

Monster Needs a Christmas Tree

Paul Czajak

Wendy Grieb, Illustrator

Mighty Media Kids (Oct 1, 2014)

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Monster makes the best of a bad situation in this well-done installment of the Monster & Me series.

A monster comes up with a creative substitution for a Christmas tree in Paul Czajak and Wendy Grieb's delightful picture book, *Monster Needs a Christmas Tree*.

In this the third book in Czajak and Grieb's *Monster & Me* series, Christmas is fast approaching, and Monster wants a Christmas tree of his own. He and his unnamed companion (a boy who also serves as narrator of the tale) pull their sled into the city but are soon distracted by a long line outside a store. They take a spot in that line to visit a department-store Santa Claus, and upon exiting, they spot a good hill for sledding. A snow sculpture and a snowball fight later, they finally decide to go get their tree but find that all the trees are sold out. Saddened at first, Monster quickly decides to make a Christmas tree by combining a variety of potted plants: "With cactus, ficus, ferns and palms, we stacked them up just right. With ornaments and twinkling lights our tree looked dynamite."

In bed on Christmas Eve, Monster worries that his tree won't pass muster with Santa. But he awakens on Christmas Day to find that Santa has left the exact present that Monster requested at the department store—a puppy.

The tale is told in rhyming verse, and it's well done—the rhythm is tight, and the meter is consistent throughout. Czajak and Grieb partner well, with clear storytelling and creative use of black and white to show "imaginary" sequences. Grieb's color illustrations are superb, as one might expect from her résumé: She has done work for companies like Disney, Nickelodeon, Sony, and others, and she has won an Annie Award as a storyboard artist.

Czajak's writing measures up, too, bolstering the enjoyment of watching Monster make the best of a bad situation with his potted-plant solution, and providing children with a valuable lesson in persistence and determination.

Monster Needs a Christmas Tree shows that the *Monster & Me* series is going strong and, from all indications, has a long life ahead of it.

PETER DABBENE (August 28, 2014)

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