

JUSTIN SOMPER

PIRATE ACADEMY

BOOK TWO: MISSING AT SEA

with illustrations
by Teo Skaffa

uclanpublishing

PRAISE FOR PIRATE ACADEMY

“It’s another gem – carefully crafted, compelling characters and all sorts of intrigue. The Academy already has enough to recommend it, filled as it is with swashbuckling legends and satisfying turns and tussles along the way. But the tale of friendship and family ties it all together in a nifty nautical knot.”

Guy Bass

“A swashbuckling pirate school adventure with loyalty and friendship at its core.”

Janine Beacham

“Set in a brilliant nautical world full of danger and daring, PIRATE ACADEMY: NEW KID ON DECK had me racing through the pages to find out what would happen next!”

Jennifer Bell

“A storming success! Justin is at the top of his game with this funny, thrilling and full-on high-seas adventure.”

Chris Bradford

“All the rip-roaring adventure you would expect from a Justin Somper book. Pirates done right! I love this world.”

Eoin Colfer

“A gloriously action-packed adventure, full of characters you really care about.”

Cressida Cowell

“Such a fun adventure story that made me want to be a pirate! Written with heart and humour by one of the best in the business.”

Laura Dockrill

“With characters you’ll want as your best friends forever, this is a glorious thrill of a salty saga – spine tingling, fast moving, totally unputdownable!”

Vivian French

“PIRATE ACADEMY: NEW KID ON DECK has pace, peril and a pirate-filled page-turner of a plot. I loved it!”

Abi Elphinstone

“A brilliant tale, fizzing with invention and excitement. Sign me up for Pirate Academy right now please!”

Chris Smith

“PIRATE ACADEMY is a swashbuckling success! Filled with edge-of-your-seat adventure, a dash of mystery, and fabulously authentic friendships, this is one perilous pirate school I didn't want to leave.”

Mel Taylor-Bessent

“This action-packed tale is the first in a new series. And I cannot wait to find out what happens next.” ★★★★★

The Sun

“(An) imaginative and action-packed novel with a warm heart.”

Teach Primary

“Top Gun for Pirates.”

Quacked Spines Podcast

“PIRATE ACADEMY feels very contemporary, both in its characters and themes. It is genuinely refreshing to have a book that is so diverse and inclusive.”

Jake Hope, Awards Executive, YOTO Carnegies

“Transporting readers to a thrilling world where piracy meets mystery . . . With vivid characters and heart-pounding twists, Justin Somper crafts an adventure brimming with excitement.”

Dean Boddington, No Shelf Control

“Justin Somper knows how to weave a salty yarn, and setting action in the future is a masterstroke . . . There's little doubt that a new audience will jump at the chance to voyage through this series.”

Absolutely Education



JUSTIN SOMPER

PIRATE ACADEMY



MISSING AT SEA

Pirate Academy: Missing At Sea is a uclanpublishing book

First published in Great Britain in 2024 by uclanpublishing
University of Central Lancashire
Preston, PR1 2HE, UK

Text copyright © Justin Somper 2024

Cover artwork © Teo Skaffa 2024

978-1-916747-03-6

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Justin Somper and Teo Skaffa to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Set in 11.5/17pt Kingfisher by Amy Cooper

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograft S.p.A.

for David Amstel and Andrew Davidson,
two of the best friends a boy could ask for –
in smooth or rough weather.

THE STORY SO FAR . . .

It is the year 2507. The world's oceans are under the control of the Pirate Federation.

Jasmine Peacock and Jacoby Blunt are two of the fifteen students in Barracuda Class at Pirate Academy, Coral Sea Province. Here, the children of the ocean's fiercest pirate families are being trained by the world's greatest captains. On Captains' Evening, Jacoby gets a horrendous report and is warned he must do better. For Jasmine, it's even worse – her parents fail to show up for Captains' Evening and are declared 'missing at sea'.

