



KUNGALOOSH

AT THE ADVENTURERS CLUB

BY RAIN BLANKEN

In mid-April 2019, I stood barefoot in the sand, adjusting my safari hat and eagerly listening to Ian Janosko—the self-proclaimed #1 Fan of the Adventurers Club.

We were at the Stage 89 Pleasure Beach party and, even nearing midnight, the shore of Disney's Yacht and Beach Club Resorts was erupting with laughter and spontaneous cheers: I was in the middle of one of the biggest celebrations for one of the deepest Disney Parks fandoms. *And I didn't even know it existed.*

"It is always talked of in a dreamy voice with that far-off look in the eye when you meet someone who has been there."

A member since he was just six years old, Janosko was eager to enlighten me. When I asked him to describe what the Adventurers Club was, he was ready: "It was undoubtedly the best thing Disney ever built."

PART 1: WHAT WAS THE ADVENTURERS CLUB?

To a layperson like me, the Adventurers Club is something of myth and intrigue. I never had the chance to yell "Kungaloosh!" on command inside the hallowed halls that once stood where The Edison now does at Disney Springs.

YOUR CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Hathaway Browne, the handsome (and he knows it) aviator

Otis T. Wren, stodgy Club Treasurer

Fletcher Hodges, the absent-minded Club Curator

Pamela Perkins, Club President who minds her p's and q's

Samantha Sterling, expert explorer and cabaret singer

Emil Bleehall, Junior Adventurer and country bumpkin

Graves, the Butler

The Maid, the only character whose name and identity changed with each actor

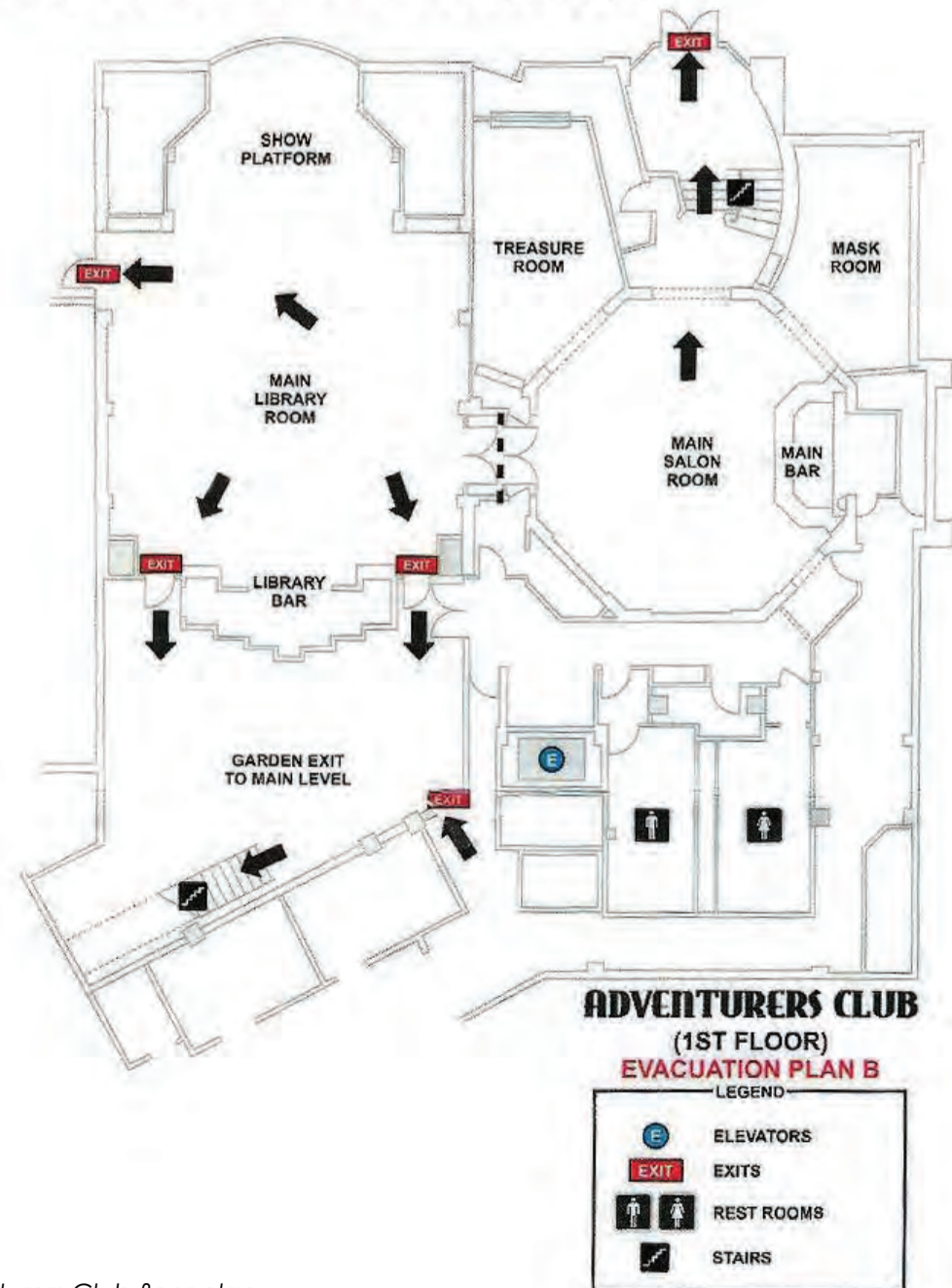
Madame Zarkov, the rarely seen gypsy psychic



