



Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

The Sneakiest Pirates

Dalton James

Dalton James, illustrator

Outskirts Press

978-1-4327-2477-1

Three Stars (out of Five)

Pirate stories like the popular Pirates of the Caribbean franchise seem to be lurking in the imaginations of children everywhere. In this charming little book seven-year-old Dalton James tells the tale of two pirates who steal a treasure from Peg Leg Chuck and use it to become rock stars.

The story is cute and the illustrations are representative of a seven-year-old's best efforts. One of the highlights of the piece is James's humor. Peg Leg Chuck in point of fact does not have a peg leg; that writes Dalton "was just a joke." Peg Leg Chuck hides his treasure and marks the spot with an 'A' choosing this letter of the alphabet over the ubiquitous 'X.' Later in the book two pirates fight for three pages until they are so exhausted they fall to the ground with their tongues lolling and their swords tossed to the side. These little details offer some nice humor to the piece.

Still good fiction whether for young or old requires motivation. Why do the characters do what they do? The story begins abruptly with a physical description of Peg Leg Chuck and then his sudden decision to stage his first robbery. Why did Peg Leg Chuck suddenly decide to become a thief? And why start with the King's gold which always holds extra risk?

Similarly plots need to be tight to leave readers without troubling questions. Granted children's stories have a bit more leeway for the fantastical and unexpected; however children's literature has an audience who is insatiably curious and will ask questions. The king's armada is chasing Peg Leg Chuck who somehow still has time to bury the gold and return to his ship without being caught by the king's men. Also Pirate Pete and Scurvy James manage to steal everything off of Peg Leg Chuck's boat and carry it back to their own ship in a rowboat. The timing is off and the rowboat preternaturally large. In the same stretch of sea Peg Leg Chuck

rows back to his boat without ever seeing Scurvy James and Pirate Pete who are rowing to the newly stashed gold. This seems hugely unlikely.

The story concludes with Pirate Pete and Scurvy James sharing the treasure and deciding to become rock stars. Unfortunately rock stars and pirates though both a lot of fun are born of different eras which may confuse some children.

The book is a very sweet effort from a seven-year-old and though it may not hold up to plot analysis it is a quick fun little book that ends with a collaboration between a father Scurvy James and a son Pirate Pete which many parents and children will appreciate.