

A Conversation with Ray Marshall





Ray Marshall, the writer and pop-up artist of *The Castaway Pirates*, has created over 25 books, but this is the first one he has written. He began his paper-engineering career in 1980 with the publication of *The Crocodile and The Dumpertruck – A Pop-Up Reptilian Guide to London*. In 1985, Ray won The Smarties Prize for Children’s Books Award in England for the most innovative book of the year for *Watch It Work – The Car*. Ray took a break from books in 1991 and formed his own design company, Ray Marshall Design. Paper engineering was never far away, however, and *The Castaway Pirates* is his dramatic return to children’s books. He lives with his wife and two daughters overlooking San Francisco Bay. Chronicle Books spoke to Mr. Marshall about the creation of this elaborate and innovative work, and his career as a master pop-up artist.

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CB How long did it take you to make *The Castaway Pirates*?

RM I started conceptualizing ideas after attending the 2003 LA Book Expo. The pirate idea took hold in the fall of that year. However, it went through several twists and turns along the way. Work on the book as a pop-up really began in July 2006.

CB Why a pirate story? Was there something about pirates in particular that appealed to you?

RM Pirates happened to come along by accident. I originally wanted to make a pop-up book using the format of the song lyric “The Green Grass Grows All Around, All Around,” [by Phil Rosenthal] where the objects on each spread build upon the previous ones. As I was mulling through some ideas, I thought of “The Gray Sharks Swam All Around, All Around” which sounded like fun. So as I began to expand on the idea, I thought of a pirate alone on a raft being circled by these sharks, and the idea evolved from there. I didn’t even set out with the intention to write a book—that just happened!





CB When did you first start experimenting with the pop-up medium?

RM In my early twenties, I was working as an art director in a London advertising agency when I discovered the reproduction Victorian pop-up books put out by Intervisual, and Jan Pienkowski's *Haunted House*, all of which just amazed me. I decided there and then that was something I just had to do! No training, just do it!

CB Who were some of your influences, both as a writer and as a pop-up artist?

RM There were quite a few paper-engineers back then. I think all of the paper-engineers had some influence on me in different ways; I wouldn't want to single anyone out. Ron Van Der Meer, John Strejan, Keith Moseley, Vik Duppa-Whyte, Jim Diaz, Tor Lokvej, David Carter, David Pelham. I think most of these folks are still designing pop-ups but some unfortunately are no longer with us. As far as writers go, I love the rhymes of Shel Silverstein and Julia Donaldson, I like the stories by Tomie De Paola and Leo Lionni, and of course it's also hard not to be influenced by people like Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. I'm also influenced by music a lot as well.

CB Did you have a favorite pop-up book as a child?

RM As a child, no, I don't remember ever owning any. I remember I had a book of *Hansel and Gretel* that impressed me because the pages were die-cut and you could look through the pages into the wood and also look back at where you had come from, I really enjoyed that. It must have had a big impact on me! When I was a child growing up in England the cereal boxes had cut-out-and-assemble projects on the back of them, and I really enjoyed making those as well.

CB What do you love most about creating pop-ups? Why were you drawn to this medium?

RM I love the notion that you can make a whole scene appear from seemingly nothing, it just rises up in front of you like magic. I enjoy the challenge of figuring out how to make that happen and then packing it all away again! It's the "ooooh" factor—watching the surprise on people's faces. I like the "How do you do that?" line. It must be my father's engineering genes!

CB Were you formally trained as a paper engineer? If not, how did you learn the technical aspects of the art?

RM No, I didn't know that was possible back then. I learned through pulling books apart and then by trial and error. Isn't it amazing how many of us end up doing something we didn't train for?

CB How long did it usually take to complete one spread? How long did the entire book take you?

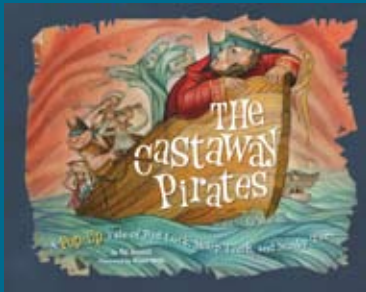
RM Each spread was different; some were much quicker than others due to the nature of each spread getting more involved than the previous one. I started my work on the pop-ups in July 2006 and I think finished in February 2007. But to put that in perspective, my workdays are very short, squeezed in between school drop-offs and pick-ups. A lot of time was spent refining the pop-ups before and after Wilson's initial sketches, and then drawing and fine-tuning the die lines took up a lot of the time. There's also a lot miscellaneous time involved in making several mock-ups of each spread, and the completed book for various reasons.

CB Is there any juicy behind-the-scenes info on the making of *The Castaway Pirates*?

RM Before I presented the book to publishers I had changed my mind about it being a pop-up book, because I thought it would be easier to sell the concept as a flat picture-and-text book. All the pirate characters and props were originally built in 3D software but ended up never being used except in the original presentation copy of the book. I spent more time learning that software and building the models than I did on the paper engineering! I listened to a lot of English folk music to "get in period" during the conceptual time. Wilson and I had a meeting outside under an umbrella in the rain at the LA Farmers Market discussing spreads 6 through 9—much to the amusement of passers by!

CB Is there something about the book that you're most proud of?

RM I'm very proud of the fact that I wrote the story! To be listed as the writer was not something I would have ever expected to happen. More importantly though I'm proud of the fact that these are some of the best pop-ups I've created, and that the whole package with Wilson's wonderful paintings has created a fun pop-up storybook, because there are very few of those in the marketplace.



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The Castaway Pirates

Story and pop-ups by Ray Marshall, Illustrated by Wilson Swain

\$19.99 hc, 978-0-8118-5923-3

10 x 8 inches, 24 pages, full-color

Ages 3 and up

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