
Cadet Henry Hale and Cadet Eric Everson’s Guide to Finding Reliable Sources

Also known as:

Avoiding a Pirate TRAAP: Why You Don’t Buy a Map from Blackbeard Joe

BY L.C. WARNER

Mission:

Eighteen-year-old Henry Hale and thirteen-year-old Eric Everson were going on a routine patrol with Second-in-Command of Intelligence of the North, Post-Captain Roland. Today was Everson’s thirteenth birthday, and Henry was taking him out as a treat. It was 9:00 a.m. at the Main Halifax Dock.

Part 1: The Wrong Map

“Alright,” Henry said, adjusting the tiller with one hand and gesturing out toward the open bay with the other. “We’ll chart the northeast quadrant today. Did you bring the map?”

Newly thirteen-year-old Cadet Eric Everson nodded eagerly and produced a folded piece of crumpled parchment. “Of course I did! We’re doing the pirate—I mean privateer thing, right?”

Henry took one look at the parchment and immediately squinted. “What the heck type of map is this?”

Everson beamed. “Uhh... treasure map?”

“Eric... I said no pirates. Not treasure. Where did you even get this?”

“Blackbeard Joe,” Everson said proudly. “At the fish shop! He said it’s the best pirate treasure map around. And he only charged me two shillings!”

Henry immediately dropped his head to the deck with a thud. “Everson,” he groaned, “I told you to get the bay charts from either the Geographic Library on campus or the Map Center on base. We’re not here to find fictional treasure. We’re doing my assigned patrols so I don’t get in trouble with my uncle. You know, Admiral Alfred Arsenic. The terrifying one.”

Everson blinked. “Oh. Right. Cool.”

Henry realized he didn’t have his map either. “Cool,” he repeated. “Uncle Alfred is going to kill me.”

Captain Roland came up from downstairs and said, “I heard screaming.”

“Ah, yes. Mr. Everson! Nice to see you again. I think you’re getting taller.” He looked over. “What’s up, Henry? I heard banging—and the only thing hard enough up here is your head.”

Henry said, “I must have—”

Everson interrupted sheepishly, “I think we...uh... brought the wrong map for the patrol.”

Roland said, “I see.” He held out his hand and sighed. “Let’s see it, then.”

As second-in-command of Intelligence in the North, he narrowed his eyes, spotting red flags in the document. “I told Blackbeard Joe he could only sell these as souvenirs during Pirate Fest—or to confuse

actual pirates.” He held the parchment. “Look at the ink. The thing doesn’t even have scales or a place to put your compass. And most of the places here are just... parks and beaches, empty land.”

Roland held the map up to the light. “Unless...” He squinted. “Nope. Not even an intelligent coding or copyright mark.” Roland rummaged in his bag, producing a sturdy and water-sealed piece of paper.

Henry smiled. “So that means... you brought our official map?”

Roland replied, “Duh. Do you think I’d trust my life in the hands of two teenagers?”

“Mr. Everson,” Roland said, “keep basic and naval-approved navigation systems on every vessel you intend to sail. And don’t listen to Henry—the only authority he’s got is chess, longsword, and cannon arcs.”

Henry looked at Everson who looked like he was hiding something else and said, “What’s up? What else did you do? What are you hiding, Eric?”—in the kindest voice he could manage, but he was genuinely intrigued at this kid’s lack of common sense.

Everson said, “Nothing!” really fast, looking like he was definitely trying to hide something—like the bulge of papers in his jacket.

“Eric,” Henry said, “just spit it out.”

Eric reached in and pulled out three more sets of folded documents.

A Field Guide to Piracy Around Halifax by Blue-Tongue Blake

Uncle Bill’s Memoirs

And a letter titled *How to Identify Privateers’ Markings and Letters of Marque*

Roland said, “Okay. So you”—he pointed at Henry—“actually follow the instructions you read.”

“And you, Mr. Everson—learn who you can trust for information.”

