Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

The Adventures of Starfoot and Brown
Rhoda Canter
Mark Brayer, illustrator
CreateSpace
978-1-4774-0617-5
Four Stars (out of Five)

Rhoda Canter's debut work, *The Adventures of Starfoot and Brown*, is somewhat autobiographical in that she writes with a fondness for what she knows: a beautiful location and her beloved pets.

With her two young Chihuahua pups, writer Cora Howard travels to her summer home on Bald Head Island, just off the coast of North Carolina. While she's busy upstairs writing, the two "girls"—Bennett and Lola—are busy making friends with the island's other animal inhabitants, including Moc, the always-in-the-know mockingbird who accounts for the comings and goings of nearly everyone and everything. Moc warns the Chihuahuas about Jug, the vicious dog who lives down the road with his mean owners, and about the big black hissing cat who resides there as well.

The real story, though, is about the turtle nests on the beach. In the dead of night, someone has been trying to poach the eggs from the nests. Bennett and Lola are drawn into helping discover the culprits with the assistance of Moc and their seeming nemesis, Jug. Because they prefer to hide their real names, the Chihuahuas call their sleuthing selves Brown and Starfoot.

Canter has imbued her animal characters with distinct personalities: Bennett, the older, more dominant pup; Lola, the younger, friendlier, and more curious dog; Moc, the trilling, singing, inquisitive, and ever-present bird; and Jug, the misunderstood but wise rescue dog.

This book takes an authentic issue and wraps it in a nicely woven story that doesn't talk down to children. Young readers will enjoy the lively banter among the animals, especially between Moc and the dogs. Moc jabbers and makes up strings of musical words, while Bennett plays a tough, sometimes unintentionally mean and sarcastic bully. For example, this is Bennett

introducing herself to Moc when they first meet: “I am the Alpha Dog, and I own this beach house. And all the food in it. Also the golf cars and the beach. And this whole island, in fact.”

Students will learn about the journey that loggerhead mama turtles make to the beach each summer to lay their nearly one hundred eggs. Also included in the story is the work the Bald Head Island Conservancy does to help ensure the baby turtles are hatched safely. Canter plans to donate some of the proceeds from the book to the organization in support of its work.

Several life lessons are presented through this story, such as not judging a book by its cover. Nearly twenty colored illustrations accompany the 120-page text. Because there are terms specific to the island environment, a glossary following the story would have been helpful—one can be found on the book’s website.

Using a current issue, easy-to-understand text, and mostly kid-friendly characters, Canter has come up with a formula that that should be equally successful in future books featuring these two curious pups. Upper elementary-aged students will most likely enjoy the adventures of Bennett and Lola and may not even realize they are learning science and history facts at the same time.

Robin Farrell Edmunds