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On a fantastic island populated by unusual animals, a pirate captain finds a trustworthy companion in the little "Yellow Creature."

Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor Details

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Author : Mervyn Peake

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From Reader Review Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor for online ebook

Brenda says

A murderous captain and his brutal crew sail the seas doing nefarious deeds. They come upon an island filled with strange creatures. One in particular catches the captain's eye and is taken on board. Before he knows it, the creature has taught the captain how to relax and renounce his pirating ways.

An odd story, especially for children, but then it was written in 1939 when kids' books were not held to such PC standards. I understand that the story is not as bloody as originally planned, actually. I found it amusing. The illustrations are fantastic and the message, to stop and smell the roses (as it were), is really pretty great for kids to hear.

I've also read that there was some debate as to the sex of the creature, hints of homosexuality or chauvinism, etc. I found I didn't really care what the gender of the creature was and there were no sexual undertones for me. There are no women in the story, but then it's a pirate tale and there are usually few ladies in those anyway.

Mathew says

The first book from Mervyn Peake and a glorious look into the imagination of a 29 year old writer and illustrator. I had no idea that Peake was an illustrator but his work here is excellent and shows exactly why he has gone on to illustrate Alice in Wonderland and Treasure Island for his characters are richly drawn and the world of Captain Slaughterboard is as odd as Wonderland itself.

The story itself is quite simple in which Slaughterboard, coming to the end of his pirating days, stumbles across a creature who is also out of sorts upon the island it inhabits. Together both find a companionship which takes them on great adventures and also shows Slaughterboard the true meaning of contentment. Although, as expected with Peake, the work is well written, it is the rich and beguiling illustrations which make the book. The oddity and nonsensical nature of the island's inhabitants reminded me very much of the excellent The 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear

Dolly says

This is a fun, but quite strange story. The narrative has a very unusual font and the illustrations are humorous, with interesting details. We enjoyed reading this story together.

Miriam says

A bloodthirsty pirate and his horrific and deformed crew spend their days dealing death until they find an uncharted island populated by diverse purple creatures. The captain becomes obsessed with the sole Yellow

Creature. This weird story made even weirder by the outre illustrations of Mervyn Peake. The text is also handwritten by Peake.

An interesting but brief end note by one of Peake's sons says that he made it up for his kids during the years they lived in primitive conditions in the Channel Islands.

HBalikov says

"As a young man in the 1930s, my father, Mervyn Peake, visited Sark, one of the Channel Islands, with the idea of living a bohemian life free from the pressures of modern society. Soon after the Second World War, he returned with his wife, Maeve, and their two sons, Sebastian and myself, Fabian. A daughter, Clare, was born on the island in 1949. At the time, Sark was an isolated place, and living conditions were simple. Water had to be hand pumped, lighting was by means of paraffin lamps; and apart from tractors, no motorized vehicles were allowed on the island. Our parents had provided us with an idyllic early childhood, and we were swept along in the wash of my father's colossal spirit of adventure.

"Each Sunday in his study, a large room with an open fire, my father would make drawings for my brother and me. Typically, these were of pirates, comical animals, and monstrous scenes in pen and ink, watercolor, or pencil, which we collected in special books. These drawings were clearly from the same imagination that created the eccentric characters of Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor.

"In this beautiful new edition, my father's book has been produced as it was intended. No details have been spared, and the idiosyncracies of his original idea have been properly realized."

London, March 2001

In many ways this is a children's tale of rehabilitation. The dread pirate Slaughterboard gives up his thieving and killing after going to the Pink Island and forming a relationship with the Yellow Creature. (see cover art above) The artwork is fantastic in the original meaning of that word. The story is more whimsical than comprehensible, but the resolution of this tale should satisfy most readers of all ages.

I big shout out to Cecily for pointing me in this direction and convincing me that there was a world beyond Titus from Mervyn Peake. (Cecily's review contains a number of representative pictures that I found difficult to import.)

Kyle says

What an odd children's book... yet, oddly wonderful with amazing artwork.

Only an unrestrained imagination like Peake's could conjure something with this blend of weirdness and charm, while still being suitable for children.

Sacramento Public Library says

Pirates and monsters! What could be better? Originally published in 1939, this picture book by the author of the Gormenghast Trilogy has wonderfully grotesque illustrations that will appeal to a certain sort of child (or adult)—though some parents may be put off by the pipe smoking and rum bottles included in some illustrations. —Dave

Michael says

Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor has been a firm favourite since I delightedly found a second-hand 1977 copy back in the '90s. Great find though it was, that edition was in a small format that compressed the lines in Peake's illustrations, dropping detail and, where colour was added, it was a vivid but disappointingly flat, orange-yellow only:

Finally, I've decided to upgrade to the large format Walker Books edition of 2001 - what a revelation! The delicacy and intricate shading and hatching of Peake's pen are now clearly visible and, whilst the colours, where used, are still flat, they are *colours*: plural! Pastel shades of green, blue and pink abound, earth colours for (most of) the pirates, purple and lilac for the strange creatures of the island and, of course, bright yellow for the Yellow Creature!

I've always suspected that the tattoo of the woman on Charlie Choke's left arm was Peake's wife, Maeve Gilmore, now I can read the name beneath the portrait to confirm that it is: a romantically humorous touch.

What's it about? The illustrations, really. They are absolutely integral to the book, which has little in the way of plot or narrative. Such as it is, it's a slight tale of the pirates discovering an island full of strange creatures, one of which becomes the object of the Captain Slaughterboard's rather obsessional affection, with whom he eventually decides to settle down and "drop anchor". Despite the lack of any deep story, the book is made vibrant and full of humorous energy by the fantastic quality of Peake's illustrations.

Christine says

It's incredibly old fashioned (because it is) and just feels lame.

