



Pearl of the Sea

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A teenage girl befriends a misunderstood sea monster in the graphic novel *Pearl of the Sea*.

Pearl lives with her father by the sea in South Africa, but with little work for him in the area, making the rent each month is a major problem. To earn money, Pearl assists abalone poachers. While diving, she discovers a giant octopus who's been trapped inside a restricted area for years. She frees and treats the injured creature, whom she names Otto; later, she attempts to liberate him from those who would imprison him again (or worse). The process of helping Otto allows Pearl, who's been scarred by her mother's abandonment, to begin building trust in other people, including her father and Naomi, a girl at school who seeks a romantic relationship with her.

There's a lot packed into the story, including exciting action scenes and aspects of Pearl's personal life (poverty; threats of relocation; love of the ocean; a budding romance). Pearl's relationship with her father is affected by her decisions about revealing her sexual identity to him. But despite the book's brisk pace, Pearl and others establish themselves well, and their subplots are all satisfactorily resolved.

The colorful art does a wonderful job of capturing the beauty of the sea and the ramshackle nature of Pearl's hometown. Of particular note are several continuous pages of wide, double-page panels, which, along with the occasional full-page spreads, result in an immersive, cinematic scope.

Pearl of the Sea is a vibrant coastal coming-of-age story with secrets, monsters, and thrills throughout.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2023)

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