

Synopsis of "Monster Rescue: A Children's Story for Adult Readers":

Pedrito is always sleeping instead of studying in school, but it's not his fault. Every night, the *tikbalang*, *asongitim*, and *manananggal* visit his house and keep him awake until the break of dawn. But one day Pedrito discovers that his father, a Filipino seaman, has been kidnapped by Somali pirates. To save his father, Pedrito makes a deal with the monsters, and together they fly off on *manananggal's* wings to the other side of the world. They find the hijacked ship and battle the pirates, but must leave before the pirate captain is defeated. Back home, Pedrito discovers that he must now find a way to keep his bargain with the monsters.

“Monster Rescue: A Children’s Story for Adult Readers”

Other children went to school to learn, but Pedrito went to school to sleep.

Pedrito came to class with dark spots under his eyes. Before the teacher even started the lesson, Pedrito’s head was already on his desk, his books used for pillows.

It was not Pedrito’s fault that he could not stay awake for school. It was the fault of the monsters who kept him up at night - the *asongitim*, the *manananggal*, and the *tikbalang*.

Every night, exactly at midnight, the three monsters would pay Pedrito a visit. They would press their faces against the window, scowl at Pedrito, howl at the moon, then dance under the moonlight until the break of dawn.

That was the reason Pedrito always went to school with dark spots under his eyes, and why he spent more time sleeping than learning his lessons.

Pedrito could not tell anyone about the *asongitim*, *manananggal*, and *tikbalang*, but he knew they were real. Pedrito’s papa used to tell him stories all the time about the three monsters. Pedrito loved his papa’s stories. Even though the stories were scary, Pedrito himself was never scared.

Pedrito only became scared after his papa left home to work as a seaman on an oil tanker. That was when the monsters started their nightly visits.

But this is not the story of how Pedrito learned to be afraid. This is the story of how Pedrito learned to stop being afraid, and how his bravery saved the life of his papa.

It was midnight, and the *asongitim*, *manananggal*, and *tikbalang* were on their way to Pedrito's house. It was one of their favorite houses, for they had been visiting Pedrito and his family for a long, long time. Pedrito did not know it, but the stories his papa told him were the same stories his papa's papa had told his papa, and so on and so forth, back to the very beginning of their family.

The monsters liked to visit Pedrito's family and scare the children. They did this because they were monsters, and this was what they did to feel important.

But they were in for a surprise when they arrived at Pedrito's window.

"Is that crying I hear," asked the *tikbalang*. "How can the kid be crying when we haven't scared him yet?"

The monsters looked through the window. They were right: Pedrito was in bed, crying.

Pedrito's tears confused the monsters.

"Should we leave?" asked the *asongitim*.

"Maybe we should open the window and enter his room," said the *manananggal*. "We haven't done that before."

"Maybe he'll stop crying and get scared of us again," said the *asongitim*.

The *tikbalang* nodded his horse's head and, with his great strength, pushed the windows open.

The *manananggal* entered first, spreading her bat's wings and blotting out the light of the moon coming through the window.

Into the darkness leapt the *asongitim*, growling. Its sleek black fur allowed it to disappear in the shadows; only its glowing red eyes, and its growls, told Pedrito that it was there.

Then came the *tikbalang*, its heavy hoofed feet shaking the entire room. When the *manananggal* lowered her wings and let the light of the moon back into the room, Pedrito could see that the *tikbalang* was so huge, its bent back and neck were pushing against the ceiling. If the *tikbalang* stood straight and tall, it would tear the roof right off Pedrito's house!

The monsters showed themselves to Pedrito in all their full, scary glory. But Pedrito just kept on crying.

"He's not crying because of us," said the *asongitim*, getting off the floor and sitting down in Pedrito's favorite chair. He stretched his legs, put up his feet, and wiggled his toes, irritating the *manananggal*, who had left her legs, feet, and toes at home.

"Every monster knows when they've made someone afraid," added the *asongitim*. "And this kid just isn't scared of us."

"Pedrito, why aren't you scared of us anymore?" the *manananggal* asked in a hurt voice.

"I'm sorry," Pedrito said, wiping his eyes, then wondering why he had apologized to the monsters for not being afraid of them.

"But something has happened to my papa.

“His ship was hijacked by Somali pirates, who are holding him and other Filipino seamen hostage. If the government doesn’t pay a ransom, the pirates say they will feed my papa and his friends to the sharks!

“I can’t be afraid of you,” Pedrito explained, “when I’m too afraid of what will happen to my papa.”

The monsters nodded their heads; they understood why Pedrito was not afraid, but because they were monsters they still wanted him to be afraid.

The *tikbalang* lowered its head and whispered something to the *manananggal*, who then flew down and whispered something to the *asongitim*. Then the *manananggal* said:

“Make a bargain with us, Pedrito.”

“We will give you back your papa,” said the *tikbalang*, “but you must give us something in return.”

“You must promise this to us,” added the *asongitim*.

“What do you want?” Pedrito asked.

“You must promise,” the monsters said, “to be afraid of us again.”

Pedrito did not want to be afraid of the monsters, but he also wanted to save his papa.

“I promise,” Pedrito said. “I will promise you anything if you can save my papa from the pirates!”

“Then grab your blanket and tie it around my neck,” said the *tikbalang*.

“Now jump on my back. And make sure to never let go of the blanket!”

The *tikbalang* grabbed the tail of the *asongitim*, who grabbed the hair of the *manananggal*, who spread her bat wings and flew out the window.

“How can you save my papa,” Pedrito asked. “His ship is near Somalia, which is in Africa, which is very far from the Philippines.