That very night, a new student, the mysterious Neo Splice, arrives at the Academy harbour. The Barracudas are a tight-knit unit and, to begin with, Neo has a bit of a bumpy ride joining the class. But the Barracudas instantly rally round Neo when he shares a massive secret with them. 'Neo Splice' is his new identity. He was born Ned Darkwater, only son of legendary pirate Captain Doll Darkwater. Neo's mum was killed on her ship by a dangerous new organisation called the League of True Pirates that plans to seize control of the oceans.

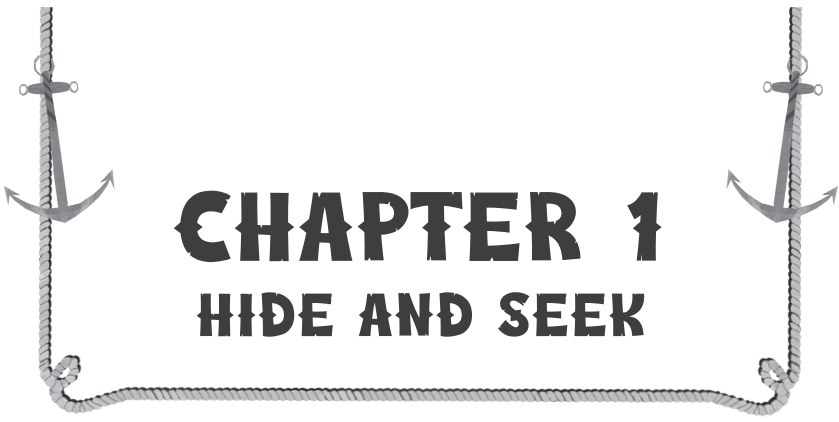
The ruthless members of LOT P have unfinished business with Neo and have followed him to Pirate Academy. During Sailing Class, they kidnap Neo, along with his classmate Priya. The Headcaptain launches a bold rescue mission. The LOT P crew puts up a strong fight. Neo is rescued but Priya reveals that she is now a member of LOT P and plans to stay with them.

As the LOT P crew is forced to surrender, Jasmine is shocked to discover that her uncle, Noah Ripley, is one of the ringleaders of the rebel organisation. Before Ripley is taken away to prison, she begs him for news of her parents. But, after trying to recruit Jasmine herself, he falls silent.

Back at Pirate Academy, Neo reveals to Jacoby that they are half-brothers. Jacoby is thrilled at this news, but they agree to keep it their secret for now.

Meanwhile, Jasmine is delivered a very special music box belonging to her mother, Parker Ripley Peacock. On the back of the box is a coded message, telling Jasmine that her parents are safe and will be in touch soon.

We pick up the story, four weeks later, at Pirate Academy . . .



CHAPTER 1

HIDE AND SEEK

He was making himself as small as possible. This wasn't easy, given how tall he had grown recently and how cramped the space was that he was hiding in. And he was making himself as quiet as a mouse – in fact *quieter*, he realised, as he watched a small furry creature emerge from the gloom and scurry excitedly towards his face. Silently, the boy drew his finger to his lips to tell the mouse to shush. But, whilst his sign might be recognised all over the world by humans, he wasn't sure if it would be understood by a rodent.

The boy was still reeling from the sight of his mother, sprawled on the bed in her cabin. *This* cabin. She lay only a few feet from him. Utterly still.

Her skin had been as cold as winter water to his touch. There was so much blood on the bedclothes, pooling out from where her heart still lay, though it was no longer beating. His own heart raced wildly. He could feel it

and he could hear it, thumping heavily against his ribcage. In the confined space, the noise seemed louder, echoing around him. He was sure it was going to give away his hiding place, reveal his presence to the intruders – the evil people who had arrived in the night, boarded this ship and, with icy efficiency, killed his mother.

