

Can swashbuckling pirates from a magical world work with two regular kids to catch naughty monster Atticus? Or will he escape again? (Villains are good at that, you know). Read on to see. . .

FOLLOW THAT ISLAND!

A MONSTERVILLE/ACCIDENTAL PIRATES MASHUP

By Claire Fayers and Sarah S. Reida

Brine Seaborne stood at the prow of the Onion, watching the waves sparkle. “Are we nearly there yet?” she asked.

Cassie O’Pia sighed. “No, we are not nearly there yet. Just like we weren’t nearly there yesterday, or the day before, or indeed when you asked five minutes ago. You can’t just sail across the world in a few hours, you know.”

“I know.” The Eight Oceans was a big place and they were sailing all the way to the Western Ocean, farther than anyone had sailed before. Brine wished the ship could go faster.

“Dragon Island’s not going anywhere,” Cassie reminded her.

“She’s right,” first mate Ewan Hughes said. “Islands don’t move. They’re known for that. In the meantime, do you want to practise cutlass-fighting?”

Usually Brine would throw herself into a fight, but she wasn’t in the mood. “No thanks,” she said, and she wandered away in search of Peter and Tom. She found them in the galley, staring into a bowl.

“Trudi’s been experimenting again,” Tom said, referring to the Onion’s cook. “Ever since she fell through the whirlpool into that other world, she’s been trying to make something called. . . *chocolate*.” He said the word like he was tasting it.

Brine looked at the brown puddle at the bottom of the bowl. “What does chocolate taste like?”

“I don’t know,” Peter said, “but I’m pretty sure it shouldn’t taste of fish. Are we nearly there yet? Maybe there’s something edible on the island.” He muttered the last sentence.

Brine sighed.

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The next day they weren’t nearly there either, but, as the sun rose and Trudi tried to persuade them that fish and chocolate stew was a good idea, Ewan shouted from the crow’s nest.

“Island ahoy!”

They all crowded around the prow to look at the green hump in the distance. Brine liked to think she could tell whether an island was friendly or not just by looking at it. (A surprising number of islands were unfriendly, but that was what happened when you travelled on a pirate ship.)

This one looked even less friendly than most. It hunched low in the water, skulking there as if it were lying in wait for them.

“Foreboding,” said Tom, taking a pen out of one of his many pockets and scribbling in his notebook. “Definitely foreboding.” He paused, staring back at the island. “Also...”

He trailed off. Now that he spent much of his time with illiterate pirates, his librarian training had suffered.

Brine opened her mouth to speak and fell silent too. She didn’t want to be the first to say it. It was impossible, nonsensical. . .

In the end it was Cassie who spoke. She took her hat off, stared at the island through her telescope, then put her hat back on and tried again as if that would make a difference.

“Someone correct me if I’m wrong,” she said, “but I think that island is moving.”

It was, indeed. The island drifted northward, paused, and started off again. Move, pause, move, pause.

“Islands don’t do that,” Ewan said.

Brine grinned. “This one apparently does.”

The island paused again, and maybe it noticed them because it started to crawl closer.

Cassie fingered her cutlass hilt. “I’ve never fought an island before. I wonder if...”

The rest of her words were obliterated in a crash of thunder that shook the sea. The ship rocked. Brine staggered, grabbing hold of Peter for support. She almost missed the moment when something green fell from the sky, hit the water with a crash, and swam toward the island.

“What happened?” asked Brine. As if for her benefit, the sky repeated the performance, and this time two shapes fell and landed right in the middle of the deck.

Cassie whipped out her cutlass. “Invaders!”

“No,” Trudi shouted, “It’s Lissa and Adam! What are *you* doing here?”

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Adam stood, then fell as a wave rocked the boat. He landed on Lissa, who groaned. “The guy’s supposed to *help* the girl in dangerous situations, not squish her,” she complained.”

Adam extended a hand and Lissa gripped it, but the ship lurched.

“. . .and I'm back on the floor," she said, letting Adam help her up again.

Adam rubbed his chin as he turned to Brine. "Did you see Atticus?"

"I saw something green fall from the sky," Brine said, still staring. "I think I did, anyway. It hit the sea and vanished."

"Maybe Atticus can't swim," Adam said, and Lissa patted his shoulder.

"Adam," she said patiently. "He's the villain. Of course he can swim."

