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DERELICT HEAVEN  
OR, HOW TO COMPILE SOMETHING THAT MAY RESEMBLE  
A PREDICATIVE PIECE IN THE GENRE OF INTERMITTENT FICTION

BY  
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<sup>1</sup>Having a Table of Contents in a novel is downright odd. Don't do it.



Part I: The Intro

or

**Loading Chekhov's Gun**

Lesson One: Exposition Methods

## 1: Wonderland Method<sup>2</sup>

Joshua Harper – A Nightmare – Paralysis – Down the Rabbit Hole – Goodbye, Earth – You’re Adopted – Deposited – New World – Sunrise – The Blacksmith – Whispers – A New Name

Any work of art begins with some sort of introductory presentation, be it one of cause, reason, character, form, or design. The presentation must be instantly alluring and seductive – it must be the busty blonde with the dive-fronted dress at the office holiday social. She must show, not tell. She must expose, but only in the subtlest ways. Paging through her at a glance, you glean some knowledge of what she embodies – but she needs commitment to share everything. She must be dressed smartly according to her nature, bound and titled, with a teaser at the rear. She shouldn’t cost too much to re-print, and she should be open to foreign rights negotiation and heavy editing.

Joshua Harper (Monsieur Harper to immersion school teachers, Joshua Victor Harper to parents when he was in Trouble) was not a well-endowed blonde with a swooping collar line. Josh Harper was a ten-year old Asian boy in flannel train-print pajamas, staring at the ceiling of his bedroom as he listened to the clock tick-tock the minutes away. His heart pounded in his chest, frantically pumping adrenaline. He shivered in his pajamas, swallowing and trying to repress the memory of the nightmare that had woken him: His bed and floor had opened up their jaws and lunged for him like a shark at a swimmer on a raft, and then he had been falling. Fast. He had heard the sound of the clock, and then dozens of clocks, wailing in discord. Violently, he had landed – and then he was in bed again, staring at the ceiling, more or less how we found him at the beginning of this paragraph.

He wanted to know the time. If it was late enough, he figured, he might be able to sneak into the kitchen for a toaster waffle and a glass of milk. He tried to sit up, but couldn’t. With rising terror, he tried again – nothing! Had he broken his neck when he had fallen? A soft buzzing came from within his ears, rushing like the sound of a distant waterfall. Was this paralysis? Was this death? His heart beat faster and his eyes darted back and forth, unable to escape the view of his ceiling and the green, glow-in-the-dark stars that had long since faded. The buzzing swelled, and

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<sup>2</sup> Make sure to introduce any quirky or weird elements (see: Footnote) that you bring to the table in the first chapter. If you don’t, you run the risk of surprising your reader later on. In a bad way.

with a panic he felt it in his bones – a shaking, rattling vibration that ran like a current on a copper wire under his skin, up his neck and into his skull.

He tried to close his eyes, but even his eyelids were frozen. A cry caught immobile in his throat, he was sucked down through his sheets, first smothered by his mattress and then unable to breathe as he found himself in a crashing free-fall. Overhead, his ceiling rushed away from him, swallowed by his bed and his sheets and then the floor beneath his bedroom. He fell through the first story, passing through floors and ceilings as if they were nothing but mist. Away went his living room, and then he was falling through the earth. He could feel his velocity rising, falling, passing into darkness.

“You’re adopted,” his mother said.

“Yes,” seven-year-old Josh agreed.

“What? How did you know?”

Josh held up his palm, comparing his tan skin to his mother’s pale, freckled complexion. He took her hand solemnly, fixing his dark brown, almond-shaped eyes on her light blue ones. He had known he would have to break the news to her eventually.

“Susan,” he said apologetically, “You’re white.”

Josh coughed a gasp when his back thumped lightly against a spongy, soft surface. There was damp grass under his fingers, and beneath that, cold soil. He cringed as he felt dew seeping through the soft fabric of his pajamas. A field stretched all around him, the sky huge and violet overhead. He watched the sunrise creep across the deep horizon, eyes trained upwards and breath coming in shallow clouds in front of his half-open mouth.

