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Worse Things Happen at Sea!

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

In this long awaited sequel to **Here Be Monsters**, Alan Snow shows once again that he is master of the surreal. In an exuberant adventure we return to the town of Ratbridge, home to a surreal group of humans and native creatures including box-trolls, cabbage-heads, talking cheeses, rats and pirates (Snow admits it is based on real life Trowbridge). The pirate crew of the May Lou have been living quietly in the town, running a laundry from the canal, but are dragged before the magistrates when a line of bloomers hanging out to dry upsets the sensibilities of one of the town's ladies. Landed with an unpayable ten thousand groat fine, they have no choice but to accept when the town's new doctor hires them to sail him to the Pacific to gather more supplies for his new miracle cure, the wonderfully named Black Jollop. The plot bounces along, gathering momentum much as a cheese rolling down Cooper's Hill; it's a thoroughly unpredictable and exhilarating read.

Absurd stories always offer opportunities for allegory and it's possible to read more into this too. There's the shopping-mad birds for example, on their Pacific island, who are duped into handing over their money with absolutely no idea of what it is they are buying ? their own doom in fact (in the shape of the trotting badgers, more fabulous Snow creations).

Snow's own illustrations fill the book. The **Books for Keeps** review of **Here Be Monsters** (BfK 156) described his style as half way between Mervyn Peake and Edward Gorey, and they are wonderfully atmospheric. There are vignettes and marvellous character sketches, plus some superb full page illustrations and diagrams: the Self Build Monster on page 232 could tempt readers to give it a try.

A little more back story for those who haven't read the first story would have been useful, but the Ratbridge world quickly pulls you in. This is hugely enjoyable, and most rare, totally original.

Running Order:

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