Henry rifled through the packet of information, reading the letter.

“This is from Uncle Bill—addressed to your dad. And... it’s ten years old.”

“Why do you even have this?”

Everson, looking hurt, said, “My Uncle Bill was a royal scribe. He worked with creating seals and stamps...”

“I was told by Blackbeard Joe that I have to learn to read and identify letters of marque if I’m to become a great pirate hunter.”

Henry opened his mouth when Roland jumped in. “This was good advice ten years ago. Not anymore. Triple seal, ribbon threading, ink that reacts to lemon juice—that’s the standard now.”

“Eric,” Roland added gently, “time matters. Letters of marque can become outdated or compromised. Think: changes of war—like the Nine Years’ War to the shift of the War of the Spanish Succession—and then anytime a new monarch takes the throne, or God forbid a full house switch? That nullifies things too.”

Roland folded the letter carefully and handed it back. “If a letter of marque is bad, the sailors may as well be pirates, but we may use discretion.”

“We, the Navy, have to keep changing, because things evolve. And forgeries? They are much easier for pirates and criminals to fake, if we always stay the same.”

Henry smiled. “It’s okay. You’re learning. But that goes for all your paperwork—field guides, orders, commissions. It’s good to recognize dates and the impact on what you’re carrying.” He leaned in slightly. “You do realize my uncle, Admiral Arsenic, grounded me for two weeks because my date was off by minutes on a note?”

Roland added, “Don’t believe him. It was a scam that involved outdated paperwork and an illegal sword tournament during a weapons ban.”

Eric asked, “Wait, does that mean you don’t have a sword right now?”

Henry smiled. He pointed at the sword on his belt. “Admiral Arsenic said if I’m on patrol, I need to have a sword.”

Henry laughed and said, “We’ve got you, Everson.”

“I don’t understand all this,” Everson admitted, looking down at the pirate field guide. “I thought we could do something cool—like pirate hunting—for my birthday.”

Henry looked at the other map. “Some of these places are real. Roland... can we at least check out the cave?”

Roland sighed. “Fine. But that means I’m driving us more west than I like. Which means—”

Henry nodded. “No fish shop. And maybe no sleeping at home.”

Everson’s eyes widened. “You mean... overnight?”

Henry gave him a look. “Don’t push it.”

And they sped away to explore the cave from Blackbeard Joe’s map.

Part 2: Inspection Misadventures

Out near the western shore, Roland had driven them to the northwest quadrant of the seas.

“Interesting,” Henry said, comparing both maps. “They show the same location—right next to the old ice dock. Roland, can we check it out?”

Roland looked down at the map. “Sure, that’s around Purcell’s Cave.”

He pulled out another leather-bound manuscript and smiled. “Don’t worry—this is a first-edition official guide to the caves in the area.”

As they pulled up to the old dock, they saw three boat-sized ships—or maybe ship-sized boats—anchored near the cove. Roland looked at the colors (the ships’ flags for communication), frowned, and raised the signal flags.

Not recognizing the merchant or naval signals, Roland said, “I’m calling for help,” and launched the flare signal twice in the air.

He looked at the boys. “We need to inspect paperwork and approach carefully.”

Loudly, he said, “Hello, gentlemen! We’ll need to see your paperwork. I am sending these two midshipmen to check your paperwork.”

He gave Henry a light push. “Go with Everson onto land and check their paperwork. I’ll keep issuing warnings from here.”

Henry jumped into ankle-high cold water. Everson followed close behind.

The first ship gave legitimate papers to Roland, letters of marque with actual seals—but, sensing tension, then pushed off so fast they practically ran.

The second ship handed over their paperwork and started to drift away, but Henry put up his hand, signaling to stop them.

He looked at the letters of marque. It was old, yet the ink looked fresh.

“No,” he said, turning to Everson, and pointed. “See? The mark is—”

Everson was already inspecting the third ship.