Seeming to sense that she was the leader of the group, Adam extended his hand to Cassie. "Nice to meet your crew. I'm Adam Griggs, and this is Lissa Black."

Quick introductions were made all around. Not a single pirate bared a weapon, but Brine circled the two, eyeing their clothes. "Your pants are so unusual," she mused. "Will they hold up in a fight?"

Adam glanced at his jeans. "Yeah, we'll be fine. But our phones didn't do so hot." He pulled a dripping rectangular square from his pocket, and Brine grabbed it.

"What is *that*?"

"It was a cell phone. Now it's a piece of garbage."

"If you don't want it, I'll take it," Peter said, snatching it from Brine. A budding magician, he wondered if there was magic behind the cracked glass screen.

"I didn't say I didn't want it!" Brine elbowed him.

"Good," Lissa said. "You're not at all ladylike. That means your chances of survival are really high." She readjusted her ponytail, squinting at the island. "Here's the deal, people. Atticus - you guys remember him," she said, nodding at Trudi and Ewan, "needs something from that island. I don't know what it is, but it's the key to causing Transformation."

"Transformation?" Cassie asked. "What's that? Magic?"

“Dark magic,” Adam said, flinging a piece of seaweed from his hair. “It’s the magic that changes kids into monsters every Halloween. October thirty-first.”

“Only this year, Transformation’s coming early,” Lissa added. “The monsters have figured out that the human world is onto them, so they’re grabbing kids *now*. Before people have time to prepare.”

Brine was still wondering what Halloween was, but she saw Cassie and Ewan exchange a look and knew exactly what they were thinking. The ship was on the way to the island regardless. And no one liked an adventure better than Cassie O’Pia. There were songs about that, after all.

Lissa put her hands on her hips. “We’ll make it worth your while. What do you want?”

Brine looked away so they wouldn’t see her smile. This strange girl was paying them for something they’d do, anyway. Clearly, she wasn’t as smart as she seemed to think she was.

Meanwhile, Lissa was silently appraising Brine. Maybe this girl knew how to make her own salt tack and spit thirty feet, but she didn’t know monster movies rules like Lissa did. And only those would defeat Atticus, one of the most dangerous monsters who lived in Down Below.

“Gold is the usual payment,” Ewan said. “Or diamonds. We like diamonds.”

Lissa’s face fell. Where were they going to get diamonds?

“Unless you can get us some more of that chocolate,” Ewan added with a grin..

Tom dug a pencil out of his pocket. “And I’d like to know about your world.”

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“Let me get this straight,” Tom said as they climbed out of the rowing boats, “a movie is like a book but there’s only one giant page and you look at it and see the whole story happen?”

“Something like that,” Lissa agreed.

Peter elbowed Tom aside. “Do you have any pirate movies?”

“Yeah, but you might not find them accurate,” Lissa said. *Or flattering*, she added silently. She caught Brine’s arm. “Footprints!”

Yes – a trail of them led away along the shoreline. Brine tested the ground cautiously. It felt odd: patches of springy sea-moss alternating with hard, brown rock.

Cassie drew her cutlass and prodded the nearest footprint. The ground twitched.

“Did you feel that?” Brine asked.

Cassie was already walking on. “It looks like Atticus is headed this way. Come on.”

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They followed the footprints around the shore, treading carefully.

“What’s the plan?” Adam asked.

Brine swished her cutlass through the air. “Fight Atticus, defeat Atticus, you give us chocolate.”

Lissa sighed and shook her head. “We have to find him first. Atticus is sneaky. He’ll lie in wait and send monsters to do his dirty work. We’ll have to fight them to get anywhere near Atticus, and then we’ll...”

“Is that him?” Cassie interrupted.

Brine had seen many strange monsters on her voyages so far, but Atticus made her pause. He stood with his hands on his hips, watching the group approach.

He was as green as one of Trudi's inedible curries, with long, gangly limbs and a hump on his back that made him stoop. Monstrous, but somehow still a little bit human.

"Get him!" snapped Cassie.

Atticus cleared his throat. "Oh, no! Pirates!" He turned and ran, his hunchback protruding from between his bony green shoulder blades.

Within seconds, the gang had caught up to him. Cassie bound his wrists and ankles tightly with a rope, and Brine patted him down for valuables. To her disappointment, all she found was a whistle. When she blew on it, it made no sound.

