

PIE RATS

THE FORGOTTEN MAP



CAMERON STELZER

Cyclone Sea

Western Passage

DRUMSTICK ISLAND

THE CRESCENT SEA

SEA SHANTY ISLAND

PHOENIX ISLAND

Devil's Cliffs

RUINED CITADEL

West River

SILVER FALLS

Eastern River

ISLAND OF KINGS

QUEEN ISLAND

Southern Passage

CLAW'S REACH

POINTER ISLAND

Northern Passage

LIGHTHOUSE ROCK

Hedgeforth Forest

RAVEN'S MOUTH

River Raven

PORT ABALILLY

Shipwreck Sandbar

WHITESHORE

ISLE OF ALADRYA

ELDERHORNE

Red Pebble River

Cloud Mountain

Lake Azure

PRISON ISLAND

Mosswood Forest

Peregrine River

HAWK'S VIEW

River Dar

Eagle's Pass

OAKBRIDGE

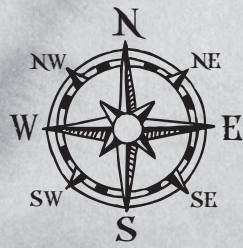
FISHERS BAY

APPLESWORTH

TWO SHILLINGS COVE

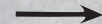
Hawk River

DAGGER ISLAND



CAPE STEADFAST

To the land of Freeforia



*Titles available in the Pie Rats series
(in reading order):*

The Forgotten Map
The King's Key
The Island of Destiny
The Trophy of Champions
Child of the Cloud
The Golden Anchor

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PIE RATS

THE FORGOTTEN MAP EXCERPT



CAMERON STELZER
Illustrations by the Author

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PRESS

*In every adventure, the moment will come when the
hero is faced with a choice –
Attack or surrender, run or hide, set sail or anchor.
The right choice will save him.
The wrong choice will seal his doom.
He will always have two options.
Sometimes he has another, a hidden option waiting to
be discovered.
It may seem simple, it may seem absurd, but when all
else fails, it may be the key to his survival ...*

Anso Winterbottom
Explorer, Discoverer and Adventurer



— PROLOGUE —

This was a storm.

It wasn't a warm sun shower on a spring afternoon. It wasn't the soft drizzle of winter rain. It was the drenching downpour of a tropical cyclone.

A small boat drifted helplessly on the night sea. Its sail hung in tatters. It disappeared into the water with every passing wave before bobbing up again in a shower of spray. These were giant waves for a tiny boat.

A mother sat cradling her crying infant while two others battled the storm. Every crashing wave meant another bucket to bail. All they could do was drift, stay afloat and hope.

Through the waterfall of rain falling from the sky, a faint light appeared. It was lantern light, warm and inviting. It grew brighter as it moved closer. Soon more lanterns emerged, shining like angelic fireflies on a rescue mission. Surrounded by the lights, the dark silhouette of a ship appeared.

Cries of relief rang out from the small boat, and through the deafening noise of the storm, a reply was heard.

At the moment of hope, the storm intensified its fury. Waves hammered the small boat from all directions.

Rescue was close, yet disaster seemed closer.

With the mighty crash of an enormous wave, a small figure was swept head first into the churning water. He vanished beneath the waves.

For a moment there was peace. No sound of the raging storm above, no blinding sting of the salty wind, just the cold calm world beneath the surface. His body relaxed as he drifted into unconsciousness and slowly sank into the dark unknown.

As the blackness closed in, his mind began to wander through distant memories: *diving with turtles in aqua lagoons ... rolling down hills with armadillos ... soaring through the air with flying foxes ...*

His mind hovered on the last memory. It was all he could see. It was sunny, he was happy and he was soaring through the air.

Was it trying to tell him something? What did it mean, soaring through the air?

Then he understood. It wasn't what he was doing that mattered, it was where he was – in the air.

He needed air.

The realisation came to him with a searing pain in his lungs and a throbbing in his head. The pain woke his body. Suddenly he was fighting for survival.

He frantically tried to guess which way was up – all around was darkness. As panic set in, he began to kick his legs. His lungs burned with pain as he moved through the water, but the pressure in his head began to lighten – he was heading in the right direction.

Finally, his head pierced the surface of the water and the silence of the ocean was replaced by the roar of the storm.