“Everson!” he yelled.

“It looked good!” Everson called back. “I checked for the seal and the thing Roland said—it was fine!”

“Everson,” Roland called from the boat, “I saw you. Let Mr. Hale check it. I’m finishing the report over here.” He scowled. “Paperwork!”

Henry grabbed Everson by the arm and walked up to the third group.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “May I see your paperwork again?” When the captain handed Henry the paperwork Everson had checked, Henry noticed the same problem. It was an exact forgery of the last set of letters only.

Everson said, “Henry, you shouldn’t have jumped ahead. I could have shown you.”

Then Henry looked by the seal and saw two massive spatters of blood.

“Eric—run!” Henry shouted.

But it was too late. Everson already had a bag over his head.

Henry pulled his sword and slashed at the captain. The man stepped back just enough.

The captain growled, “Drop it, or I skewer the eleven-year-old brat.”

Henry gritted his teeth. “He just turned thirteen.”

“Good age to die, then,” the captain sneered.

Henry didn’t hesitate. He gave the signal for “Get help now.” He took his sword and threw it into the water. It landed blade-down, the hilt just above the surface—a perfect marker.

From the boat, Roland saw it and froze. But by the time he grabbed for his rifle and shouted orders, the pirates, Henry, and Everson were gone.

Roland left to find Admiral Arsenic, who was only fifteen minutes away.

Henry and Everson both had their hands tied behind their backs. Henry said, “Don’t say anything, Everson—this is where you get gagged.”

“I was only trying to help,” Everson replied.

The captain said, “These are the secret caves here, boys. And these two could make a good ransom—or a good execution. What say you?”

“I want the money,” someone shouted.

“I want to flee,” another said.

“Aye,” said the captain. “We’ll do both, then.”

Four pirates stayed on shore, and the rest, including the captain, sailed off. Henry and Everson were brought inside the cave.

“I’m hungry, Henry. What time is it?” Everson asked.

“It’s 1:30,” the first mate said.

“See—we haven’t eaten since nine,” Everson muttered.

The pirates pulled their hoods off, revealing a cool, wet, slimy cave. Against the main rock formation, they saw a set of iron chains. The pirates chained their wrists, then left them.

“Try not to die in four hours—or not,” one sneered.

Henry was quiet, calculating. Everson just stood there frozen. The pirates walked out of the cave mouth, laughing. Then Henry noticed it—the tide was slowly coming in. He looked up at the ceiling and said, “We don’t have a lot of time, Everson. The waves are coming in.”

Everson tried to smile. “So... no lunch, then?”

Henry didn’t laugh. “Maybe not dinner either.” He pulled hard against the chains. No give. Solid as rock.

Everson’s voice cracked. “I’m sorry, Henry. I messed up.”

Henry said, “While we are on the topic, did you happen to notice next to the seal were two large spatters of blood and the fact that, had you stayed with me, you would have seen that these papers were exactly the same as ship two?”

“Just never mind,” Henry said, looking at Eric’s eyes filling with tears. “I’m looking for an escape route.”

Part 3: Rescue and Real Sources

When Roland sent the signal, Admiral Alfred Arsenic saw the rising smoke and nearly dropped his fishing rod. From his anchored ship in the cove, about twenty minutes later, Roland came by in his vessel.

“Oh no. Not you.”

“The whole point of having a Number Two, Roland,” he said, “is so I can get one day off to fish.”

He scanned the shore. “Wait... where are the boys?”

Roland responded, “Pirates, sir—as privateers.”

Arsenic said, “Why me?” and looked at Roland.

“Okay,” Arsenic gestured, “let’s tow your vessel behind. Hop aboard, and let’s see what you got, Number Two.”

“Also, shoot my signal into the sky, and when the third patrol comes, then, well—they’ll have surrendered already.”

Roland shot the ricochet shots—two cannonballs that collided mid-air. Ship number two, 800 feet away, saw the signal, immediately dropped anchor, and raised surrender flags.