"It's broken," she said, tucking it into the pouch around her waist. Perhaps she'd fix it later.

"No, it's not," Atticus said with a strange smile.

"Huh." Lissa was circling the group, inspecting Atticus. "You know, it was awfully easy to catch him."

Right at that moment, a horrible vibration threw everyone to the ground.

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"Earthquake!" Ewan yelled.

But the ground wasn't just shaking, it was tilting.

"Everyone, grab something! We're moving!" Peter screamed, wrapping his arms around a large rock. It was just in time, because the island suddenly tipped over onto its side.

"Oh, my!" Brine sputtered. "The island - it's as if it's *rolled over!*"

Atticus barked a laugh. "Rolled over! Exactly!" He had already managed to escape his bindings, and he was caressing the ground. "Good boy," he crooned. He smirked at Brine. "Want to blow that whistle again?"

Before Brine could answer, far away in the distance, a thick, felled tree rose from the ground.

“What the - ” Trudi began as the tree bent and curled in their direction. That’s when they all realized that it wasn’t a tree at all. It was a head atop a long neck. A yellow eye glared at them.

“You’ve done it now!” Atticus yelled gleefully. “Rover! Now!”

The head bobbed once, and, before anyone could react, the island flipped completely upside down, plunging everyone into the cold, salty waters of the Western Ocean.

*

This was it, Lissa thought. Atticus had won and she and Adam would never see their home again. She knew the legend of this monster - the Asp Turtle, or *Aspidochelone*. It was famous for luring unlucky travellers onto its back, and then rolling to trap them into a watery death.

Movement below her caught her eye. As the pirates panicked and Cassie and Ewan beat uselessly at the giant shell above them, Peter had swum down father into the inky black water, leaving a trail of large bubbles. They glowed - pinkish and perfectly round - seven in all.

Peter reappeared amongst the bubbles, frantically waving at the group and then pointing at the bubbles. Lissa couldn’t process it. Her lungs screamed for air, and her body was weighed down by the gravity of the water. Her eyes stung from the salt water.

But Brine seemed to understand. She swam past Lissa, her hands grasping for the closest bubble. When they connected with it, the bubble instantly sucked her

inside. She fell, dry, into the air-filled bubble, the water from her clothes splashing its pink, clear sides.

Soon everyone was doing the same. Lissa pushed Adam into a bubble and swam to the next one. The instant her hands hit its wall, it was as if she were being vacuumed into the space. Tumbling headfirst, she rubbed the salt from her eyes and looked around, finding herself safe in a bubble that was rapidly crossing the length of the Asp Turtle, on its way to the surface.

The bubbles broke through the choppy waters, bobbing. In the distance, the group could make out the Asp Turtle, now on its back. From here, it seemed unbelievable that they had ever thought it was an island - enormous flippers lazily treaded water, and its head was tilted back, the one visible eye at half-mast.

Brine was yelling something through the wall of her bubble, but Lissa couldn't make it out. Cassie put her hand to her ear, shaking her head.

Brine pointed, and the group followed her gaze. The ship! It had become untethered when the Asp Turtle had rolled, and it was now bobbing in the sea. Seconds later, its sails filled and its prow swung toward them.

*

"Thanks," Adam gasped as the crew pulled him on board. "I thought we were going to die."

"We *should* have died," Lissa said. "But in the movies, when magic's involved, you can bend the rules of survival more than normal." She turned to Peter. "You can do magic?"

Peter turned pink. "A bit. I'm still learning." He took a shard of bright shell out of his pocket. "This is called starshell. It stores magic and I can pull it out and use it."

"Like a battery," Adam said. "Cool. What's it made of?"

“It’s a long story.” Peter started to tell it.

Brine turned to watch the Asp turtle. It appeared to have forgotten about the ship altogether. It floated with its neck outstretched, wriggling this way and that in the water, its flippers waving happily.

“It’s ticklish,” Brine said. “That’s how Atticus is controlling it.”

Control was maybe too strong a word for what Atticus was doing, but by scratching on one side of the turtle’s neck he could make the monster turn its head and, gradually, he was steering it around.

That wasn’t all. As the turtle turned, Brine spotted something brown and knobby caught at the edge of its shell. “An egg!” she exclaimed. “The turtle is a *she*.”

Atticus had clearly seen the egg, too, as he began crawling across the turtle toward it.