Dead. Murdered. The words were so strange in his head. He knew their meaning, of course, but it felt impossible to apply them to his own mother. The woman who had raised him these eleven years alone – who had taught him how to sail ships and navigate by starlight, to wield swords and crossbows almost as masterfully as she could. His mother, who had schooled him in how to grade diamonds and gold and how to quickly spot a real da Vinci from a fake. His mother, with whom he had eaten supper just a few hours earlier, out on the upper deck. They had laughed together, as the sun sank behind their sails, talking about this and that and nothing at all. The thought that he would never hear her throaty laugh again was already hard to bear.

Maybe he should just give himself up and allow them to take him too. It would likely be a quick death and it would take away this terrible fear, swelling in his belly like a demon. He knew they were getting closer.

He could hear footsteps and voices. It was only a matter of time. Their swords were thirsty again.

Now there came a knocking. Muffled at first, then clearer and louder. They must be here inside his mother's cabin, right in front of the cupboard he had hurled himself into. He froze, trying to think himself even smaller, even quieter. He noticed that the mouse had gone away, presumably bored by this game of sleeping pirates.

The knocking came again. Now he not only heard it but felt it ricochet through his body. It was as if they were already beating the living daylight out of him. His eyes were already closed but now he squeezed them even more tightly shut. As if that would protect him. The knocking grew louder, closer.

“Neo! Neo, are you there? Are you awake?”

He opened his eyes with a start.

He had been dreaming. He wasn't on the ship, *Death and the Maiden*, which he had called home for the best part of his life. He was here in his landlocked cabin at Pirate Academy. His body was tightly folded but he wasn't in the confines of a cupboard – he was simply twisted in the sheets of his bunk. He was no longer the boy called Ned Darkwater. He was . . .

“Neo! I can hear you in there! Let me in!”

He swung his legs over the bunk. He took a deep breath in and out of his belly, letting go of the nightmare, allowing his eyes to drink in the familiar surroundings of his room. The knocking came again.

“I’m coming!” he called out, padding over to the door and opening it.

“Have you seen the time?” Jacoby asked him, tapping his watch. “We’re going to be late.” Then his expression and voice changed. “Are you OK? You don’t look OK.”

Neo attempted a smile. “I’m . . . all right. I was just really deep in sleep, I guess.”

Jacoby studied his face carefully. It reminded Neo of being examined by a doctor. Seeing that Jacoby was dressed in his aqua-coloured tracksuit pulled Neo’s own thoughts into sharp focus. His new friend, who was also his secret brother, had – as usual – come to collect him for the 5k run which signalled the start of each new day for Barracuda Class.

“How late are we?” Neo asked.

“We need to be at Swashbuckle Hill in precisely nine minutes,” Jacoby informed him, stepping into Neo’s cabin. “Or we’ll be doing hundreds of press-ups. And you *know* how I feel about press-ups!”

Neo nodded, already striding towards the bathroom.

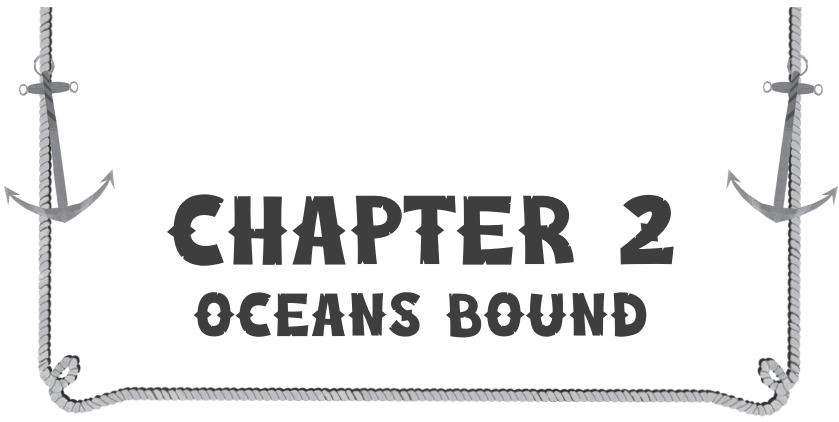
Now Jacoby was here, the day was starting to feel more normal.

