



Strangers on the High Seas: Book 4 of the Captain No Beard Series

Carole P. Roman

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This playful picture book whisks readers away on a voyage with pirates, sharks, and smelly diapers.

Captain No Beard and the crew of the *Flying Dragon* have returned with a new addition in *Strangers on the High Seas*, the latest entry in the Captain No Beard series by Carole P. Roman.

Strangers on the High Seas introduces the young, diaper-clad Cayla, little sister to Captain No Beard and cousin to his first mate, Hallie. Captain No Beard (the pirate alias of a boy named Alexander) isn't happy about welcoming Cayla onto his imaginary ship, especially since he's soon presented with a formidable challenge: the *Shark Bait*, pirate ship of Barnabas the scurvy dog, a captain "so mean that he bites his own tail." In the end, it's one of Cayla's smelly diapers that holds Barnabas and his crew at bay, and Captain No Beard learns that every crew member, no matter how small, has something to offer.

Roman's storytelling is solid, except for a passage in which the crew of the *Flying Dragon* discusses how to handle strangers like Captain Barnabas. There's no mention of the ship being turned around, so when Captain No Beard yells "Full speed ahead!" it seems like he has disregarded his first mate's advice and decided to attack the *Shark Bait* head-on. Only on the next page does it become clear that Captain No Beard is actually trying to escape.

Despite the book's title, the "not talking to strangers" theme feels tacked on; readers learn all about the *Shark Bait* and its unsavory crew from Polly the Parrot and Linus the Lion. But because Polly and Linus have never actually met them, the crew treats them as "strangers." It seems like a technicality—and a case of Roman deciding that if one moral is good, two must be better.

Roman keeps the tale entertaining and suspenseful throughout. Jokes like Captain No Beard's call for his mother to "report to the poop deck" and little Cayla's "I was only doing my duty" are up the right alley for the target audience of the series.

The book's major flaw is the distracting number of punctuation errors, mostly periods placed where commas should be, as in "'We will lose them in those sharp reefs.' The captain told her." This results in a staccato pattern, with the reader unsure where sentences are meant to begin and end.

The illustrations are generally good, and all of the characters' appearances are consistent. But there are some strange choices, such as a text page where the main action is Captain Barnabas "holding his snout while stamping on his hat," while in the corresponding illustration, Captain Barnabas is nowhere to be seen.

Roman's characters are endearing, and the Captain No Beard series could have a long life.

PETER DABBENE (July 1, 2013)

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