He was shaken out of his daze by the sound of hoof beats and wagon creaking. Where a dull and slow-witted boy might have simply turned his head in a stupor, Josh jumped to his feet and ran towards the sounds, hoping for help. A narrow dirt road cut through the field ahead, and coming down it was a carriage drawn by two black stallions. Josh stood by the side of the road, waving his hands. The carriage slowed and the driver looked down at him over a grey, deck-brush mustache.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Noteworthy: Old men tend to be very good at introducing normal characters into abnormal situations. Many would argue this is due to the “wise old man” archetype. However, an old man’s ability to unfold vast amounts of information without seeming

“What ho, son?” he asked. “How old are you? Aren’t you a bit young to be out here by yourself?”

“Ten, sir,” Josh said, remembering his manners. “I don’t know how I got here.”

“What do you mean?” The driver lowered the reins to stroke his beard, reminding Josh of a Santa Claus who had gone down a particularly filthy chimney.

“I fell,” Josh said, at a loss for a better explanation. Curiously enough, his answer inspired a widening of eyes in the carriage driver. The old man looked Josh over more closely this time, taking in his mode of dress.

“You say you fell, son?”

“Yes sir.”

“From where?”

“From my bed,” Josh said. He looked upwards, but saw only sky. “From Boston.”

“Boston?”

“It’s the capital of Massachusetts?” Josh tipped his head to the side at the face the driver made. No recognition. Not good. “United States of America?” Nothing. “...Earth?”

“*Earth?*” the driver shouted, springing up and back and bobbing in a manner not unlike a jack-in-the-box. He retracted and hunched over towards Josh, suddenly whispering as if there were someone nearby, which Josh was sure there weren’t, since they were, after all, in the middle of nowhere at sunrise. “You’re from *Earth?*”

“Yes..?”

The driver tied the reins and bumbled off his seat to meet Josh on the road. He put his hand on the boy’s shoulder, ushering him inside the carriage to sit among crates and tins of canned food. The urgency in the man’s manner implied unspoken danger.

“No good, no good,” he muttered. “Well, son. I’m a blacksmith who works for the King. You’d best come with me if you’re from where you say you are.”

“The King?” Josh asked. “Am I in Britain?”

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out of character lies not in his archetypal sensibilities, but in that he is good at rambling, forgets where he put things, and forgets how many times he’s told a certain story or joke. This means he can say the same things repeatedly without sounding out of character.

Again, the country's name passed the man's face like the shape of a cloud in high wind. He shook his head, stroking his grizzled beard.

"You're in the Centrian Kingdom now, son," he said.

Josh tried to recall his geography. "Is that in Ireland?"

"You're not on Earth anymore," the man said, grumbling in his old man voice. "I've heard of children like you – they come fallin' from the sky now and again, say they're from a world called Earth. Sky Orphans."

Josh had read a good deal of ~~comics~~ fine literature in his day, and he was familiar with the plot devices used to get normal, ordinary people from Earth (such as himself) into weird, fantastic, extraordinary situations. Usually this either involved severe psychological trauma, supernatural radiation or other physical mutation, or latent magical/superhuman powers. Then there were the comedy conventions, like blundering idiot-ism and the always unfortunate wrong-place-wrong-time syndrome. Josh hoped against all reason that he was going to be injected with a radioactive mutagen, but knew in his heart it was probably just bad luck.

"Well," the old man said. "I guess let's go in to town and we'll see what to make of you."

Josh didn't have another option, so into the carriage he went, and that was that.

## 2: “Both You & I Know” Method

Some Years Later – How to Describe a Side Character – Jasper, a Plot Device – Dragon White – Capturing Wolves – A Centrian Prison – Lizzy Siren – Duress – Lizzy’s Personal Guard – Decker – Returning to the Academy – Cipher Necronis – Exposition, Exposition, Exposition.

