

# VI. Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl

Where to begin? We end the second set of voyages of the **OFFSHORE QUARANTINE** nearly where we began, eleven journeys ago with 2003's **MASTER AND COMMANDER**. Shot nearly simultaneously with Disney's towering 2003 commercial success, the film we will be shipping with tonight, the two films were in contention with one another for sailing crew, location and support sites, and more. While previously-screened naval epic attempted to deliver period accuracy, **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN** director Gore Verbinski pursuing that objective in this or subsequent **PIRATES** films.

The film's primary inspirations are, of course, the famed ride attraction at **Disneyland**, **Disney World**, and other Disney parks worldwide, and the film we sailed with last voyage, **THE CRIMSON PIRATE**. In fact, there is a sequence in **CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL** which was directly lifted from **THE CRIMSON PIRATE**.

The ride itself is the last work of art which may be fairly attributed to **Walt Disney** himself. He died in 1966, before it opened in 1967. **Walt** was also heavily involved in the creation of another attraction for the park at the same time, the **HAUNTED MANSION**. Approaching the end of his days, it's unsurprising that his imagination should turn to mortality and grim scenes of skeletons amid treasure. I contend that the central image in the **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN RIDE**, the sacking of **Port Royal**, is a funhouse mirror of American anxieties about cultural change at the end of the nineteensixties. Those colonial buildings up in flames? **AMERICA'S CITIES** burning in the night, as the end of empire looms.

The movie we sail with tonight is from a later cultural era and is more lighthearted than the ride. The film was a huge box office success, spanning five sequels and countless cosplayers, with a sixth reportedly in development. However, the fate of this project remains uncertain as star **Johnny Depp** is under a cloud stemming from testimony in his divorce proceedings which detail spousal abuse and violence.

Almost as soon as the first film was released, observers noted similarities with a preceding **Tim Powers** novel, **ON STRANGER TIDES**. The filmmakers allege unfamiliarity with the novel at the time the film was developed but whatever the truth of the matter - **PIRATE!** - all was made well when the fourth film in the franchise was developed as an official adaptation of the book.

The ship which **Captain Jack Sparrow** and company steal from the dock, the **INTERCEPTOR**, is played in the film by a real tall ship based in **Washington state**, the **LADY WASHINGTON**. She is a full-scale modern replica of an historical **LADY WASHINGTON**, a ship which was foundational in establishing American maritime presence on the **WEST COAST** in the decade after the **AMERICAN REVOLUTION**. She has appeared in numerous other productions as well, notably as the sailing vessel seen in the holodeck-set opening sequence to the **STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION** film **GENERATIONS**. She sails out of **Grays Harbor**, and tours the **West Coast** in summer. Her crew is entirely volunteer and to join, you simply need to show up, sign some insurance waivers, and successfully complete training. Typical billets on the **LADY WASHINGTON** are about two weeks in length. Your captain here before you has had the honor of sailing aboard her as a passenger and ship's guest.

Of note is the fact that the plot of the film centers on a curse placed upon a cache of golden coins taken by **Captain Barbossa** and his crew. One might fairly term it, in fact, *a pirate's curse*. Amusingly, in **HOLLYWOOD**, the **Pirate's Curse** is a term used to describe the box office failures of nearly thirty years of pirate-themed movies, beginning roughly in the late 1950s and continuing through many fairly high-profile efforts until the release of **THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL**. It may be said that when the curse is lifted in-narrative, the commercial fortunes of the genre were also reversed.

And so crewmen, let us *latten down the hatches* and make ready to be underway on this, *the final pursuit of pirates* in these waters for the nonce. **OFFSHORE QUARANTINE** will continue with a third series and yet another incarnation of *your captain*, focusing on commercial and non-Eurocentric expressions of the *maritime genre* in film. *Beat to quarters* and let the mains'l drop and fill and set course for **PORT ROYAL!** Away, me hearties, away!