“That’s what he’s after,” Lissa exclaimed. “An egg from a legendary turtle. It’s bound to have magical properties. We have to stop him.”

“How do you stop a giant turtle from being ticklish?” Adam asked, watching as Atticus crawled across the turtle’s stomach.

Lissa tried to tickle Adam. He slapped her hands away. “Will you stop that?”

“Have you ever noticed how you can’t tickle an angry person?” Tom said.

Cassie grinned. “Let’s make the turtle angry!”

Everyone looked at her expectantly. After a moment, her smile faded. “Brine – you’re the Chief Planner. Come up with a plan to make the turtle angry.”

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The turtle looked more puzzled than angry when the Onion sailed straight at its head. But then the crew began throwing things. Empty barrels, a rowing boat, all of

Trudi's failed attempts at chocolate. The turtle snapped at the rowing boat, then at the lump of hardened failed chocolate. It roared.

"It's working!" Brine shouted. "Keep throwing things!"

Adam and Lissa threw their mobile phones. The turtle swallowed one of them. It began to cough, switching its head from side to side.

"Full speed in reverse!" Cassie shouted.

The Onion backed up, timbers straining. Just in time, as the turtle wriggled and flapped and then, with a great heave, flipped over and dived underwater.

"My egg!" Atticus cried. Then the turtle's tail caught him and disappeared under the waves.

Brine grabbed Peter's arm. "I'm doing it," he said. He held up the piece of amber starshell and drew an arrow in the air. Magic unfurled like a rope, plunged into the sea, and drew back a moment later, holding a dripping Atticus.

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"What should we do with him?" Brine asked. Atticus didn't look so threatening now that he was tied up in coils of rope from his ankles to his neck.

Cassie swung her cutlass back and forth, but more, it seemed, out of habit than any intention to use it. "What do you think?" she asked Lissa and Adam. "He comes from your world."

"Not really," Lissa responded, staring at him. Suddenly, Atticus didn't seem so scary anymore. He looked sad and even a little silly, with his green skin and hairy hunchback. If he went to Monster Grade School, he'd get picked on. She looked at Adam. "Adam, what do you think?"

Adam scratched his head. "We have him where we want him. Why don't we just make him promise never to do anything bad again?"

Lissa squinted at him. “Did that fall knock something loose? You can’t do that with a bad guy! The bad guy *always* goes back on his word.”

“What if we made it so he couldn’t?” Brine asked. “Peter, you remember the mind control spell.”

Peter’s mouth fell open. “What? No, I can’t! I’m not using magic to control people – that’s the sort of thing Marfak West would do.”

“Who’s Marfak West?” Adam asked.

“The evilest magician ever. It’s a long story.”

“Everything’s a long story with you,” Lissa complained.

Brine grinned. “All the best stories are long stories.”

Ewan took a step forward. “It’s either mind control him or kill him – or tie him to the mast forever.” He winked at Lissa, too fast for Atticus to see.

Lissa played along, advancing on Atticus. “Well, which one will it be?”

The monster looked at the people circled around him. Ewan was cracking his knuckles. Cassie was shooting one of her classic death stares. “Fine!” he croaked. “I promise I’ll leave you alone.”

Peter took the piece of starshell from his pocket, held it up in one hand, and drew a complicated shape in the air with the other.

“Spellshape,” Brine whispered. “It’s how you cast spells.”

Peter raised his hands. “Virtuous, incorruptible, unimpeachable, inconceivable!” The spellshape flared to life in mid-air, bathing Atticus in an amber glow.

The light cleared. They all looked expectantly at Atticus. He didn’t look any different. “Did it work?” Lissa asked.

“I think so,” Peter said.

“When people *think* something works in the movies, they regret it,” Lissa said. “Like *thinking* you killed the zombie. Double tap, or you’ll be sorry.”

Peter shook his head. “If it’ll make you happy, I’ll do it again”. He raised the starshell once more and drew the spellshape, frowning in concentration. “Virtuous, incorruptible, unimpeachable, *inconceivable!*”

This time, Atticus blinked and stumbled back.

“That’s much better,” Brine said, loosening the ropes. “Good job, Peter.”

As soon as he was freed, Atticus danced away, jumping on the ledge of the boat. “Stop me? Inconceivable!” He bent his knobby knees and dove into the water.