Jasper Callahan was six feet even, with black hair cropped in a military cut. He was Captain of the Castle Guard. He wore the Crown’s dragon insignia across his sleeves and a sword at either hip. He was a forgettable side character, and his job was to receive information for our benefit. Behold:

“Pardon my tardiness,” Jasper said as he strode in to his study. His guest, the blond young man sitting by the fireplace, stood to meet him. Jasper noted the ocean-green and steel-silver coat hanging on the arm of the couch; this was a sorcerer, a Maji.<sup>4</sup> No – he was too young to be a full Maji, he couldn’t be older than eighteen – a Majik Academy student, then?

“Of course,” the boy replied, flashing a charismatic smile under an aquiline nose and devious hazel eyes. The two shook hands formally, and Jasper gestured, enjoying a moment of cross-alphabetical alliteration.

“Would you like something to drink? I have teas from across the ocean.”

“I hear Jakkali tea is something to be rivaled,” the Maji (sorcerer) said. “I suppose I haven’t really introduced myself.”

Jasper then noticed the ornate sword lying on the coffee table, several feet long with a gold-plated dragon’s claw for a hilt. The claws of the beast were as large as daggers, gripped about the seat of the blade like a coil of snakes and talons. It was the boy’s Majik wand, and like most wands, its form said volumes about its master.

“No need; you give yourself away, lad. You’re Dragon White, the one they call the White Dragon. Or the Black Dragon, depending on the circumstances.”

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<sup>4</sup> Reiterating and redefining new terms should be done at least twice, for those who may be faint of memory.

“Who is really all good or all evil, anyway?” Dragon asked, full of clandestine cliché. He hadn’t yet learned the art of engaging dialogue.

“Indeed.” Jasper motioned for Dragon to take a seat before doing so himself. “His Highness did not explicitly tell me what role I fill in the matters at hand, though I expect it has to do with the pirate crew we arrested last week.”

“Yes,” Dragon agreed. “You see, I’ve been sent by Maji Cipher Necronis to retrieve one of the King’s misplaced belongings. In simpler terms, Necronis has sent a dragon to capture a wolf.”

Jasper coughed in surprise. “You can’t mean Black Wolf Maverick, curse his eyes! Both you and I know he destroys any vessels that approach that stolen ship of his. What a disgrace!”

Both Jasper and Dragon knew that the theft of the Royal Armada Ship that was now called *Righteous Jones* had been the most shameful trespass since the Pirate King Sinister had been at large. Maverick’s crew – the Wolfpack Pirates – were all wanted criminals in their own right. All together, capturing the *Jones* and her crew was the largest bounty Centria Kingdom had ever offered, short of Pirate King Sinister himself.

Dragon smiled. “And I’m to capture him, dead or alive.”

“Wolves are not taken into capture easily,” Jasper warned. “Not even rogue Maji wolf-pups fresh out of the Academy. 51,000,000 Crown bounty aside.”

“Of course not.”

There was a silence, and Jasper asked bluntly:

“How does this relate to the crew of the pirate ship *Siren*?”

“I wish to speak to the captain; I believe she may be quite useful in the final arrest of Maverick. You have her?”

“Yes.”

Dragon was smiling. He did look like a serpent then.

“Take me to her.”

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When Jasper finally left him at the entrance to the dungeon, Dragon was relieved: Finally, he had the third-person point of view to himself. He made his way down into the maze of rank-smelling dungeon, finally finding the one he sought. Nonchalantly, he leaned against the bars of the cell door, waiting for the young woman within to stir. He sang her name, his voice like molten gold.

“*Elise.*”

“Go bleed yourself,” she snapped, sitting up suddenly. Her long, crimson hair was pulled into a high ponytail, disheveled and murky like the rest of her garb from her time in the dungeon. The black leather eye patch covering her right eye only accented her left, which was the bright green color of the sea. She was every inch a bitter, catty pirate captain, with full lips around a sharp-tongued mouth. “Call me Elise one more time’n I’ll rip your bloody stones off with a fork. And I’ll warn you now, the forks here are incredibly dull and rusty.”

“To be sure. What can you tell me about Justin Maverick?”

She froze, then narrowed her eyes. Then spat at him.

Bitterly: “That wolf? Don’t know. Ain’t seen him in years.”