Cast of the Adventurers Club. PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO



Adventurers Club Evacuation Plan B Lower Level



Adventurers Club floor plan. PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO

ON THIS DAY IN DISNEY HISTORY...

MARCH 1ST, 1924

Alice's Day at Sea premiered in theaters, the second of the Alice Comedies created by Walt Disney. This combination of animation and live-action scenes astounded audiences. Do you know how many shorts in all were created? (Hint: over 50!)

MARCH 9TH, 1984

Touchtone Pictures made a splash today with the release of, well, *Splash!* This Tom Hanks and Darryl Hannah movie brought live-action mermaids to the big screen. Do you remember where the fountain from *Splash* could be found at WDW?

MARCH 15TH, 1975

America the Beautiful premiered at the Circle-Vision 360° theater in Magic Kingdom. This was an adjusted version of the opening day film of the same name. Do you know where the Circle-Vision theater was located at this park?

MARCH 22ND, 1975

The Lake Buena Vista Shopping Village officially opened its doors at Walt Disney World. This area offered shopping, dining, and unique entertainment for those who weren't in the parks. Any guesses as to what this area is called today?

You may have known these dates, but do you know the details? Visit WDW-MAGAZINE.COM/THE-BLOG to find out more.

As guests passed the threshold of the Adventurers Club, they were instantly transformed into 1937 explorers attending an Open House on New Year's Eve. The club utilized creative architecture, decor, actors, animatronics, puppets, and effects to create a world of continuity, humor, and more than enough self-awareness.

Make no mistake: Adventurers Club was an attraction, not just another lounge or bar on Pleasure Island.

Some of the most memorable personalities in the club were animatronic masks Arnie and Claude and the Colonel Critchlow Sunchbench puppet, but it was the cast of live characters who interacted the most with guests and created memorable fan bonds to the club.

The characters were each based on a wacky premise (think a 1985 *Clue* level of camp, complete with a butler and maid on the roster) and were played by various actors each night. They carried on the same storylines and shows, but each actor was seasoned in improv and put their own flavor on the characters.

The shows were humorous and performed in the spirit of inclusion: The audience members always participated.

WHAT IT WAS LIKE INSIDE

Entering the Adventurers Club was consent to suspend all disbelief. As Janosko recalled, "The first time I ever visited the Adventurers Club was during its opening year in 1989, when I was 6. I didn't quite get what was going on with all these crazy people running around



Main Salon of the Adventurers Club. PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO

and talking about their latest expedition to Papua New Guinea, but I certainly loved the building!”

Guests entered the building on the second floor Zebra Mezzanine, surrounded by artifacts from various expeditions and overlooking the Main Salon. Wall displays included photos and plaques detailing the history of the characters guests were about to meet. Imagineer Joe Rohde—famous for both large earrings and the genius theming at Pandora, Aulani, and Expedition Everest (to name a few)—assembled the decor.

It’s been said that some guests who didn’t get the appeal of the Adventurers Club may not have had great timing. But those who lingered long enough might see Colonel Critchlow Sunchbench wake up to sing the Club Song in the Main Salon or witness as Emil Bleehall win the outrageous Balderdash Cup Competition (again) in the Library.

Every 20 minutes, one of the five rooms of the club hosted a show. The Library was the largest room, with interactive shows like the Radio Broadcast, in which Otis T. Wren and Pamela

Perkins struggled to put on a radio show without most of the actors. The audience, of course, had to step into the roles.

ONCE A MEMBER, ALWAYS A MEMBER

Janosko said, “Some came because they just stumbled into the place one night and got hooked. Some needed a place to escape the drudgery of their lives. Some came because there was alcohol! But, no matter who you were, if you ‘got’ the club, it felt like home.”