“You could miss brushing your teeth just this once,” Jacoby said.

Neo shook his head. “Never neglect your personal hygiene,” he said, popping his toothbrush in his mouth. He disappeared into the bathroom and completed a basic wash routine in under two minutes. Stepping back out again, satisfied he was smelling fresh, he quickly changed into his own aqua tracksuit and running shoes. Meanwhile, Jacoby anxiously watched the other Academy students through the window. His legs jiggled as they always did when he was tense.

“OK,” Jacoby said. “We have five and a half minutes now. Can we do it?”

Neo grinned, his freshly polished teeth gleaming at his brother. “Never underestimate a Barracuda!”



CHAPTER 2

OCEANS BOUND



The school grounds were a riot of colour as students from eight year groups jogged through the lush gardens, each class wearing different coloured running gear. The older students ran 10k at the start of each day, whilst those in Crab, Squid and Barracuda Class ran 5k.

“You guys cut it fine this morning,” Jasmine said to Jacoby and Neo as they jogged along side by side. “What happened?”

“I overslept!” Jacoby cried, speeding up as if he might be trying to run ahead of her.

Jasmine effortlessly increased her own pace so she was just ahead of the boys.

“You overslept?!” she exclaimed. “On today of all days!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jacoby said but, as their eyes met, she caught the grin spreading across his face. Jasmine and Jacoby had been great friends for five years and she was expert at reading his moods. “All right,” he said. “Maybe I *do* know what you’re talking about.”

Having all speeded up, Jasmine, Jacoby and Neo had now caught up with Cosmo and Ocean, who gladly parted ways to give the others space to run alongside them. They had reached the base of Swashbuckle Hill and were now jogging alongside the sunlit harbour waters.

“So, Jacoby,” Cosmo said, with a mischievous grin. “How do you rate your chances today?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jacoby said again.

“Argh!” Jasmine cried out. She glanced past Jacoby to exchange a knowing look with her roommate Ocean.

Cosmo turned to Neo. “Jacoby has been waiting for this moment – *dreaming* of this moment – from the day he first climbed up Swashbuckle Hill in his little knee-socks and sandals!”

“You’re talking about Oceans Bound weekend, right?” Neo said.

“Correct!” Cosmo boomed. “Everyone knows that Oceans Bound is the true beginning of your life as a pirate.” He called to Jacoby over Neo’s head. “Admit it, Blunt, you’ve been obsessing about this weekend for years!”

“To be fair,” Ocean cut in, “we all have. There’s no getting away from it. Oceans Bound weekend *is* a Really Big Deal.”

“I don’t totally understand why,” Neo said.

“That’s because you only joined Barracuda Class a month ago,” Cosmo said. “No offence intended.”

“None taken,” Neo replied. Jasmine was pleased to see how, after his first bumpy days, Neo had been fully welcomed into the tight-knit fold of the Barracudas. “Can you explain it to me?” Neo asked now.

Cosmo nodded, happy to be of service. “Up until now, we’ve only ever gone out to sea for a few hours at a time, and always closely watched by the teaching captains. But tomorrow, everything changes. We set sail as five independent yacht crews to complete forty-eight hours of sailing and a number of challenges, designed to test our BRONTE skills!”

“BRONTE skills?” Neo’s face was awash with confusion.

Ocean took over. “B-R-O-N-T-E. Bravery, Resilience, Observation, Navigation, Teamwork and general Excellence.”

Captain Kirstin Larsen, who was running just ahead of them, now turned and shook her head, flicking out her neat blonde bob. “If you can say all those words whilst running, Barracudas, you are *not* running fast enough!” There was steel in her fjord-blue eyes. “Come on, guys! I know you’re all excited for Oceans Bound, but step it up!”