Smugly: “I suppose you probably could find him if I gave you the coordinates to his current destination.”

She glowered. “If you know his heading, why don’t *you* go and arrest him, ya goutcap?”

He chuckled. “Oh please, Azralea. Both you and I know that no ship in the King’s port is a match for the *Jones*. Maverick has both his crew and Majik on his side, not to mention the formidable defenses on that ship. He’s looted from many ports that serve the King’s armada. He’s made himself quite a little warship.”

“Well, the *Jones was* your Royal Highness’ fastest, strongest, most expensive and beloved ship,” Lizzy sneered, letting pride seep into her grin. She soon turned sour again, crossing her arms and leaning back on the bars. From this angle he could see a lovely line of cleavage between her perfectly tanned breasts. Not that he was looking.

“So I suppose you’re wantin’ me to head out on the *Siren* and hope he doesn’t fire on me, just as we know each other so very well,” she sighed.

“What a clever girl.”

“Well, y’know what, loverboy? You can go plug a bottle o’ leeches with yer half-mast. Savvy?” Dragon waited a few moments, piecing together the meaning of her sentence. The pirate in the cell seemed to think he had gone, and growled when she noticed he hadn’t. “Did you hear what I said, or are you deaf as y’are stupid—”

“—I hear you and your crew are sentenced to be hanged in four days.”

“—If we’re still here.” Despite the words, her lack of conviction fed Dragon’s smile, which was growing fat and happy indeed.

“You don’t really believe you’ll escape,” he crooned. When she didn’t answer, he took a short breath that matched the patronizing arch of his eyebrows. “Well then, I suppose it would be downright silly of me to suggest that in return for the release of your ship and crew, you could do a favor for me.”

Again, Lizzy Siren said nothing. Dragon dropped his tone and leaned on the bars, lowering his voice and talking business while he examined his fingernails.

“How many is your crew, Lizzy? I hear it’s over sixty. Sixty-seven to be exact – if you include the cook and the two Jakkali girls you were transporting which, might I remind you, is illegal without the paperwork, which I’m very sure you don’t have – sixty-seven faithful crew-members, about to be hanged. And their young and ferocious captain won’t do a thing to save them?”

She gave him a jabbing glance, but her voice was raw.

“Do they call you Dragon because your speeches drag on and on and on?”

“All you need to do is bring me Justin Maverick. Alive. I’ll supply you with a crew.”

“Made of castle guard, no doubt.”

“No doubt.”

“I won’t do it, pirate’s honor.” Then she glared. “And if *you* had any honor, you wouldn’t

be after one o' your own kind. *I know your fine Maji-coat's colors as well as anyone else in the country. Teal and gray, crescent moon; Maji to stay the King's buffoon--*"

Lizzy's taunt stopped short when Dragon grabbed her by the neck through the bars, squeezing. His voice dropped to a deep growl and she felt the Black Majik gathering at his fingertips, sending a low hum of dangerous voltage buzzing through her skin.

"The only thing I'll swear on my honor is this," he said, letting the darkness of his Majik seep into his words: "I'll see you're the last to die, so you can watch your crewmen's necks snap one at a time."

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Lizzy got a sick feeling in her stomach as she quietly followed the silver-and-yellow-clad Castle Guard down the dock. She looked out across the harbor – stationed on the northern coast, near the velum of the mouth-shaped bay that protected the castle, it was said to be impregnable. But as Lizzy conjectured, even the most careful of whores could get stuck with a parting gift.

Dragon White was waiting near the gangplank of her ship, the *Siren*. The sails were curled at the mast, but when full would reveal a brilliant display of red and navy. The flag and banner that rippled in the early afternoon wind were black, the banner sporting the flying snake that marked a ship of the infamous Gorgon Fleet.

"Captain Azralea. I trust you slept well?"

"As well as one can in the company of prison rats, in company smelling of piss and bile."

The guard at her shoulder raised a hand to strike her, but Dragon stopped the move with only a subtle flick of the eyes. His Maji cloak's collar was turned up, cutting the lower half of his profile, and it accentuated the cold, stern line of his brow. He smiled at her.