At its outset, the goal was to make guests feel like

part of the club. And it worked—almost too well. By the end of its nearly 20-year run, its fictional beginnings had amassed a bonafide community of real-life Adventurers—so dedicated that the hundreds of letters they wrote to the club characters inspired a quarterly newsletter to quell the crowd.

Locals patronized the club so often that the actors still knew these regulars by name at the Pleasure Beach reunion over a decade later.

At the Stage 89 Paradise Beach event, I spoke with perhaps one of the most frequent reciters of the Club Creed, Virginia Carmichael, who remembered, “We went almost every Friday, sometimes more.” It was only natural that she and her late husband, Bob, even celebrated their 50th anniversary at the Adventurers Club. On her arm, her friend, Melissa Galleon, quickly piped up, “I met my husband there!”

Just two tales among thousands: These guests are eager to swap stories of past adventures now that they don’t have a club in which to commemorate them. And it soon became clear that the fandom had taken on a life of



Adventurers Club nightly schedule demonstrates many shows that were performed each night.
PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO



Pamela crowd-surfs in front of Babylonia. **PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO**

its own, living on well after the club’s closure in 2008.

S.E.A. CARRIES THE TORCH

Disney has made efforts to subtly immortalize the Adventurers Club in what someone could call an “extended universe” in

the form of the Society of Explorers and Adventurers (S.E.A.). This fictional organization first appeared at Tokyo DisneySea in 2001, at the Fortress Explorations attraction, where guests solved puzzles in an effort to join S.E.A.

Since then, the legend has expanded to include fictional S.E.A. members Harrison Hightower III (of Tokyo DisneySea's Tower of Terror), Lord Henry Mystic (of Hong Kong Disneyland's Mystic Manor), and Jock Lindsey (Indiana Jones' pilot and purveyor of Jock Lindsey's Hangar Bar in Disney Springs).

In addition, fans can spot nods to the Adventurers Club and its members

in the Jungle Cruise line queue and Magic Kingdom's Skipper Canteen, where you can order a dessert named after the club's all-purpose word (and signature drink), the "Kungaloosh."

These remaining nuggets are clues to the (literally) uninitiated, like me, that this Adventurers Club was a pretty big deal.

But while Disney keeps a torch lit for Adventurers

Club, the fans have been building a bonfire.

PART 2: YOU CAN STILL BE AN ADVENTURER

Thinking back on that night in the sand at the Yacht and Beach Club Resorts, I take pride in one singular moment: When I joined in the chanting crowd and performed my first Club Salute—11 years after the Adventurers Club was supposed to be over—I was a new member.



Tallulah with animatronic masks Arnie and Claude in the Treasure Room. PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO



TOP: Emil Bleehall at the Adventurers Club Christmas Broadcast. BOTTOM: Adventurers Club Christmas decorations.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO

Janosko remembered hearing the news that the sinking Pleasure Island was taking the Adventurers Club with it: “Well, I basically went through six of the seven stages of grief ... but I never have reached the acceptance point, for I continue to hold out hope that one day, someone high up in the Disney corporation will resurrect the club.

“We went through shock and denial and pain and guilt pretty fast and went straight to anger and bargaining—and became quite active in the petitions and letter-writing campaigns.”

In the years since its closure, fans have been meeting and performing the Club Salute and have even raised over \$40,000 for charity in the name of adventure. But if the club was closed ... how did they do it?

EARLY REUNIONS AT THE ADVENTURERS CLUB

Janosko certainly goes about his business as though the club is still open each night—so he didn’t hesitate to let me know about the goings-on of club members since the 2008 closure.

About a year after the Adventures Club officially



The 2009 Adventurers Club Reunion at Downtown Disney. PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO

closed, Janosko attended the first reunion, held on September 26, 2009, by The ConGaloosh Society. The club building was still standing and retained all of its decor, available for private rentals.

Organizers Robert Croskery and Michael Gaven were able to secure former Adventurers Club actors for a night that included fan favorites like the RadioThon and Bon Voyage Hoopla. The night was followed by an evening of Pleasure Island history, presented by Disney historian Jim Korkis at the Royal Plaza Hotel, which included a club favorite, the

ridiculous Balderdash Cup competition.

But 2010 brought about a disheartening change of venue. The beloved outpost “was gutted,” said Janosko, of its ancient artifacts and curiosities, and it was no longer available for private events. Holding reunions inside the Adventurers Club among artifacts procured from around the world by the legendary Imagineer Joe Rohde himself was no longer an option.

INDIANA JONES HOSTS A NEW VENUE

While the loss of the club was devastating,



A reunion event held on stage at the Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular.
PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO

Adventurers discovered that year that no matter the setting, their camaraderie lived on.

Ever the optimist, Janosko told the tale of a historic pivot: "... [S]o we had a show held on the streets of Cairo at the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular! [in Disney's Hollywood Studios], where the characters did an amazing job of performing the club shows in a vastly different setting."