As the captain turned around and sped on her athletic way, the five Barracudas fell silent. Jasmine heard the sound of a metal blade striking the ground as Leif Larsen – Captain Larsen’s son – powered forward to join the group. Due to an encounter with a shark, Leif wore a prosthetic below his left knee. Now, as he often did for sports and other activities, he had switched out his regular prosthetic for a blade.

“I think Mor missed her Seamoss Smoothie this morning!” he whispered to Jasmine.

Jasmine giggled. She was impressed how Leif managed to maintain the fine balance of loyalty towards both his teacher mum and his mates.

“She’s safely out of hearing,” Leif informed the others.



“You can continue briefing Neo!”

Cosmo tapped Neo on the arm and pointed out past the glittering harbour to the ocean beyond. “We sail off in a north-east direction towards that archipelago of small islands over there.”

“And all along the way,” Ocean continued, “we get set challenges by the teachers.”

“The captains record everything in Logbooks,” Jacoby said. “And, at the end, there are bonus marks for arriving first at target destinations, as well as



overcoming challenging sailing conditions or showing special initiative.”

“Do the teachers follow us to see how we’re doing?” Neo asked.

Jasmine shook her head. “The challenges are laid out in advance by some of the older students.”

“We know that the teachers *do* keep tabs on our progress,” Ocean added. “But we’re not entirely sure how.”

Jasmine imagined this was a lot for Neo to take in.

“Those are the basics,” Cosmo resumed. “But what matters, Neo, is that Oceans Bound really shows each of us – and our teachers – just what we’re made of. How well we’ve learnt our lessons. And, *crucially*, which of us has leadership potential.”

They were nearing the end of their 5k loop, back to the terrace they had set off from. Captain Larsen was already at the water station, chatting away with Captains Pavel Platonov and Victor Molina, both of whom had led the 10k run with the Academy’s older students.

“Everything we have said so far is just background information,” Leif told Neo. “Because all any of us really care about is *who* the five captains are going to be. Isn’t that right, Jacoby?”

“I don’t know what you’re talk—” Jacoby began.

“Argh!” Jasmine cried loudly over him. “Somebody make him stop!”

“Don’t go there, Blunt,” Cosmo grinned. “We all know it’s been your only waking thought for weeks, if not months, now.”

“Maybe,” Jacoby admitted, sounding cross. “But is it really such a terrible thing that I want to be one of the five captains? The truth is, there isn’t a Barracuda

among us who *doesn't* want to be a captain.” His eyes ranged across his fourteen classmates. “Anyone who says they don’t is a liar, a rogue . . . and a scoundrel!”

Jasmine and her friends all laughed at Jacoby’s over-the-top language. He sounded just like his dad, Captain Beaufort Blunt.

“Well, Jacoby,” Captain Platonov said. It seemed the teaching captains had witnessed his outburst. “If you’re so keen to find out who the five chosen captains are, you had better go shower and have breakfast. Commodore Kuo and Captain Salt will reveal the five names at assembly in The Octopus precisely one hour from now.” He smiled. “So you will soon be put out of your misery.”

“Or,” Cosmo said, “you might be much *more* miserable!” He nudged Jacoby in the ribs.

“Ouch!” Jacoby complained. He prepared to launch a revenge attack but froze as Captain Larsen shot him a warning look.

“I’d think very carefully about what you do or say next,” Captain Larsen told him. “Always remember, the head and deputy head have eyes and ears everywhere – and decisions can be overturned right up until the last minute.”

Jacoby folded his arms, thoughtfully. “That’s very interesting. Thank you, Captain Larsen.” His eyes were bright.

Jasmine knew exactly what he was thinking. She really hoped they *did* make Jacoby one of the five captains. She knew him so well – maybe better than he knew himself – and she wasn’t sure how he’d cope with the disappointment of not being chosen.

Actually, she *was* sure.

He’d be a total nightmare.