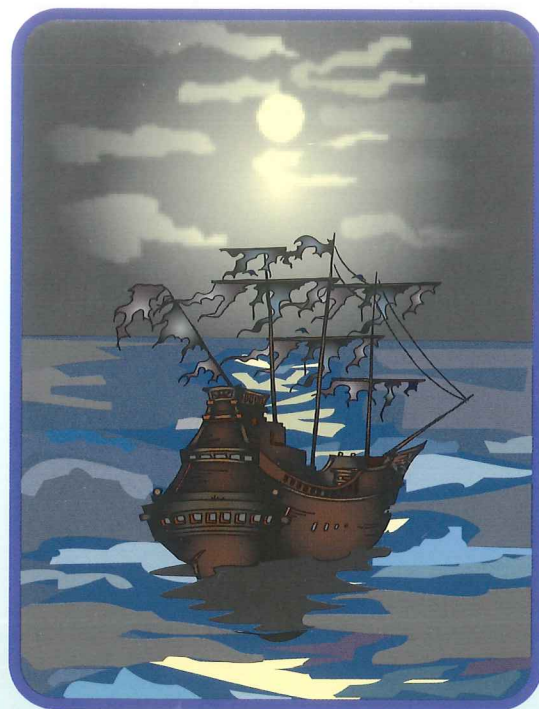
found the 80-metre ship to be completely empty except for a large quantity of rice. Just like the *Mary Celeste*, there were no signs of a struggle. However, because there were no other clues on board the ship, no one knows where it came from.

6 Even spookier is the appearance of an old schooner off the coast of Sardinia in November. Looking very similar to the *Mary Celeste*, the only clues about this abandoned ship were some half-eaten meals, Egyptian artefacts and maps of North Africa found on board. The age of the ship was not made public, and the Italian authorities that found the ship claimed the vessel had never been officially registered in any country. A flag from the European country of Luxembourg was found on the ship — perhaps this might offer some answers. Authorities called the schooner the *Bel Amica*, a phrase found on a wooden plaque left on board. This is a misspelling of the Italian phrase, "Beautiful Friend".

7 These modern ghost ships present a different danger than the threat of evil spirits. Without a crew these vessels become hazards floating in the ocean. At night they would be impossible to see until too late, as they do not have any lights or radios to warn other ships. If coast officials are unable to identify the owner of a ghost ship, they must sink it so that it cannot cause any damage.

8 The idea of the ghost ship is terrifying because even though we cannot always explain them, they do exist. Whether or not a ship is actually haunted does not change how spooky they are. Just imagine how terrified you'd be as the last sailor on a ship, floating in the middle of nowhere in the dead of night ...

Happy sailing!



Questions

1 In the past, the appearance of a *ghost ship* was
 a considered bad luck.
 b quite common.
 c considered good luck.

2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge was
 a a terrified sailor.
 b a famous British poet.
 c the *Flying Dutchman*.

3 The *Mary Celeste* was found floating off the coast of
 a Australia.
 b Portugal.
 c Sardinia.

4 The captain of the *Mary Celeste* was
 a Benjamin Briggs.
 b Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
 c Sherlock Holmes.

5 Which of the above ghost ships didn't have a meal left on board?
 a The *Mary Celeste*
 b The *Jian Seng*
 c The *Bel Amica*

6 If you were a coastguard patrol officer, what action must you take for the *Jian Seng*?
 a Give it back to its owners.
 b Sell the ship to new owners.
 c Sink the ship.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 Creepiest and scariest (1)
 8 An invented story (2)
 9 Horrible and frightening (4)
 10 A sailing ship with at least two masts (6)
 11 Things that could be dangerous (7)

Grammar

Adverbs are words used to describe the quality of another word, such as a verb or adjective. They often end with an *-ly*. Change these nouns and adjectives into **adverbs**. E.g. *quick* becomes *quickly*

- 12 slow 13 ghost
 14 sudden 15 beautiful

Back To The Text...

- 16 In section 1 the word *lure* is used as
 a a noun. b a verb.
- 17 In section 5, "Two recent ghost ships both appeared in 2006" is
 a fact. b opinion.
- 18 The writer's intention is to put the reader at ease.
 a true b false

Sequencing

Chronologically, what occurred first?
 Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a The *Mary Celeste* was found floating near Portugal.
 b Coleridge published the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.
- 20 a The *Jian Seng* was found abandoned.
 b The *Bel Amica* was found abandoned.

Think About This

- 21 The term *ghost ship* is
 a an accurate description.
 b an imaginative description.
- 22 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
 a rewrote the tale just as he heard it.
 b made Sherlock Holmes captain.
 c embellished the facts.
- 23 The word *artefacts* in section 6 means
 a artistic information.
 b ship's charts.
 c relics.

Challenge Option

Research: Many ships have disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle. Where is it?