The reunion event was again followed up with an evening at the Royal Plaza Hotel with Jim Korkis reflecting on the club, a costume contest, and a Q&A panel of Cast Members.

So our intrepid Adventurers no longer had a club but remained strong with a new setting for the celebration, right? Not so fast.

In 2011, Disney pumped the brakes on the third year of ConGaloosh, stating that the characters and songs would not be made available for events. In light of no actual Adventurers Club venue and the lack of characters and club songs, what is an Adventurer to do?

AN ADVENTURERS (CLUB) CHALLENGE

Janosko volunteered to write a good old-fashioned Adventureland Challenge scavenger hunt to get our Adventurers excited about

being out in the field.

Adventureland Challenges were a feature of Magic Kingdom's Adventureland from 1996 to 2000, eventually replaced by A Pirate's Adventure, an automated experience (see page 90 for more).

In 2012, Janosko wrote a new Adventureland Challenge, but it had to be canceled at the last minute; nothing seemed to work out. Janosko said, "The fourth year of ConGaloosh was the roughest; the Challenge I had written for the day was canceled at the last minute, and all the hotel events fell through. Things looked like we had come to the actual end of the club ... but that's when a meeting took place."

ADVENTURING FOR CHARITY

Five years after the club closed, The ConGaloosh Society was feeling the pinch. They could no longer gather in the Adventurers Club building, there were no characters available to celebrate with, and the past year's event was a bust.

But when the dashing Hathaway Browne's engine gave out, did he accept a grim fate? No, he made an

emergency landing near Cleveland, and so, too, our intrepid Adventurers carried on.

Janosko remembered, “Robert Croskery pulled me aside and said that with the fifth anniversary of the club’s closing, we had to have a huge event to celebrate the Club.” So Janosko teamed up with fellow explorers, including Robert Croskery, to form Adventurers in Charity.

And these new Adventurers Club meetings reached for a higher purpose. Each club actor represented a charity for the event (e.g., The Actors Fund, Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, A Better Life Pet Rescue), and each charity received a portion of the funds raised.

As Disney no longer allowed the Adventurers Club characters to be portrayed at events, the actors were instead invited to enjoy the festivities as themselves. And that night, Ian Janosko stepped into the shoes of a very prominent club member that Disney had not stipulated in its do-not-use policy. Janosko remembered, “Club Founder Merriweather Adam Pleasure, played by yours truly, led the room in the Club Salute, the Club Creed,

and The All-Purpose Club Theme Song.”

The Adventurers in Charity event went on for six years. Janosko described the last gathering in 2018: “... [I]t was almost like we had gone through the final night at the club. Emotions were high, the actors were in top form, and we had raised a fantastic amount of money for the actors’ charities.”

Over the course of its six-year run, Adventurers in Charity raised over \$40,000

for charities including the American Heart Association, Red Cross, and the American Cancer Society. Not a bad legacy for a long-gone lounge with nonsensical shows and Jungle Cruise-style puns.

KUNGALOOSH!

When I asked Janosko if he thought the Adventurers Club fandom was slowly dying out over time, he exclaimed, “The club will never die! The fans of it are still out there and very vocal!” Disney has kept the



Colonel Critchlow Sunchbench and Samantha have a word. PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN JANOSKO



Adventurers Club story alive via its S.E.A. references all over the world, giving club veterans a unique position we haven't really seen before in the history of attraction closures. With the characters and storyline living on, Adventurers Club fans are encouraged to keep their community alive.

While the Adventurers Club was open, fans would write letters to their favorite characters and await the quarterly club newsletter. These days, Facebook groups like the Society for Explorers and Adventurers and The ConGaloosh Society keep club members in touch. You can even virtually walk the halls of the Adventurers



GM_ADVENTURERS: DISNEY'S ADVENTURERS CLUB IN GARRY'S MOD BRERBEN

Club via a fan-made Garry's Mod walkthrough, for which Janosko provided thousands of reference photos. Walk through the Adventurers Club via the video above.

For those of us who never had the chance to adventure as Merriweather Pleasure intended, we have to lean on the memories of past Adventurers—who are eager to share their experiences.

Whether posting photos in online groups or singing at reunion events, what started out as a fictional club is now a bonafide community of real-life Adventurers.

The reunion at Yacht and Beach Club in 2019 was my literal initiation into one of the most ambitious and immersive experiences ever created by Disney Imagineers.

It was enough to make me proud of and nostalgic for a place I'd never set foot in. But it looks like the legacy will live on, and I'll be saluting with my fellow members again, soon. 🐻

Portions of this article were originally published on WDWNT.com.