

Stuck in the Doldrums: A Lesson in Sharing- A Captain No Beard Story

Carole P. Roman

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One of the challenges of publishing a series of children's books is maintaining the level of quality that readers expect in each installment while developing the characters so they don't seem static. Carole Roman has succeeded on both measures with the third volume of the Captain No Beard tales, *Stuck in the Doldrums: A Lesson in Sharing*.

Captain No Beard (a boy named Alexander, who has a vivid imagination) is stuck with his crew on a desert island with no wind to move the sails of their ship. The crew decides to pass the time by looking at the clouds through a telescope and building a sand castle. The captain can't help himself—he quickly commandeers the telescope and begins barking orders to modify the sand castle. In defiance, the crew abandons him until Captain No Beard—now sulking on the ship—is attacked by a giant squid and calls for help. “The captain needed to pull up the anchor and steer the ship away. He couldn't do both at the same time. He could not sail the ship alone. Captain No Beard needed his crew!”

The predicament of Roman's characters here seems to evolve naturally from the story lines of earlier Captain No Beard books, and the tale serves as a valuable lesson in the rights and responsibilities of leadership. The volume's title seems a bit misguided, however, as *Stuck in the Doldrums*, though an appropriate nautical phrase, seems to indicate boredom, which is not the focus of the story. The subtitle, *A Lesson in Sharing*, also seems off the mark—the true message here is about the proper use of power. That said, Roman's writing is simple and incisive, a combination that is ideal for a children's book.

The illustrations are appealing, but the first few pages suffer from very similar layouts. The images of the characters don't always match up with the text, either, as Captain No Beard is described as having “demanded” and “ordered” to be given the spyglass, but is pictured with his hand out casually and wearing a pleasant smile. The text states that Linus the Lion is “trying to grab the telescope,” but he isn't even looking at it in the accompanying picture. Mongo the Monkey is said to be peering out of the telescope, but he is never actually shown looking through it.

These flaws detract from the early part of the tale, but the book soon rights itself. After that, it's smooth sailing. Roman has delivered a satisfying story that continues the saga of Captain No Beard and will have readers eagerly clamoring for volume four.

PETER DABBENE (May 28, 2013)

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