"It's good to know you're a woman who knows how to make the best of an unfortunate situation." He stood aside and gestured, and as he did, his sword-wand glinted from his side. "Shall I introduce you to your new crew?"

Lizzy sighed. Better get it over with. Standing about on the main deck were a couple dozen men in plainclothes – they’d never pass for pirates in the face of it, but through a spyglass, Lizzy supposed brown, white and grey all looked the same. Their glib faces hardened like stone when she looked at them, and Lizzy felt ill again. She followed Dragon to the rail of the quarterdeck, feeling trapped on her own ship. They were joined by a tall, well-built man with draconic green eyes and a white grin. He wore leather trousers and a vest, under which his bare chest and arms were carved like the sculpture of a Roman athlete. Something about his stride wasn’t human, carrying the weight of a creature far bigger. Dragon said,

“This is Avery, he’ll be your first mate.”

*You mean personal guard*, Lizzy thought. She said, “Another Maji?”

Avery bowed over-graciously. “No ma’am. Not a hint of Majik about me.”

“Avery is a mercenary who owes me a favor.” Lizzy noticed Dragon’s voice was laden with quiet threats, all of which Avery acknowledged with a flinch and a grimace. He recovered and smiled.

“I’m sure we’ll get along fine,” he said. His eyes trailed downwards, then bobbed back up to her face. “What a delicious young woman!”

From Dragon’s arrogance to the ship of strangers to this bizarre comment – Lizzy couldn’t hold it in any more. A moment later, she stormed off towards her quarters. Avery sat up from the deck where he’d been knocked to his back, rubbing his cheek where the Siren had acquainted her fist to his face.

“She decked me. Get it?” Avery pulled himself to his feet. “DECKED?”

Dragon, who lacked a sense of humor, turned and grabbed a fist of Avery’s collar, yanking the other man to eye level. His knuckles grew white, and where they brushed Avery’s chin, they sparked with black, Majik electricity.

“Look, dragon,” he issued quietly. “If you finish this task, you will be released and your bounty canceled. I swear it. But if you do anything less than get me Maverick, your fate will be to

join the rest of your kind and I will see to it that I have the pleasure of delivering such a thing to you myself.”

Avery twitched, resisting the urge to snort fire out of his nose. Dragon released him and he nodded.

“Aye,” he growled. “I’ll do what it takes.”

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“Where’ve you been?”

Dragon shouldered past the brown-haired girl who was waiting for him at the Academy West Wing gates. She wore the teal and gray Academy uniform of a junior classman well, albeit loosely, if loose were the more conservative of words to use. She tagged behind as he crossed the courtyard towards the dormitories, nestled at the foot of the ominous grey tower that was the Royal Centrian Majik Academy.

“Hey, Dragon!” Olivia Piper (that was the loose girl’s name) grabbed Dragon’s shoulder when they entered the building. “So? Are you still assigned to Justin’s case?”

The interior of the marble-halled, echoing dorm was almost silent. Olivia’s voice carried too far, and somewhere in the depths of the place, a door opened and shut. Dragon looked upwards, hoping to satiate Olivia with information before there were any eavesdroppers. His assignment from the King had not exactly made him popular with his classmates. Olivia was the only one who was happy for him, but she would be happy for him no matter what he was up to.

“Yes,” he whispered hastily, “And let’s leave it at that.”

Dragon pulled free of Olivia’s tentacles and disappeared down the hall towards his dorm. He heard her follow him, her shoes loud on the tile. He didn’t want to see her. He got his door open, slipping inside and locking her out. He cast a quick fire spell to light the wall sconce, then sucked in a quick breath and held it. Sitting at his desk in the small room was an old, thin, cloaked man. He bore a strong resemblance to the Grim Reaper, or perhaps a Sith Lord, though Dragon had never

thought much of it. The man was Cipher Necronis, yet another new character. With a sense of deep importance, he said quietly,

“Exposition exposition exposition.”