His heaving lungs gasped for air.

He'd barely taken a breath when a wave smashed over him, filling his mouth with stinging salt water. Coughing and spluttering, he tried to wipe the water from his eyes before the next wave hit.

He looked around. His small boat was barely visible in the distance. But it was afloat. He swivelled his body and peered up ... in horror. Towering over him, like a prehistoric monster, was the dark shape of the ship.

Before he had time to cry out, a wave struck him from behind and his body was thrown towards the hull of the ship. His head smashed into rough wooden boards with an agonising *THUD*. Splinters and barnacles dug into his arm. He felt the sleeve of his shirt tear from his body as he dropped backwards into the foaming surf.

With arms outstretched in surrender, he watched the lights of the ship swirl before his eyes. Everything became a blur.

Struggling to remain conscious, he felt strong arms reach down and grab hold of him. He was dragged from the ocean, hauled to safety. He felt the comforting hardness of the ship's deck beneath his limp body and the reassuring whispers of voices around him.

He tried to look up. Through the relentless rain, all he could see was one eye staring down at him. And with a whiff of stale pie, he heard two words yelled into the raging storm.

'I PROMISE!'

Then his world went black.



In the Company of Rats

Wentworth awoke with a dull pain in his arm and a pounding in his head. Warily, he opened his eyes and looked around.

He was in a sunlit cabin. The curtains surrounding a small porthole window were pulled back to reveal a cloudless morning sky. He heard the faint lapping of water against the ship's hull and felt the boat gently rocking from side to side.

All was calm.

The cabin was small but cosy, and would have appeared much larger if it weren't for the strange piles of books that ran from floor to ceiling.

From where he lay, Wentworth made out several titles in the pile closest to him: *Ailments and Illnesses*, *Art for Beginners*, *Astronomical Navigation*. The next pile contained books starting with the letter *B*. There seemed to be a pile for every letter of the alphabet, all perfectly aligned, with their spines facing a wooden desk in the corner.

The strangest items in the cabin were not the bizarre book piles, but the objects leaning against its walls. Stacked in straight rows of matching colours was an array of giant

coloured pencils. They covered the entire perimeter of the cabin – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink. With the morning sunshine streaming in, Wentworth imagined he was lying in an ancient library at the very top of a rainbow.

CLOMP, patter, CLOMP.

The sound of approaching footsteps drew his attention from the room.

CLOMP, patter, CLOMP. The footsteps stopped.

With a soft creak, the door slowly opened to reveal a crooked white nose and two pink eyes. A scrawny albino rat in a green vest and spotted bandanna edged through the doorway. Wentworth immediately understood the reason for the peculiar footsteps. Occupying the place of a missing left leg was a giant red pencil.

The white rat directed his eyes to the collection of books and pencils around the room. Satisfied that everything was in order, he turned his attention to the bed.

'Oh,' he sniffled, clearly surprised to see Wentworth staring at him. 'I see you're awake. I'll go and fetch the Captain then.'

Before Wentworth had time to respond, the pencil rat disappeared out of the room with a *patter, CLOMP, patter*, shouting, 'Captain! Captain! The little squib is finally awake.'

It wasn't long before Wentworth had more visitors. They filed in one by one and stood in an arc around the bed. There were five rats in total, and one large blowfly. Wentworth pulled the covers up to his chin as the curious strangers peered down at him.

'Do you think he can understand us?' the pencil rat asked.

An extremely short rat with grey-blue fur and a purple hat prodded Wentworth with a sharp object.

‘Ouch!’ Wentworth cried. ‘Of course I can understand you. I’m a rat.’

The short rat pulled away and Wentworth realised the sharp object was a hook attached to the end of his right arm.

‘For Ratbeard’s sake, give the boy some room,’ said a distinguished-looking rat with black fur. ‘He’s not an animal!’

‘Well, technically he is, Captain,’ the pencil rat mumbled.

The Captain straightened his black eye patch and looked down at Wentworth.

‘Sorry about that. My crew gets a little over-excited at times.’

Wentworth nodded and stared back at the hook.

‘Do you like it?’ the short rat asked. ‘I’ve got a knife attachment, a fork attachment and even a skeleton key attachment. If you were a pirate, you could have your own.’

Wentworth felt his tail go rigid with shock.