Adam looked alarmed, but Lissa barely batted an eye. “It’s cool,” she assured Peter. “I knew getting rid of Atticus wouldn’t that easy.” She turned to Cassie. “So, we’re on to the issue of your payment. Chocolate and information about our world, right?”

Cassie grinned. “That’s right, lassie.”

Lissa raised an eyebrow at Peter. “Can that starshell transport you to other worlds?”

“I doubt it,” he said. “I didn’t even know there were other worlds until Trudi and Ewan fell into yours. And we all thought they’d dreamed it.”

“Let’s try it,” Lissa said. “How about if we all hold onto the starshell and I’ll think about where we want to go.”

Brine and Peter exchanged disbelieving grins.

“Why not try it?” Tom said. “You never know, magic might work differently in their world.”

“May I?” Lissa took the starshell, the others crowding around her. She screwed her eyes shut, deep in concentration. “You should close your eyes, too,” she whispered to no one in particular. “I don’t want to ruin the surprise.”

*

When Brine cracked open her eyes, white light almost blinded her.

“That’s the fluorescent lighting,” Lissa advised. “Don’t look directly at it. Kind of harsh.”

“How does the light. . . shine?” Trudi asked. It was beginning to register that the lights marked a very tall ceiling. Meaning, even though the open space made it feel like they were outside, surely they were inside.

“Electricity,” Lissa said. “See, some guy named Thomas Edison found a way to power lights and machines. Flip a switch, the lights turn on.” She spread her arms. “Like here. To showcase all of this fabulous - how do you say it? - *booty!*”

“Coming from you, that sounds like a dirty word,” Adam said, but Lissa waved him off. “Booty,” she repeated, spinning once before walking away. “Let me show you!”

Cassie let out a yell. “Tiny pirates! They’re trapped in those magical boxes!”

She whipped out her cutlass. Lissa grabbed her arm. “Quiet! You’ll have security on us. Those are televisions. Remember, I told you about movies. That’s a pirate movie they’re showing.”

Cassie tapped at the glass, watching two pirate crews battle. “It’s not real? How do they do it?”

“Well, the pirates are all actors. And then you have a director telling them what to do and the whole thing is filmed, and...” Lissa gave up. “It’s magic,” she said.

“Magic?” Cassie put her cutlass away. “That makes sense, then. What else is here?”

Two aisles away, Adam was trying to stop Ewan looting the costume jewellery. Lissa quickly rounded everyone up. “We shouldn’t draw attention to ourselves,” she said, eyeballing the group of armed pirates. “Let me show you the best bit about this place.”

She led them on. “This,” she said, “is the canned food aisle.” She pointed to an enormous can of baked beans. Trudi grabbed it and tried to stuff it in an apron pocket.

“Absolutely not,” Lissa said, taking it. “You don’t need to shoplift- steal - anything. This is your reward, from us.” She found a metal contraption on small wheels, abandoned at the end of the long aisle, and placed the beans inside. “This is called a cart,” Lissa said, steering it.

“This place has literally almost every kind of food you can imagine,” Adam said, picking up an enormous plastic container of coconut oil.

“I love coconut!” Trudi squealed. “But the last time I climbed a coconut tree, a monkey attacked me.”

They turned another aisle, and Brine’s eyes widened. “Toilet *paper*?”

“Oh, yikes.” Lissa loaded it into the cart. “Consider this a gift.”

Tom opened the door to a freezer, the cold fogging his glasses. “What *is* this place?”

“Costco!” Lissa said proudly. “The most magical place *our* world has to offer. Literally, anything you want is here.” She led them past the frozen food offerings to their real destination - the candy near the back of the store. “Behold, Hershey’s,” she said, tossing a thirty-six pack into the cart. On second thought, she added another.

Trudi had tears in her eyes. “Thank you. Thank you, for showing us such a magical place!” She caressed the candy.

“It’s the least we can do,” Lissa said generously, glancing at Brine. Maybe she’d pegged her wrong. After all, Brine had been the one to show her how to survive underwater.

Meanwhile, Brine was revising her initial opinion too. Surely only a smart girl would know how to navigate a place like Costco. Maybe they could be friends. Brine was willing to consider it.

In a magical place like Costco, anything seemed possible.

*Did you enjoy this tale? If so, find *The Accidental Pirates Book Series* on Amazon here, and *Monsterville: A Lissa Black Production* here. All proceeds go to Costco runs.