“See?” said Arsenic. “Let’s leave them here for the patrol and get the boys.”

They reached the shore dock, and Roland and Arsenic stepped out. Arsenic saw all of Roland’s maps and guides scattered across the smaller boat.

“Blackbeard Joe and Blue-Tongue Blake at it again? Okay. I know where to go.”

He hopped out into the surf, knee-deep, and said, “Explore the outer entrance, Roland.”

And then they split up.

Back in the cave, it was 2:30 p.m. The tide was rising fast—Everson now up to his knees and Henry just to his ankles in water.

“Stop struggling,” Henry said. “We’ll need energy to tread when the water comes up. We might be able to keep our heads above it if the cave doesn’t fill completely.”

Everson, voice shaking, said, “I’m sorry. I thought... I thought the rest of Uncle Bill’s information was good. And it matched the new Blue-Tongued Blake section on privateers and letters of marque. Uncle Bill—he was always so good. He knew his stuff, Henry.”

Henry finally snapped, frustration breaking through. “It was out of date—even if the authenticity was good! None of that information is relevant for what we were doing. We were supposed to be checking dock numbers, Everson. We did not need a pirate map in the first place.”

Henry huffed loudly. “And it clearly wasn’t even accurate.”

Everson nodded, ashamed. “Yes... wait, this is a pirate cave, so maybe the map wasn’t completely wrong.”

Henry huffed. “Fine. I stand corrected. The map was barely right—but everything else? It came from a fishmonger and a craftsman. That didn’t set off alarm bells?”

Everson didn’t answer. Henry softened just slightly. “Did you even ask why they were selling you that stuff in the first place?”

Everson shook his head.

“Maybe start there. Just ask, ‘What’s the purpose?’ next time, alright?”

Everson, crying, said, “I wanted to have a family member that knows stuff too... you always ask your dad. Or Uncle Rutherford. Or Admiral Arsenic.”

Henry, exasperated but trying to keep his cool, replied, “My dad is an admiral—he’s been a navigator for twenty-six years. My uncle Rutherford is the governor and head of naval base in Port Royal and is a

polyglot with a bachelor's from Oxford. Didn't he tell you he also has a music conservatory education? With a man who studied under Jean-Baptiste Lully, by the way."

Everson said, "Wait a minute. How is your uncle's musical background relevant to the navy?"

Henry said, "He's got both. Bottom line, my family does have authority in many different areas. Though the music is less important now, unless we want to sing our own requiem."

"And Uncle Alfred? He's the Commandant of the North, head of intelligence, and he's the Lord High Admiral. He has twenty-eight years of sea experience. He literally wrote the manual on half the stuff we're stuck in."

Henry said, "I know you admire your Uncle Bill," trying to calm him down.

"But we have to use different methods working with active documents, ones that aren't just historical—like letters of marque, whose seals change regularly to avoid forgery."

"It doesn't mean he wasn't an excellent royal scribe or signer, just means while he's enjoying retirement, we're chained to a rock for trusting that privateer."

Everson nodded. "I just want to be like you, Henry."

And then, Arsenic stepped into the cave, waist-deep in water, examining the chains.

"Why? He's always grounded."

Arsenic came in the cave with large coils of rope tied around his chest and some tools to rescue him.

Henry said, "Where's Roland?"

Arsenic just looked at him. "Am I my captain's keeper?" Smiling, he said, "He's around."

Henry asked, "How did you know where to find us?"

Arsenic said, "I read current intelligence reports and compare them against known geographical features. I saw the flare as I was coming back from Newfoundland. You do realize you were supposed to be patrolling more east, right?"

Henry laughed sheepishly and started hitting his head back against the rocks in frustration at the turn of his afternoon.

Then Arsenic pulled a tool out of his belt and started picking the lock off Everson's cuffs first. Henry looked down impatiently.