‘Y-y-you’re pirates?’ he stammered. ‘All of you?’

‘Every one of us,’ hissed a caramel-coloured rat wearing a crimson eye patch. ‘Do you have a problem with a *female* pirate?’

‘Yes,’ Wentworth gasped, staring back at her accusing green eye. ‘I mean no ... I mean ... I don’t have a problem with females being pirates. I just have a problem with pirates ... in general.’

She narrowed her eye and glared at him.

‘Oh dear,’ Wentworth moaned, pulling the covers up to

his eyes. ‘Are you going to throw me overboard?’

‘Why would we do that?’ the pencil rat snapped. ‘We risked our necks rescuing you and you’ve been sleeping in my bed for the past two days. Why would we want to throw you back again?’

‘Because that’s what pirates do!’ Wentworth exclaimed.

‘We’re not just common everyday pirates,’ the short rat boasted.

‘So what kind of pirates are you?’ Wentworth asked in confusion.

‘Write it down for him,’ the Captain said to the pencil rat.

The pencil rat scribbled something with his leg and the Captain turned back to Wentworth. ‘You can read, can’t you?’

‘Of course I can read,’ Wentworth replied. ‘Everyone can read.’

‘Fred can’t,’ the short rat said, pointing behind him to the most enormous rat Wentworth had ever seen.

The rat’s teeth protruded, his shoulders were huge and hunched and his cauliflower-shaped chef’s hat made him look even bigger. But the most striking part of his appearance was not his blue anchor tattoo or his safety pin earring, but his gigantic left eye. He reminded Wentworth of an oversized goldfish.

Wentworth gulped and waited for the giant to flatten him like a pancake, or at least stare him to death.

The giant rat did neither. He simply opened his mouth and rumbled, ‘We are rats. We like pies. That’s why people call us the Pie Rats.’

At once Wentworth understood and his tail began to relax.

‘I like pies, too,’ he squeaked.

THE PIE RATS



‘Fred is our chef,’ the short rat explained. ‘He makes the best pies. You should try one. I’m sure you’re hungry after nearly dying in a cyclone and sleeping for two days ...’

‘Horace, please!’ the Captain interrupted. ‘One thing at a time! Let’s start with a proper introduction, rather than confusing our guest even more.’

He tipped his hat and bowed. ‘I am Captain Black Rat. You are currently on my ship, the *Apple Pie*, and this is her crew.’ He pointed beside him to the pencil rat. ‘This is our Quartermaster, Pencil Leg Pete, who has graciously given up his cabin for your recovery.’

Pencil Leg Pete gave Wentworth a less-than-impressed look.

The Captain continued, ‘To my left is Hook Hand Horace. Don’t let his lack of height deceive you. He is our Master Gunner and, how can I say this nicely ... our most *entertaining* character!’

Horace saluted Wentworth with his hook and Wentworth nodded politely.

The Captain turned to the girl in the eye patch.

‘This is Ruby Rat, my beloved niece and the ship’s Boatswain. She keeps our sails taut, our flag flying high, and our deck in shipshape order.’

Ruby flashed Wentworth a proud smile. Wentworth tried not to blush.

‘Next to Ruby,’ the Captain said, ‘is of course our famous pastry chef, Fish Eye Fred. I don’t need to explain his name to you, but I’ll tell you this: he has better vision in that eye than the rest of us put together.’

‘Hello,’ Fred said shyly. ‘I’m Fred. What’s your name?’

Wentworth brushed the untidy fur from his eyes.

‘I’m Wentworth. Wentworth Winterbottom. I’m, err ...

delighted to meet you all.’

The blowfly jumped up and down on the bed trying to grab Wentworth’s attention.

‘Sorry,’ the Captain apologised. ‘We can’t forget Smudge, our loyal mascot and world class lookout.’

Smudge held out a tiny arm to Wentworth and Wentworth shook it hesitantly.

‘Don’t worry,’ Horace said, ‘Smudge is pretty clean for a fly.’

Wentworth tried to sit up.

‘Where are my parents?’ he asked. ‘And my sister Anna? Is she okay?’

The crew shuffled nervously and turned away.

The Captain began to speak, ‘I ...’ but his voice trailed off.

Wentworth felt an icy chill of dread creep up his tail.

‘N-no,’ he stuttered, trying to hold back the tears. ‘They’re not ... they can’t be ... tell me you rescued them too. Please.’

