

The music came to an end. I looked over and Captain Bartlett opened his eyes.  
"Mozart. Beautiful music ... so hauntin', an' majestic an' lonely. It reminds me of —"

"Up here," I interrupted.

A flash of white formed into a smile and shone through his beard. I was thrown by the smile. I didn't think he knew how to smile.

"Exactly. Ya surprised me girl. Didn't think ya'd figure that...."

*Trapped in Ice* is a fine story, which adds a dimension of genuine humanity to a segment of history dominated by larger-than-life figures.

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### A Village Nourished by Evil

*The Wreckers*. Iain Lawrence. Delacorte Press, 1998. 196 pp. \$21.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-32535-5.

One stormy night in 1799 the *Isle of Skye*, lured by false beacons, is wrecked on the rocky coast of Cornwall. John Spencer, the youngest member of her crew, survives the wreck of his father's ship only to find that the villagers are more dangerous than the sea. On this barren shore, looting wrecked ships has become the key to survival, and sailors who escape alive are murdered.

The first person John meets is the terrifying legless man Stumps, who hints darkly that he holds John's father prisoner and will kill him if John breathes a word. Spared from the wreckers' knives only by the last-minute intervention of Simon Mawgan, the brooding local lord, John must negotiate a labyrinth of intrigue to rescue his father and save himself. But whom can he trust? The village is full of ambiguous figures like Mawgan and the chilling Parson Tweed, as well as implacable enemies like Stumps. And is John's own father a gold smuggler? What was really in those barrels of wine loaded secretly by night in Spain?

This is a thrilling tale told at breakneck speed. John's quest for survival is set against a vividly-realized historical backdrop of poverty and desperation. This is a grotesque Dickensian world where hanged men wave in the wind and rats gnaw at the heels of a man chained to the wall of a drain pipe. There is even a mad widow who predicts the wrecks and "corpse lights" haunting the rocks. Fans of pirate tales will find much to please here.

Yet there are flaws. John's initial conversations with Mawgan seem inconsistent with the truths that we learn about him later. The premise that

the legless Stumps, despite his great strength, could drag John's unconscious father off the rocky beach and all the way back to town strains credulity. Mawgan's ambiguous portrayal keeps us guessing until the end, but it is almost disappointing to discover that he is really a "good guy" who made one tragic mistake years ago. And John's father is no smuggler after all, but has simply been cheated by Spanish wine-merchants. Ultimately, we are left with a clear assortment of "good guys and bad guys"; there is no beguiling Long John Silver winking at us here.

Nevertheless, most readers will be too immersed in this breathless, dangerous world to notice such shortcomings. They'll be too busy flipping the pages to find out what happens next.

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### Of Gorgons and Peanut Butter

*Snake Dreamer*. Priscilla Galloway. Stoddart Kids, 1998. 231 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-5981-6.

"Her plumage was like the rainbow, and her face was like the face of a nymph, only her eyebrows were knit, and her lips clenched, with everlasting pain...." Here, Charles Kingsley is describing Medusa the Gorgon as Perseus saw her seconds before he cut off her head. In literature, Medusa is known chiefly as a frightening, though mainly inactive, bit-player in Perseus's triumphant career. But unlike most other monsters of mythology, mere targets for glory-seeking demigods and heroes, she has a touching history, and despite her serpent tresses and petrifying visage, she is often accorded pathos, tormented beauty, and dignity, as in the Kingsley passage.

It is, therefore, a bit of a shock to find her dragged by her snaky locks into a prose equivalent of a B movie — Priscilla Galloway's *Snake Dreamer*, an adventure story about a present-day teenager improbably named Dusa who is borne off to a Greek island to be treated for convulsive dreams of snakes by formidable sisters, Teno and Yali Gordon, medical doctor and psychologist respectively. (Too late, Dusa recollects that the raging, grieving, immortal sisters of the slain Medusa were called Stheno and Euryale.) What has an awesome, sad character of antique myth to do with two brisk mistresses of modern skills and technologies and a young consumer of peanut butter and Hershey bars? Little that's credible.

Nevertheless, Galloway launches her grotesque story efficiently. Necessary tidbits of information and provocative hints are planted with care. In