Arsenic said, "Come on, it's his birthday," smacking Henry on the back of the head.

He smiled and said, "I thought I added letters of marque identification to the curriculum and that you were supposed to be teaching Everson that."

Henry said, "It's an ongoing lesson," looking at his cuffed wrists.

Once they were out of the chains, Arsenic pulled out his own copy of Joe's map. "Did you know Blackbeard Joe's—Joseph Beardbridge's—maps contain accurate locations that pertain ONLY to fishing spots? It's honestly the real reason I'm here. Was out fishing, using this. Has some of the best spots for herring."

Arsenic looked around the cave. “I’m surprised pirates still use this place. But let’s get out of here before we have to swim out.”

Arsenic grabbed some rope with a weight and threw it through an iron ring anchored at the top of the cave. “Hold on. And tie it around your waist—we need to climb higher if we don’t want to swim. We might be stuck until the tide flows back out again.”

Everson asked, “Where did you learn that from?”

Arsenic said, “Experience. Sometimes it’s the best authority.”

Then they hung from a rope while the cave filled, and Henry calculated the pressure and tide timing.

Everson was just shaking. “How long?”

Arsenic said, “Shhh. He’s calculating.”

Henry looked up. “What are the closest measurements you have for size?”

Alfred called back, “Best I could tell from the map, this chamber’s maybe twenty feet high, and looks about thirty wide from where I’m standing. But I think it’s been sealed on the other side—probably collapsed or blocked. And with this storm surge coming in... we could be dealing with swells on top of tide.”

Henry muttered, half to himself, half to the others, “Okay, so—tide’s peaking around 3:30... swell could add another foot or two... and if this place is sealed, we’re not draining fast, if at all. We’ve got maybe—two hours of treading water before the level starts to drop. If we’re lucky.”

He glanced at the walls, then back at the rising water.

“Worst-case scenario? Six hours.”

Alfred Arsenic said, “Good thing we’re on the rock about ten feet up—and I got this rope through that ring.”

Henry replied, “I doubt the cave will fill up. It’s over twenty feet. We may just be hanging around a lot.”

Eric just groaned. “None of my pirate guides mentioned cave drowning.”

Arsenic said, “Authority on pirates is a whole other field, son.”

As the water was coming level to the ledge, a secret passage suddenly opened in the right wall, and Roland was on the other side of the passage.

“Oh good, you two haven’t drowned. I was calculating water’d be over your noses right about now,” he said, just as he saw the chains on the wall disappear.

“Hello, Admiral,” said Roland.

Before Roland could help them through the entrance, Everson, too excited, slipped.

“Oh bother,” said Everson, as he lost his hat.

Henry gripped his shoulder and said, “Come on,” and Arsenic cut them loose once they were through the cave passage.

They then headed out through a different passageway and found four tied-up pirates outside.

Everson pointed. “Those are not privateers. Their letters of marque are outdated by four years.”

As they walked back to the beach, a naval patrol came and took the pirates into custody.

Arsenic said, “I’m taking these two home with me.”

“Would you like a tow?” Arsenic asked.

Roland shook his head.

“I’m going to take Everson to Blackbeard Joe’s fish shop for his birthday,” Arsenic said. “And since Mr. Hale hasn’t been an abysmal mentor, he can join.”

Roland turned to his men. “Ooh, fish rolls,” said Roland. “I’m joining—I’ll take that tow back after all.”

Everson spotted his hat floating along the surf. He grabbed it quickly and poured a fish out of it. He wrung the water out and said, “Good information will keep you out of a pirate TRAAP.”

Epilogue: At Blackbeard Joe’s Fish Shop

Everson leaned in and asked, “Henry... why are you so good at math?”

Henry replied, “Years of formal study. When I was seven, my paternal grandmother’s family started paying for private tutoring from Cambridge men. My great-grandfather worked a lot with math, physics, and astronomy.”