“I know this,” he added proudly, “because I looked at the map in school.”

“Don’t worry,” said the *manananggal*. “We will fly over the moon and arrive on the other side of the world.

“This is the best way to travel,” she shouted as the others hung on for their lives. They flew higher and higher, and faster and faster.

Pedrito laughed aloud as the wind screamed in his ears, but the *asongitim* and *tikbalang* just gulped and kept their eyes closed.

“Now we’re descending,” said the *manananggal*. “From this height, we can see everything on land and sea.”

“That’s my papa’s ship!” Pedrito said as they flew over a ship in the middle of the ocean. “He told me the name of his ship: it’s the *MV Philippine Stars*.”

“Let’s drop in on those pirates,” said the *manananggal*. She flew next to a porthole on the side of the ship, allowing the others to peek inside.

Inside the room were the pirate captain and his crew. The pirate captain was holding a video-phone and talking to someone.

“Who’s he talking to,” asked the *asongitim*.

“It looks like a *tiyanak*,” said the *manananggal*. “Notice the overly-large bald head.”

“That’s not a *tiyanak*,” Pedrito said. “That’s the President of the Philippines.”

“I thought the President of the Philippines was a *duwende*,” said the *asongitim*.

“That was the old president,” Pedrito said. “And she only looked like a *duwende*.”

“I never understood why Filipinos always elect monsters as their leaders,” said the *manananggal*.

“I hope they never stop,” said the *asongitim*. “I plan to run for Congress someday.”

“Be quiet all of you!” the *tikbalang* commanded. He was always irritated by political discussions. “I want to hear what the pirates are saying.”

“We will give you one million pesos if you let the hostages go,” the President said.

“I don’t want one million pesos. What can I buy with one million pesos? I want one million dollars!” the pirate captain shouted. “If you don’t give us our money, we will feed the Filipino seamen to the sharks!”

He shut off the video-phone and shouted to his crew: “Prepare to throw the Filipinos overboard!”

“Oh no,” Pedrito said, but his new friends were already in action.

The *tikbalang* jumped aboard the ship and started stomping on the deck, shaking the ship from bow to stern.

“We’re under attack!” the pirate captain said. “All hands on deck! Prepare to repel boarders!”

The pirates rushed onto the deck, but the *tikbalang* was waiting for them. As each pirate emerged, the *tikbalang* gave him a swift kick to the behind, sending him flying off the ship and into the waiting arms of the *manananggal*. When all the pirates were in her arms, the *manananggal* flew to the top of the moon and left the pirates there.

That took care of the pirate crew, but the pirate captain was still in the fight. He carried a machine gun and was getting ready to shoot the *tikbalang* when the *asongitim* jumped out of the shadows. The *asongitim* bit the pirate captain’s hand, making him drop the machine gun.

It looked like the monsters had won, but then the *manananggal* flew down from the sky.

“The sun is coming up!” she shouted. She picked up the *asongitim*, who picked up the *tikbalang*, who picked up Pedrito. Together, they flew off the ship.

“But you haven’t rescued my papa,” Pedrito said, struggling. “We have to go back! The pirate captain is still holding him prisoner!”

“We have to go,” said the *tikbalang* apologetically.

“We will melt in the light of the sun,” explained the *manananggal*.

“Don’t worry about the pirate captain,” said the *asongitim*, smiling and showing off his sharp teeth.

The sky was turning blue when the three monsters brought Pedrito back to his room. They flew out the window just as Pedrito’s mama entered.

“Good news!” she said.

“Your papa has been rescued!”

Rescuers had boarded his papa’s ship, she said, but found no pirates onboard.

“All they found, aside from your papa and the other sailors, was a big black dog chewing on a machine gun.

“I wonder where that dog came from,” Pedrito’s mama asked.

Pedrito said nothing, for he remembered his papa’s stories about the *asongitim*. “If the *asongitim* bites you,” his papa had said, “you will turn into a big black dog and never turn back!”

But despite Pedrito’s best intentions, things could not go back to the way they were.

Pedrito was so grateful to the *asongitim*, *manananggal*, and *tikbalang* for saving his papa that he stopped being afraid of them. Whenever they appeared at his window, he tried his best to pretend to be scared, but monsters always know real fear from false, and they could not live on pity alone.

Sadly, they turned away from Pedrito’s window.

Night after night, Pedrito would look out his window to watch his three friends. The *tikbalang* was getting skinnier, the *manananggal* was losing her hair, and the *asongitim* didn’t have enough energy to howl at the moon anymore. His friends were starting to fade away before his very eyes.

Then, Pedrito had a bright idea.

At school, he started to tell his classmates the same stories his papa told him. And when he ran out of the old stories, he made up new ones:

“The *manananggal* will pick you up and drop you on top of the moon,” he told his classmates. “If the *tikbalang* kicks your house, it will fall down! And if the *asongitim* bites you, you will turn into a black dog that the drunks at the *sari-sari* store will cook and eat as *pulutan*.”

His plan worked: before long, his classmates started coming to school with dark spots under their eyes. They were now sleeping in class instead of listening to the teacher. And when the teacher scolded them, they complained that they couldn't sleep at home because every night at midnight the *asongitim*, the *manananggal*, and the *tikbalang* tapped on their windows and paid them a visit.

But the teacher did not believe them.

At the end of the school year, Pedrito was first in his class, in part because the rest of his classmates were always asleep. Pedrito was very happy about getting a medal, but he was even happier about two things.

One, his mama said his papa was coming home soon. Two, whenever Pedrito looked out his window at night, he saw his three friends, healthy and well, dancing under the moonlight.

The End