Dragon rolled his eyes. “I sent one of Maverick’s old colleagues after him, with Avery. If that’s not enough, I have other plans waiting,” he said, relaxing a little and brushing the sleeves of his jacket off, in case he might have somehow gathered dust since he’d stepped foot inside the Academy. “I hope after this is all done, I expect your endorsement of an early graduation from this hell-hole.”

“Whatever you want, you will have,” Cipher said. He drummed his long, grey fingernails against the desk slowly, his hand like one half of a severed spider that hadn’t quite died yet. “Both you and I know I’ve promised this to you many times. Just bring in Maverick.”

“Yes, yes. He’ll be here soon – I know him. I know his ways.”

“If you want your graduation and Maji status, you surely had better,” Cipher said, rising and setting down the book. “I did not save you from the Witch’s Trial so that you might fail me time and time again. I bid you remember that.”

Cipher stepped through the heavy planks of the door, vanishing from sight. Dragon balled his hands into fists, wishing for all the world he could keep the control he could maintain anywhere but the Academy. At court, before the King, around castle guards, with Jasper, with Lizzy – it was all as if he ruled the world. But here, all his accomplishments and high grades were left behind, shrouded by the shadows of his superiors and rival. His dignity and reputation were suffering, and they would continue to do so until he had done what had been called the impossible – bring Maji Captain Justin “The Black Wolf” Maverick back to Centria.

## Lesson Two: Storyline Expansion Methods

### 3: Introduction Method

Captain Justin C. Maverick – Curse – Sharky – Returning the Treasure – Wolfpack Pirates – Land Ho – Preparation – Grey Pirate Sinister, the Pirate King – Fishbone Peak – Siren Runs the Green Flag

By now, the reader should be at least marginally intrigued as to what kind of person this “Wolf” person could possibly be. After all, he’d been mentioned in one of the first two chapters (multiple times), and it was hard to imagine that he could be anything other than either a) the main protagonist or b) the main antagonist. And, as Dragon has shown us that he is neither likeable nor easy to sympathize with (as an antagonist is wont to), you may feel comfortable in knowing that the Black Wolf shall, in further chapters, dutifully oppose him.

In all truth, really, Maji Pirate Captain Justin Cygnus “The Wolf” Maverick was neither good nor bad, but five foot five and freckled. At the time in which this chapter takes place, he was somewhere between his last birthday and his next<sup>5</sup>, and sleeping in his quarters as mischief became afoot elsewhere on his ship.

A knock on the door.

No response.

Another.

None.

Jamie Brilliant, ruggedly handsome and be-dreadlocked first mate and cousin to the captain, held onto his scabbard before ramming his shoulder against and then barging through the door, startling a dreaming Maverick out of bed and onto the hard wood floor.

“Justin, we’ve got a problem,” Brilliant said.

“I was sleeping,” Maverick pointed out, hoping it was socially acceptable to be seen in one’s underwear by one’s kin in a situation as awkward as this.

“We’ve been hijacked. Kinda.”

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<sup>5</sup> Or should that be “most recent” and his next? ‘His last’ appears ambiguous in that it could also mean the last birthday he’ll ever have, which would be sentencing a newly introduced character to impending death.

Maverick groped for his glasses and put some pants on. The sky over over the quiet deck was cloudy and grey, heavy with stillborn rain over an empty ocean peaking with jagged waves and twinkling with spindrift. As the descriptive word budget plummeted after the previous sentence, Maverick's galleon temporarily became a wood floaty thing with thingy things attached to its thing in order to do something.

"See?" Brilliant said, pointing. Maverick followed the gesture to the helm, which should have been manned by a crewman, but which was instead manned by a woman who was the cross of a shark and a human. Her blue, metallic skin and predatory eyes were the shark parts; her shapely legs, straight-nosed face, and decorated arms were the human parts. At her back was a huge silver halberd. Beside her, the three guards and night helmsman were sitting on the deck with their hands bound behind their backs.

Maverick went to address the situation, clearing his throat and reaching into his jacket. As he neared, the shark woman looked over, arching a brow.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Why yes you *can*," Brilliant said under his breath with a bit of an eyebrow-waggle.