Then he turned with a smile and said, “Happy birthday, Everson.”

He handed him a small, sturdy compass and a small stuffed shark. “This was my first student compass—but remember, you need a legitimate map to use it right. And this is Finley Junior. My mom had him made for you. Start thinking like an apex predator and be careful what sort of information you consume.”

At that moment, Blackbeard Joe ran up with a grin. Henry raised an eyebrow. “Where does your pirate authority come from, Joe?”

Joe winked. “Blue-Tongued Blake, of course. The stonemason.”

Everson looked disgusted. “I tried to catch pirates using the guide of a stonemason.”

Meanwhile, Roland and Arsenic were deep in conversation. Arsenic asked, “How did you really find us in one hour instead of six?”

Roland smirked. “Oh, turns out—if you’re a stonemason, you really know how to map caves. So Blue-Tongued Blake’s guide to cave structures was actually... pretty relevant. And accurate, that time.”

Appendix: The TRAAP Framework

Letter	Criterion	Ask Yourself
T	Time (Currency)	Is it current? When was it created or updated?
R	Relevance	Is it important to your topic?
A	Authority	Who is the creator?
A	Accuracy	Is it reliable? Is the data updated and correct?
P	Purpose	Fact or opinion? Biased? Commercial value? Is the purpose honest?

Based on the CRAAP Framework by Molly Beestrum / Sarah Blakeslee.

Sarah Blakeslee and a team of librarians at the Meriam Library, California State University, Chico.

Characters

Henry Hale — 18-year-old recently graduated Naval Cadet, mentor to Eric Everson, naval ward and nephew to Admiral Alfred Arsenic.

Eric Everson — 13-year-old Junior Cadet at the Northern Naval Academy in Halifax.

Post-Captain Jacob Roland — Head of Halifax, Northern Intelligence, and Henry's mentor.

Admiral Alfred Arsenic — Admiral of the Northern Fleet and Commandant of the Northern Naval Academy. Henry's guardian.

Blackbeard Joe — Local fishmonger and fish shop owner; sells tourist fake pirate maps (they really just show the best fishing locations, not pirate booty).

Blue-Tongued Blake — Local stonemason; knows cave locations and features; has an unhealthy amateur interest in pirate hunting.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important that you verify any information? (Whether it be maps, locations, websites, and even books.)
2. What are some ways Henry and Everson verified or could have verified information in the story? List two ways you can verify information for your projects, papers, and homework.
3. Henry and Everson got into some sticky situations using old (outdated), bad (not accurate), and unhelpful (not relevant) information. List one sticky situation you could get into if you use poor sources in your own work.
4. Name one thing you can look for to avoid triggering a Pirate TRAAP in real life.
5. Both Blackbeard Joe and Blue-Tongued Blake had expertise in something. What does this mean about people, sources, and information that you may come across?

Fun Facts: Connection to History

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- The period of 1650–1730 is roughly considered the dates of the Golden Age of Piracy. Pirates were active all over the globe during this period, even as far north as Nova Scotia.
 - In 1701, Halifax, Nova Scotia had not been formally claimed by the British, but there was an active Royal British naval presence, and the land was frequently fought over by the British and the French, though there were many Native peoples who called this place home for generations, most notably the Mi’kmaq people.
 - Both French and English privateers and pirates were active in this area. Privateers were basically legalized pirates employed by different countries; they were given letters of marque to prove they were not pirates. Letters of marque could expire between wars and changes in government succession. The Nine Years’ War had just ended between France and England, and they were in the early stages of the War of the Spanish Succession.
 - Purcell’s Cave is a real place, and it existed in 1701. Caves like Purcell’s Cave were numerous around the Halifax and Nova Scotia coast; they were excellent places for hiding, smuggling, and storing pirate booty.
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Original story and characters written by Lian Warner

This is an original work of historical fiction; dates, language, and circumstances may be adjusted for creative purposes.

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