



Victory over Abu Derya: The Quest for Pearls in the Arabian Gulf

Books Reviewed:

[Victory over Abu Derya: The Quest for Pearls in the Arabian Gulf](#) [1]

Issue:

[195](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

New to Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

2

Pearl fishing in the Arabian Gulf two hundred years ago could be a fascinating subject. It might even make an exciting story for a picture book for older readers. Unfortunately, **Victory over Abu Derya** isn't that book. The idea of the pearl fishers in a battle with the malevolent sea god Abu Derya, who commands storms, plagues of jellyfish and schools of sharks, definitely has potential, but the announcement of the outcome of the battle in the title of the book undermines any dramatic tension that might be generated. Mohammed Ali does not attempt to personify Abu Derya in his illustrations, not even as an inchoate shape in a storm, so that the battle appears to have no real enemy. Nor does he seem to have resolved whether this is a story or an information book. Human interest is introduced in the form of a boy called Rashid whose grandmother has foretold a fruitful fishing season, but although Rashid goes to sea, he disappears from the illustrations for the extent of the fishing expedition. The illustrations are entirely double page spreads that accompany a bland and wordy text, giving a dull and pedestrian feel to the book. Ali is a talented artist and the best of his illustrations are bathed in a strange brown of sunset and boat shadow, showing the pearl fishers emerging exhausted on their ropes at sunset, their baskets around their necks, like sea creatures themselves. Sometimes, however, a cartoon style representation of people introduces a comic element that doesn't fit the subject. Sadly, this handsomely produced but rather unimaginatively conceived book fails to convey either the pearl fisher's extraordinary courage and skill or the dangers that they faced.

Source URL (retrieved on Oct '21): <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/195/childrens-books/reviews/victory-over-abu-derya-the-quest-for-pearls-in-the-arabian-gulf>

Links:

[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/victory-over-abu-derya-the-quest-for-pearls-in-the-arabian-gulf>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/195>

[3] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>