"Well, yes and no," Maverick said, more over his breath and thus more loudly. He leaned on the rail near the wheel, rubbing his forehead between his eyes with one hand and rustling about in his pocket with the other. "Can I ask what you happen to be doing on this fine morning?"

"I have hijacked your ship." She grinned, and Maverick saw more evidence of her sharky heritage in the shape of many rows of sharp teeth.

"I can see that. Where do you intend to go with it?"

"That is no longer your concern," she replied with calm hoity-toit.

"As it's *my* ship, I feel it's rather more my business than not." Maverick withdrew a small black rod from his pocket and began twirling it between his fingers. As he flipped the rod in his hands, it grew until it was twice as long as it had been when he had removed it. At this size, the rune-like inscriptions that were etched along it were visible – ancient, dark and powerful. The shark woman noticed it suddenly, then recognized the face of the boy before her: The dark brown

hair and the sharp, chocolate-colored scholar's eyes behind very un-pirate-like spectacles – the green and gray colored jacket – his face was printed on wanted posters throughout the Kingdom.

“So you see,” he said coolly, recognizing the revelation catching hold in her piscine features. “We’re going to have to negotiate a bit more than you were thinking now, aren’t we?”

“I am not afraid of you, Maji,” the woman said. “I will take this ship to Fishbone Peak regardless who stands in my way, regardless their bounty!”

Maverick's ears perked at the name of the Crescentian's destination.

“Fishbone Peak?”

“You know of it?”

Maverick smiled broadly, offering his hand.

“I'm Captain Justin Maverick. Let's strike a deal.”

\* \* \*

“So that's why we're headed there,” Maverick summarized after a lengthy expose (using methods found earlier in this novel, of course). He took a swig of his coffee. The mid-afternoon light shone in through the galley windows, making everything a little less dank and dreary. Brilliant, adjacent, eyed Macey Blueangel Strikerider, High Priestess of the Crescentian Imperial Citadel and User of Extreme Title Case.

“How about you?”

“I am going there to meet my destiny,” she said solemnly.

“Your destiny,” Maverick repeated, but with a different intonation. “Your destiny is at Fishbone Peak, second largest loot depository for the most powerful pirate in the world, the Pirate King Sinister? Seems like a literary plot device to me.”

“Unless her destiny is to steal his treasure,” Brilliant suggested. “Or both.”

Maverick scoffed. “I wouldn't recommend *that*,” he said. “Unless you're into Majik-nullifying curses.”

Macey frowned; nullified Majik? So his wand-flaunting earlier had been a bluff? Well, that didn't matter now. If they would participate in her quest, then so be it. Destiny was destiny.

“My destiny as a High Priestess is to assemble an ancient prophecy which has been kept by my people within the crystalline tombs of the Crescentian Citadel,” she said verbosely. The background music dimmed and faded, finally replaced by a mysterious piano piece with enigmatic undertones. “We cannot fully understand it yet, but we know it speaks of a young man who was thrust from his homeland into a world of danger. This boy, with unparalleled Majik powers, will be the bringer of freedom to this world. And it is my duty, as the High Priestess of the Citadel, to aid him.”

“Where does Fishbone Peak come in?”

“Within the Pirate King Sinister's treasure, there is an Artifact which I must retrieve. This Artifact will guide me to the Destined One. It was once part of the great Crescentian Museum, but when Sinister declared war against us many decades ago, it was stolen. We finally traced it to his treasure hoard. It has been a sore spot for my people, and once I have it back, and have found the Destined One, I hope to go after Sinister next, and be sure his black ships never sail the seas again.”

“Ah, I see, a prophecy plot. Well, are you sure it's actually on the island? Maybe we've got it stashed in our cargo hold from when we stole it. If we have it, once we revoke this curse on me, you can just take it.”

Maverick stood, gesturing for Macey to follow. Brilliant, decidedly hungrier for food than foreshadowing, remained seated and reached for another loaf of fairly fresh bread. Macey and Maverick surfaced onto the deck, where the day was in the making. Maverick took a moment to proudly survey his ship and crew, taking a deep breath of ocean air.

