



NAXOS

AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION
ABRIDGED



MERVYN PEAKE

GORMENGHAST

Read by Rupert Degas

CD 1

1	Titus is seven.	7:15
2	The Countess walked with a frown on her brow...	5:53
3	Cora and Clarice, although they did not know...	6:49
4	The husky, whispering sound of a score of flying gowns...	6:31
5	He beat his fist into the palm of his other hand.	6:34
6	When Titus awoke the walls of the cave were leaping...	5:41
7	Titus was to be kept in the lichen fort for a week.	4:08
8	There was no sound in all Gormenghast...	7:49
9	It was on the following afternoon that Mrs Slagg died.	7:45
10	A few days later when Steerpike saw Fuschia emerge...	3:52
11	At the end of the three hours that lay before him...	3:42
12	Steerpike's return to the castle's heart was rapid...	6:04
13	It was then that there was a knock at the door.	6:26

CD 2

14	At the same time Steerpike was fighting to free himself...	4:54
15	When Steerpike had come out of his faint...	6:42
16	Mr Flay had been sitting for over an hour...	7:50
17	In January the snow came down.	7:47
18	While Flay in his wilderness of hollow halls was brooding...	7:15
19	Dr Prunesquallor sank back on the couch by the window...	5:15
20	The Doctor had told the Countess...	6:32
21	She turned on her heel...	5:17
22	When Flay heard the door open quietly below him...	5:31
23	And so, without a moment to lose...	5:38
24	It was lucky for Titus that when the Doctor started...	5:56
25	When at last Steerpike came to a certain door...	6:24
26	When Flay and the Doctor, in their different ways...	3:33

CD 3

27	What he did not realise was that the death...	4:54
28	A few days after the murder of Mr Flay..	6:53
29	The day of the Bright Carvings was at hand.	6:19
30	Then he began to run...	4:48
31	It was hunger that finally woke him.	7:09
32	All of a sudden, Titus knew that he was lying alone...	5:24
33	There was no one alive in Gormenghast who could remember...	5:27
34	For little short of a fortnight the rain continued...	5:08
35	Driven from haunt to haunt...	6:10
36	It was not that Fuschia did not struggle...	3:33
37	Now that the flood had reached its height...	4:48
38	He was altogether exhausted...	4:33

CD 4

39	Knowing that he had several hours to wait...	9:46
40	The unwitting pageantry of the lantern-lit boats...	7:31
41	Titus, as the minutes had passed...	5:28
42	Nevertheless, the time came when the boatman...	6:09
43	When she turned her eye back...	6:30
44	All at once there was a terrible cry from below...	5:54
45	The boats moved out with much splashing of oars...	6:37
46	Ignoring all precautions, he wrenched the boughs about him...	4:55
47	When Titus saw that this was indeed so...	3:31
48	There was no more rain.	5:51
49	One evening in the late spring...	5:34

Total time: 4:50:29

Mervyn Peake

(1911–1968)

Titus Groan · Gormenghast · Titus Alone

The *Gormenghast* trilogy (as *Titus Groan*, *Gormenghast* and *Titus Alone* are slightly inaccurately known) seems at first sight out of step with its times. The first volume was published in 1946, when a numbed Britain was greyly austere, still in shock and just beginning to learn some of the broader horrors of the War: the devastating implications of the atom bomb were almost overwhelmed by the emerging atrocities of the Holocaust. *Titus Groan*, a grimly comic, fantastical, Gothic tale, was surely just an escapist work, a kind of dark relief. But while the imaginary world it so completely describes is essentially self-contained (rather than echoing the concerns of Britain in the '40s), Peake had more claim than most to an understanding of the evils in the real one. He had been a war artist at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen.

He had also suffered the first of two nervous breakdowns, and was by temperament slightly otherworldly. He was the son of missionaries – his father a doctor, his mother a nurse – and spent

his early years in China before returning to England to complete his education in 1923. Tracing specific influences is bound to lead to conjecture, but his imagination was certainly stirred by the architecture and the unquiet society of China at the time, and his first published story was written when he was 10 for the Missionary Society's magazine.

Passionate, unconventional, romantic and almost in some senses wild, he had worn a cape, an earring and his hair long in the early '30s when he was pursuing his first love (art) and his second (poetry). Despite his evident skills he was undisciplined almost on principle, and after failing the necessary exams at the Royal Academy Schools he moved to the Channel Island of Sark, where a former tutor had established an artists' colony. His work was exhibited there and in London, where in 1935 he returned and began teaching at the Westminster School of Art. He met Maeve Gilmore on her first day as a student there and they married the following year. By the end of 1940

he had had a one-man show in London, illustrated a collection of children's verse, written and illustrated a children's book, had a son, moved to Sussex, and begun the writing of *Titus Groan*.

He had also joined the Royal Artillery, although he was a good deal more interested in becoming a war artist. His several applications to become one were turned down in part because it was suspected that he might be applying in order to get out of the Army. It would not be an unseemly speculation to suggest that this was correct; but his mental state was such that he was invalided out of the Army anyway after a nervous breakdown in 1943.