He looked desperately around the room. No one answered. No one returned his gaze.

Finally the Captain spoke. ‘We tried to get to the boat but the wind and rain drove us apart. After Fred lost sight of them, we had no way of knowing where they had gone. When the wind died down we searched. We searched all night in the rain. We searched for the next two days while you slept but we found nothing ... I’m sorry.’

Wentworth felt empty and helpless. He wished he hadn’t blacked out. He wished he was there to help.

‘I could have found them,’ he said quietly. ‘I know their voices. I would have heard them through the rain.’

The Captain shook his head. ‘There’s nothing you could

have done, especially after your ordeal.' He pointed to a navy blue shirt draped over a chair. It was Wentworth's shirt. The entire right sleeve had been ripped off. 'You escaped death by a whisker, you know?'

Wentworth knew he was lucky. But what was the good of luck if everything he cared about was gone?

'What about the island?' he asked with a glimmer of hope. 'Did you search the island – the one with the circus tents? There was no time to pull them down. Maybe my parents went back?'

'We searched the island,' the Captain said grimly. 'The tents were torn to shreds. There was no one there. There was no one on any of the islands ...'

The room was silent once more.

Wentworth felt his tail work itself into a knot. He longed to be under the ocean again in that dark place where there was nothing to see and nothing to feel. He closed his eyes and tried to take himself there. But instead of blackness, all he could picture were the smiling faces of his parents and sister. There was no escape.

He slowly opened his eyes. Horace was staring down at him with a confused expression on his face.

'What is it?' Wentworth whispered.

Horace glanced at the Captain and then looked back at Wentworth.

'What the Captain has told you is true,' he said cautiously, 'but that doesn't mean your family is dead ...'

'Horace,' the Captain said gruffly. 'Is this really necessary? You were there. You know what happens on the Cyclone Sea.'

'Let him speak,' Wentworth pleaded. 'I want to hear it.'

'Very well,' the Captain sighed. 'But Horace, I don't want

one of your fantasy stories – no false hopes, only the truth.'

Horace nodded and whispered to Wentworth, 'Do you remember what happened on the night you were rescued?'

'Yes,' Wentworth replied.

'Everything?'

'Well, until I blacked out.'

'Go on.'

'We were on the island,' Wentworth recalled, 'setting up the tents for the circus. That's what we do. My father makes the tents and all the costumes – he's a sailmaker. My mother and I help out and my sister watches. We went ahead in my father's new boat to set up before the performers arrived.'

'Just before dark we saw the clouds. We've been in plenty of storms before, but until the gulls arrived we had no idea it was a cyclone. There was no shelter on the island and the gulls said we had time to reach the bigger islands before the cyclone. But gulls fly faster than we can sail ...'

'When the storm hit, we lost our sail. It's a strong boat – I helped my father build it. But so much water was coming over the side ... and then we saw your ship ... I went overboard ... you rescued me ... someone was shouting –'

'What did you hear?' Horace whispered.

'It was the Captain,' Wentworth said. 'I heard him promise something –' He looked at the Captain. 'What did you promise?'

The Captain hesitated and Horace spoke for him.

'Before your father disappeared into the storm he yelled: *Promise you'll take care of him, 'til we cross paths again ...*' Horace paused. 'Your father believed he would see you again. Isn't that a reason for some hope?'

'Cyclones don't care about promises or hope,' Pete hissed. 'It's cruel to lead him on.'

‘But those were his father’s words,’ Horace argued.

Wentworth looked at Horace with a puzzled expression. ‘They’re not my father’s words ...’

‘But,’ Horace cut in, ‘I heard it with my own ears, I swear I did – we all did. I’m not a liar.’

‘Let him finish,’ the Captain growled. ‘No one’s calling you a liar.’

Wentworth took a deep breath. ‘My father may have spoken those words, but they belong to my great-grandfather.’

‘Your great-grandfather?’ Horace repeated in confusion.

Wentworth tried to explain. ‘My great-grandfather Anso was an explorer who owned an entire fleet of ships. Whenever he left a ship in the care of an officer he would use the words: *Promise you’ll take care of her, ‘til we cross paths again*. The officer had a duty to protect the ship like it was his own child and Anso had a duty to return from his adventures and collect her.’