“The *Jones* is an impressive ship,” Macey admitted as she followed Maverick across the deck towards the locks to the hold. “At first I thought she was a Centrian warship. I suppose I should have recognized the *Righteous Jones* when I saw her, but we Crescentians try to stay as far out of Centrian politics as possible.”

“Me too. I was trained by His Majesty's royal torturers at the dungeon that poses as an

Academy, and I bear the sign, but I got out of that place the first chance I got,” he said. “The rest of the crew has never worked a day under Centrian command. They’re my Wolfpack, and they belong to me.”

“That Brilliant character – he is your first mate?”

“And cousin, aye.”

“You compliment each other well.” A pause. “So you were cursed?”

“Yeah. And as you can probably imagine, it’s a bit hard to be *the most dangerous pirate on the sea* when I can’t even light my own candles,” he said dryly. The two climbed down beneath the deck and Maverick dug a match from his pocket, lighting a torch and taking it from the wall. When they reached the end of the hall, Macey held the torch for the Captain while he fiddled with his keys and unlocked the great, heavy doors that led to the hold. When he finally pushed the doors open, they let out a low, loud creak and Macey gasped.

Inside the hold were wall-to-wall crates and chests, some spilling over with gold and jewels, but most of them packed tightly with dusty books and maps. Some of the boxes had neither material nor intellectual treasure; they were filled with what looked like garage sale findings – boots, tupperware, old bottles and jugs, writing utensils, worn baby clothes and broken bits and pieces of furniture.

“I’ve had my cartographer<sup>6</sup> copy all the maps he could find, and I’ve been working on memorizing some of the things from the logs, but most of it’s just this weird junk,” Maverick said. “A lot of the maps aren’t even of real places – I guess that’s what we get for lifting before looking. Who knew the Pirate King would have so much random crap. Do you see your Artifact?”

Macey stepped in, timidly poking into this crate and that. When nothing resurfaced but old, musty stuffed animals and broken VHS tapes, she shook her head.

“I will accompany you to the island,” Macey said when they reached the deck again. “I have been formally trained in many kinds of combat, and I fear little. With my help, we will be in and out of there in the fluke of a tail.”

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<sup>6</sup> Maverick preferred the term “map man,” but he figured he’d act professional in front of Macey.

Maverick grinned. “That’s something I’m very glad to hear.”

The ship’s bell clanged – their destination was in view.

“Looks like our position has become propinquitous,” Maverick called. “Prepare to go ashore. I want fifteen men strong. Start hauling out the loot. Let’s make this a quick operation, men! I want to be back for supper.”

Maverick turned to oversee the hauling out of the loot when Brilliant emerged from the newly bustling crowd of pirates.

“We’ve got a problem,” he said. “Another ship approaching from the west.”

“Flags?”

Brilliant grimaced. “It’s the *Siren*. They’re running the green flag, but…”

Maverick gritted teeth. His teeth. “This is just friggin’ perfect. I don’t see her for six years and the first thing that happens when we meet again is I blow her ship into the water. Show me.”

“The *Siren* – another pirate ship?” Macey asked.

“Yeah. A friend’s. Brilliant, keep an eye on them. If she’s there, we’ll accept her green. Otherwise, they make a move and we blow ‘em to smithereens.”

“Aye, Cap’n.”

“I’m gonna help the men with their junk. That sounded wrong. But you know what I mean. First sign of anything, get me.”

“Aye.”

Maverick strode back over to help carry crates. Macey didn’t help, but she did tag along and ask questions.

“Why suspicious of a friend?” she asked.

Maverick recapped for those who hadn’t been paying close attention. “We got news Lizzy’s ship was taken under Centrian capture,” he began. “In that short of time, she couldn’t have escaped and found me without help. I’m a wanted man on the mainland – ergo it’s *highly* likely that ship is filled with Centrian soldiers ready to arrest me the minute I let my guard down.”

“Justin.” Brilliant was back, and he was all serious, and you could tell because he used Maverick’s first name. He handed the Captain the spyglass. “Take a look. She’s there.”