Wreade1872 says

I like the drawings but that was a little too random for me. Also even as a child i think i would be annoyed that most of the characters disappear from the story half-way through.

Samuel Nakat says

Fantastical, wildly creative and colourful illustrations paired with a charming story make for a children's

classic. Highly recommended.

Alex says

We LOVE this book in our house. Out of print, perhaps? It was written way back in 1939, by the author of the very dark and gothic Gormenghast trilogy, but this is a book of a very different kind. He wrote it based on stories he used to tell his kids, I believe. The best thing about this book is the art, which is an incredibly detailed style of cross-hatching and pointillism. We discover something new on each page every time we read it. The story is good, but one has to overlook the outdated undercurrent of colonialist privilege and questionable undertones that are present in the narrative.

Travis says

Funny, quirky story book about a ruthless pirate and his equally blood-thirsty and quirky crew, as they wander the seas, encountering various odd islands and having the occasional massacre.

Then on one island Slaughterboard comes to is populated by numerous odd, mythical creatures and he meets the yellow imp, who becomes his best friend and makes him see the error of his ways.

Fun, fantastical, bloodthirsty, clever and, in an odd way, kind of sweet.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Return to the Pink Island

Down on the docks, I felt the pull
Of my first sailing trip abroad.
"Hear ye, my mates, from Istanbul,"
Said fearless Captain Slaughterboard
(I ask, what kind of name is that?)
"My ship, it's called the Black Tiger"
(That's no name for a pussy cat!),
"I need fifty men inside her."
En route, we heard a husky voice,
Above the clamour of the band,
Billy Bottle, one of the boys:
"Hey, I've spotted a pink island."
Then we noticed all these creatures
Whose clothing was preposterous.
"Who are these inhabitants
So remote from the Bosphorus?"
Lined up on the sandy beaches,
They didn't seem so devilish,
While they sat on purple turtles
And ate their crimson jellyfish.

If you think we've got funny names
Or ones that shouldn't be allowed,
Then you should hear just what they're called:
Balleroon, Dignipomp the proud.
There's more live beneath the summit:
Dreadful Hunchabil, Saggerdroop,
The Sleeka, his son, the Plummet
(A portly cook like Peter Poop).
Guggaflop is very lazy,
That's not to mention Mousterashe,
Who claims Squirmarins are crazy,
Though motivated still by cash.
Well, the Captain was the fondest
Of a little yellow creature.
He took him to our pirate ship
And showed him every feature.
But the Captain yearned to return
With the creature to his home land,
Where he hoped there was much to learn
And they both could walk, hand in hand.
So later when we dropped anchor
Off this pink island you don't know,
The two strode down the sloping deck,
While shouting wildly, "Yo-ho! Yo-ho!"

Cecily says

A delightful children's book, handwritten and illustrated by Mervyn Peake, though like all really good children's books, it can also be enjoyed by adults.

This book reflects Peake's lifelong love of pirates and islands, though it's really a simple story of friendship, fun and adventure. The Captain and his mate, Smear, bond partly over a shared joy of reading. One surprise is the lack of a peg-leg, given that Barquentine (in *Gormenghast*, which I reviewed [HERE](#)) and the eponymous Lost Uncle (my review [HERE](#)) both have one.

The publication date means there are hints of colonialism, but in context, I have no problem with that.

Fantastical

The opening strikes a change from the traditional "Once upon a time", yet somehow has a fairytale familiarity, enhanced by its illustration:

"Far beyond the jungles and the burning deserts lay the bright blue ocean that stretched forever in all directions. There were little green islands with undiscovered edges, and whales swam around them in this sort of way."

There is a panoply of fantastical creatures, with suitably exotic names, including the lonely Mousterashe, croaking Hunchabil, lazy Guggaflop, melancholy Saggerdroop, loathsome Squirmarins, along with the prosaically named, Yellow Creature (male in pronoun, but not exactly masculine).

Illustrations

The pictures are a pen and ink. Many are black and white; others use just a few solid colours (it was first published in 1939).

There is a general air of Heath Robinson, the carvings on the ship resemble caricatures of ancient Greek statues, and there's a large wave echoing Hukusi's famous one (but rolling the other way, and with a ship atop).

There is a wealth of detail in the lines, shading and stippling. This is especially true of details: tattoos, body hair, fabric, plants, sea creatures, and patched repairs of people(!), clothes and ship. Adults may notice some rather phallic stylising of noses, fingers, and a banana.

Sexuality and gender fluidity?

The lack of women reflects the plot and setting, but there is a gay subtext, or would be if the yellow creature was unambiguously male. In appearance, the yellow creature isn't, but the text uses he/him pronouns. It's subtle and ahead of its time: a subtext that will go over the heads of small children and shouldn't be an issue for anyone anyway. This aspect is the theme of an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum in Luzern, 28.10.2017 07.01.2018 (details [here](#)).

Most cowboy stories and many pirate ones have similar, tacit, themes, which is why Brokeback Mountain was startling (as mentioned in my review, [HERE](#)).

"The British author and draftsman Mervyn Peake (1911-1968) created a figure with Yellow Creature already in 1939, which in every drawing between woman and man, animal and man 'changiert' and while still faithful above all remains faithful to itself. Yellow Creature is therefore the title for the group exhibition, which focuses on the relationship between gender and genres."

Short and charming. And a little bit adult if you want it to be.

All My Peake Reviews

Note that this is unrelated to **Mr Slaughterboard**, which is a longer, nastier (a more violent and tyrannical pirate captain), less illustrated story of a bibliophile, and is included in "Peake's Progress" (my review [HERE](#)).

All my Peake/Gormenghast reviews (including biographies/memoirs and books about his art) are on a shelf, [HERE](#).