‘I see,’ Horace said, ‘This isn’t just a promise, it’s a pledge.’

‘But what does this mean for him?’ Fred asked, pointing a huge furry finger at Wentworth.

As Wentworth searched his mind for an answer, a whirlwind of hopeless thoughts rushed through his head: *give up ... they’re gone ... the pledge is for nothing*. He felt the knot in his tail tighten.

The crew looked down at him expectantly but Wentworth lacked the courage to meet their gaze. He lowered his eyes until they came to rest on the ripped shirt. At first all he saw was a cruel reminder of that terrible night. But as he stared at the torn sleeve, the dark thoughts in his head began to fade. Instead of seeing a tattered item of clothing, he saw a story of survival.

A distant memory floated into his mind and he absentmindedly slid his paw to the top of his chest. His trembling fingers felt the shape of a gold pendant. His parents had given it to him when he was a young boy. He thought he’d lost it in the cyclone; but the pendant, like its wearer, had survived, and it was hanging where it belonged – close to his heart.

He ran his finger over its smooth surface and reflected on its design. It was an anchor: the steadfast symbol of hope.

If I can survive a cyclone and nearly die, he told himself, then surely my family can survive ...

The knot in his tail began to loosen. He looked up at Fred.

‘What this means,’ Wentworth said slowly, ‘is that I need to have hope that my family are still alive, and that my father, like my grandfather, will one day fulfil his side of the promise and find his way back to me.’

Horace smiled, Fred patted Wentworth on the shoulder and Smudge clapped his little hands.

‘This promise means something else, you know,’ Pete muttered to the Captain. ‘It means that until we find this circus boy’s family we’re stuck with him.’

The Captain sighed. ‘Yes, I suppose you’re right, Pete. I made a promise and I have a duty to keep it.’

He turned to Wentworth with a look of resolve. ‘I suggest you try and get some more rest. There is much we need to discuss, but now is not the time.’

Without saying another word, the Pie Rats tiptoed out of the room, leaving Wentworth alone with his thoughts. Finally, his anxious body began to relax and he drifted off to sleep.



It was late afternoon when Wentworth stirred from his slumber. He hadn't eaten in two days, and was overjoyed when Fred arrived at his bedside with a freshly cooked plum pie. Wentworth devoured every plum and every last crumb.

He'd barely finished eating when the rest of the crew marched into the cabin.

'I trust you're feeling better this afternoon, Wentworth?' the Captain asked cheerfully.

After eating an entire pie, Wentworth wasn't sure how he felt, but nodded all the same.

'From now on,' the Captain said, 'you will no longer be known as Wentworth Winterbottom.'

'But that's my name,' Wentworth gasped.

'Was your name,' Pete corrected. 'It would never do for a Pie Rat name.'

'W-what are you talking about?' Wentworth stammered. 'Why do I need a Pie Rat name?'

'Because,' the Captain replied, 'we don't carry passengers and we don't take prisoners, and because I have sworn to protect you, I can't throw you overboard. Therefore, from this day forward, there is only one other option – you are now one of us.'

Wentworth was speechless. He tried to appear grateful, but this wasn't a career choice he would have willingly made.

Ruby crossed her arms and looked down at him with a frown. It was obvious she had similar reservations about him joining the crew.

'As a new recruit,' the Captain explained, 'you will undertake a Pie Rat apprenticeship. Once you have passed

the seven Pie Rat tests you will become a full member of the crew.'

'But what if I fail?' Wentworth blurted out.

'Don't worry, you won't fail,' Horace encouraged. 'You've already passed the first test.'

'Which is?' Wentworth asked.

'Surviving when you should have died,' Horace replied. 'It's a great skill to have. If you've done it once, you can do it again.'

Wentworth had no desire to test this theory.

'On the subject of survival,' the Captain said, 'I thought your new name should reflect the dramatic nature of your rescue.'

Wentworth crossed his fingers and hoped it wasn't something ridiculous like *Washed-up Waterbottom*.

The Captain extended his paw to Wentworth. 'From this day forth, you will be known as *Whisker*, the brave Pie Rat who narrowly escaped death. Welcome to the Pie Rats.'

With a hesitant shake of the Captain's paw, Wentworth's story ended and Whisker's began.

Discover more at:
www.pierats.com.au