



Pigs

Johanna Stoberock

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Six giant pigs, four kids, and a gang of adults on a magical island maintain a tenuous balance of power until two castaways show up in Johanna Stoberock's probing literary novel, *Pigs*.

Every day, Luisa, Andrew, Mimi, and Natasha feed pigs the garbage that the ocean brings in as the adults party in a lavish villa. When young Eddie arrives in a barrel, the kids mistake him for another piece of trash. Captured by the adults, Eddie becomes a pet. Then an adult, Otis, washes ashore.

Otis is a bridge between the world at large and the island. An ex-sailor with a history of running away toward life at sea, his real world woes motivate him to improve. He introduces a new system that has wider repercussions. He and the kids must choose their fate together.

Pigs reads like a parable or a Greek tragedy. The refrain "from a distance" is interspersed with passages about the island itself, and the drama lies in the interplay between the island's inhabitants, whose vantage points are toggled between.

Pithy, earthy language conveys complex truths. Amid grunting pigs, slimy refuse, and few belongings, the kids develop into thoughtful characters, eliciting compassion and respect. In contrast, the adults act like kids, abandoning responsibility. Undeveloped, they serve as warnings.

Eddie, the adults' pet, and Otis, at the children's mercy, mark a reversal. As the island holds a mirror to the world, these castaways hold a mirror to the island. The focus toward the end of the book narrows, and the tone becomes more self-reflective as the action gains gruesome intensity. The end is an effective rupture of the way things were. Devastating and hopeful, the book champions reform from the inside out.

Against a backdrop of environmental crisis, *Pigs* is a modern fable, though less a tirade about climate disaster than a coming-of-age story for adults.

MARI CARLSON (September / October 2019)

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