After six months' recovery, he was finally taken on as a war artist, and at the end of the War witnessed Nazi trials as well as the previously unimaginable concentration camps. As an artist he had always been attracted to the macabre, but this actual horror changed him deeply. His wife said that he became 'quieter, more inward looking, as if he had lost his confidence in life itself'. His other work during the War included illustrating *The Hunting of the Snark*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, writing more

poetry, and finishing *Titus Groan*.

He and his family went to live in Sark in 1946 (the year of *Titus Groan*'s publication), in the house previously occupied by the Commandant of the German occupying force; but financial constraints forced them back to the UK in 1950, where Peake taught, illustrated, published *Gormenghast*, and wrote a comic novel (*Mr Pye*) and several plays. But the plays were not the financial winners he had hoped for, and he suffered another nervous breakdown in 1957. This led to the more evident display of the symptoms of a type of Parkinson's Disease which, alongside the effects of encephalitis lethargica that he contracted in childhood, was slowly to kill him over more than a decade.

In 1956 he wrote *Boy in Darkness*, a short horror story about Titus (although the name is not mentioned in the book), and in 1959 *Titus Alone* was published. By now, however, Peake was hardly able to write, and *Titus Alone* was incomplete on publication. Later editions were corrected by his widow and the writer Langdon Jones. Preparatory notes for a further volume (*Titus Awakes*) were also discovered among his many papers after his death.

Gormenghast

This second book in the series starts with Titus at seven, and finishes with him at 17. Inside Gormenghast, the old ways are facing a threat that seems as organic as it is destructive. Just as Steerpike's rise in *Titus Groan* was a harbinger of unwelcome and not necessarily beneficial change, so his continued prominence directly and indirectly threatens lives, and is evidence of a shift away from the rooted traditions of the castle.

He doesn't have it all his own way, though, and faces genuine threats to his own life on several occasions as his plotting destroys more and more of the crumbling world of the castle. But in determining his own rise to power, Steerpike is setting himself against his Lord, Titus, who feels trapped and oppressed by the rituals of his position. *Gormenghast* also moves the focus away from the castle itself and into the wider world – the world of Titus's schooling, the world inhabited by his foster-sister, feral and free, The Thing; and by extension the world in general beyond the confines of the narrow expectations to which he was born.

This second novel increases the incident and surprise (of both delight and tragedy) without losing any of the extraordinarily complete imagining of Peake's invented world. There are fires, lightning strikes, floods and dramatic departures. But there is a new element, too: a greater openness, or even joyousness, expressed in part in the way the story moves into new country, but also in the language itself. This was perhaps born from the fact that it was written during his happiest years, in Sark after the War. This, added to the uniquely strange atmosphere he created and maintained, earned the novel the Royal Society of Literature's Award and the Heinemann Award for Literature, which also recognised a collection of Peake's poetry, *The Glassblowers*. He may never have received the public acclaim he needed for financial security, but the critics were recognising something that would eventually become the stuff of cult legend and huge popular pleasure.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Rupert Degas, a versatile and charismatic audiobook reader, has read a substantial list of books for Naxos AudioBooks, notably Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* and *Dance Dance Dance*, Kafka's *The Trial*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Rose Tremain's *Restoration*, Tom McNab's *Flanagan's Run*, and *The Adventures of Brigadier Gerard* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He is in considerable demand as a voice for cartoons, and is the voice of Pantalaimon in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*; but he is also regularly seen in London's West End in plays as varied as *Stones in his Pockets* and *The 39 Steps*.

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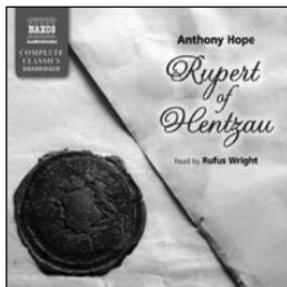
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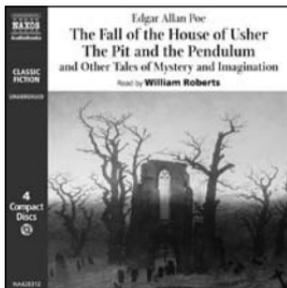
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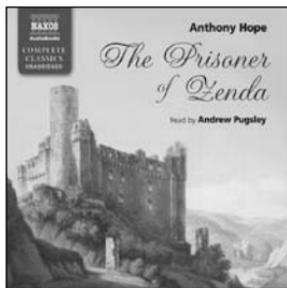


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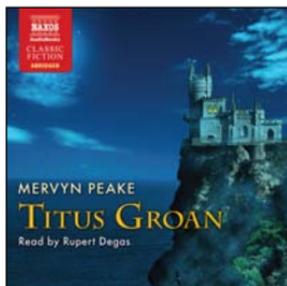
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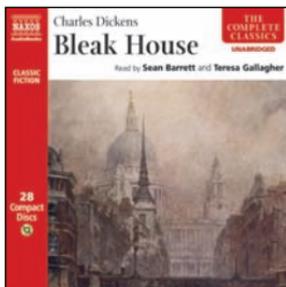
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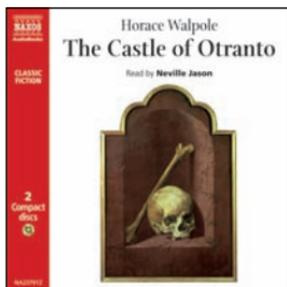
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