

IV. Treasure Island

Today, mariners, we'll be clapping eyes on to the 1950 adaptation of what may be the foundation of modern maritime adventure fiction, **TREASURE ISLAND**. We'll be screening the Anglo-American Disney adaptation, one of at least 37 screen and 24 theatrical productions based on **Robert Louis Stevenson's 1881** work, originally serialized in the **United Kingdom** for the magazine **YOUNG FOLKS**.

An influential 1911 edition of the novel was published in the **United States**, with remarkable full-color illustrations by **N. C. Wyeth**, who together with his teacher **Howard Pyle** are the initial creators of the contemporary idea of the look and setting of a pirate-themed adventure tale.

Stevenson drew on an array of 17th and 18th century sources, most notably including **A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES**, by the pseudonymous **Captain Charles Johnson**, long identified as **Daniel Defoe**, although recent scholarship disputes this claim. The novel also explicitly mentions a real inn which was opened in the late 1700s in **Savannah, Georgia**, which remains in operation to this day, **The Pirate's House**.

The best-known prewar cinematic adaptation was made in 1934 and featured prewar nautical cinema regular **Wallace Beery** as **Long John Silver**. **Beery** is as squinty-eyed as his successor, English actor **Robert Newton** who gnashes and stomps his way through today's voyage. **Newton's** portrayal of **Long John Silver** remains toweringly influential in popular portrayals of pirates. He is credited with inventing what we now think of as pirate dialect and his performance features many **arrrrrrrspects** of that style of speech.

Later adaptations continue to be produced regularly and have featured performers including **Eddie Izzard**, **Orson Welles**, and **Brian Blessed** as the one-legged buccaneer.

This 1950 adaptation remains the most notable of all the adaptations for several reasons. It is the first wholly live-action film and the first wholly-offshore production by the Disney studio. The movie was entirely shot in **England**, primarily because wartime tax regulations prohibited Disney from investing profits earned in the **United Kingdom** in another location than the island nation itself. One might say that **Walt** was forced ashore with a **treasure chest** and chose to shovel money into the English film industry. Given that the film was an enormous success, the **X** which marks the spot of this film on Disney's map of cinematic treasures is hardly a secret held deep in **unexplored terrain**.

Director **Byron Haskins** would go on to direct the classic 1953 adaptation of **WAR OF THE WORLDS**, and cinematographer **Freddie Young** would fill the same role on **David Lean's** immortal **LAWRENCE OF ARABIA** a few years after that.

Well then, make course for the **Admiral Benbow Inn**, where a chance encounter will take **Jim Hawkins** to sea and adventure in the blazing climes of the **Caribbean**! Batten down the tennis rackets! Tighten up, tightly now! Invoke the rhinoceros and spit ye upon the brasswork! Raise each hand high, I say **HIGH**, and raise the dome of the noonday sky! Cast off, up anchor, and set sail!