"Avast, ye scurvy swabs, the solar wind be fair! 'Tis for far Centaurus we sail!" Thus I replied to a friend's EMailed comment, that with the eye patches we often wear, deep-sky observers look like pirates. Yet though a chorus of hearty "Arrrrr!"s greeted me at Fremont Peak on January 10, 1997, I had better things to do than hoist the Jolly Roger.

What a night! The air had quieted after frontal weather earlier in the week, so no low-level cumulus clouds impeded visibility. The next system was still far off, so the high sky stood clear. Calm conditions meant that the thick, wet fog forming in the damp air slid downhill and stayed there, turning off the lights of cities and towns, leaving a spectacular view, clear to the horizon, in all directions.

For almost twenty years, my deep-sky observing program has been to observe all the galaxies, star clusters, and nebulae listed in Burnham's _Celestial_Handbook_, at or north of 45 degrees south declination. That boundary encloses 85 percent of the sky. From observing sites at 36 or 37 degrees north latitude, it is a tough limit -- it takes good sky, good equipment, and moderate skill to chase down a 13th magnitude galaxy more than eighty degrees off the zenith. Since clear weather is scarcest, and I am laziest, in the cold months of the year, the last handful of unobserved objects lie far to the south, at right ascensions best placed in the dead of winter. But on such a night as this, surely I can get a few more.

I set up my six-inch Maksutov, and swing it south and east. Maybe, but not now -- that part of the sky is too low. Brrr, it will be some hours yet. I zip up my down vest, double my fists inside my mittens, and settle down to look at less exotic objects for a while.

Yet my eyes are drawn to the great cluster of suns on the far side of Sirius. I think of my eye patch in whimsy -- for in truth, there is a pirate ship in the sky.

She is the Argo, the trim fighting galley of the Greek corsair, Jason. She sails upon the southern Milky Way. Modern astronomical cartographers have separated her vast bulk into four separate constellations, yet her form remains. Canis Major must be a salty sea dog, for he dances on the aft rail of her poop deck, the constellation Puppis. Pyxis is her small and stubby mast -- galleys are driven primarily by oars. Vela comprises her sails. And there is one more.

In this region lie dazzling stars, blue-white diamonds that shock the eye with cold actinic fire -- zeta Puppis, gamma Velorum, and a generous strew of others, a great thunder of suns. If this is pirates' booty, it is treasure rare indeed. And there is one more.

I climb the hill with my 10x50 Ultraview binocular, red flashlight, and an old Norton's _Star_Atlas_. Fremont Peak stands above most of the surrounding terrain, and the view to the south goes to the true horizon. In the crystalline air, I star-hop through unfamiliar heavens, south of Sirius, through Puppis, south, and south

again. I pause at a particularly bright star, a few degrees above the distant skyline, near an airplane landing light that winks off and on. Can that star be...? No, it's just tau Puppis.

The airplane light has risen slightly, and brightened enormously. I put down the binocular, for it is easily visible to the naked eye. It drowns tau Puppis. I try the binocular again. The light is not moving with respect to the stars. It brightens further, regularly flashing reds, and yellows, and all the other colors of the horizon, but now and then exhibiting the same diamond purity of the lesser luminaries higher up. It is Canopus, the brightest star in Carina, the keel and fourth constellation of Argo. Canopus is second only to Sirius for brightness among the nighttime stars. Even at a degree above the horizon, it is *bright*. I have never seen it before, nor anything else in Carina. For the first time in my observing career, all the parts of the Argo lie before me. I take it as an omen.

I descend to my telescope and dig out Burnham's. Quick, quick, get two clusters and a nebulous wisp in western Vela, before they drop below the shoulder of the hill. Phew! More leisurely now, swing the telescope up to Antila for nine or ten galaxies, none much below 32 degrees south. Then back to Vela, for three galaxies in the eastern part of the constellation, that lie near my 45-degree southerly limit.

There is just one object left. It lies another hour of right ascension to the east, not yet high enough to see, so I kill time chasing down the Messier galaxies in Leo and Virgo with the 10x50 -- a cinch, the only problem is keeping track which is which. I started my Burnham's observing program in 1978, with a 7x50. The object that remains is bright enough to find with a binocular, but it will be more fun to end on a different note. A friend has a Meade 12-inch LX200, a computer-controlled telescope with capabilities unheard of in 1978. I ask him to dial up the object for me, not telling him why until I am certain of success.

And there it is. At 88x, we resolve open cluster NGC 3680, the final entry in my doggedly-pursued and at last finished deep-sky program, above the prow of the Argo, in far Centaurus.