

# Chosen Ones

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Dave O'Neil and Kiran Morris

*Raised by Frank*

Lothian, \$24.95hb, 32pp, 0 7344 0357 7

Andrew Plant

*Could a Tyrannosaurus Play Table Tennis?*

Viking, \$25hb, 32pp, 0 670 04016 9

Emily Rodda and Andrew McLean

*Squeak Street*

Working Title Press, \$24.95hb, 32pp, 1 87628 831 0

Lisa Shanahan and Wayne Harris

*Gordon's Got a Snookie*

Allen & Unwin, \$24.95hb, 32pp, 1 86508 691 6

WHEN A CHILDREN'S picture book first comes into the home, there is no way of telling whether it is going to be 'the one' — the one that will be read and reread; that will have pictures drawn about it and songs made up about it; that will be carried around and allowed to spend the night at the end of the bed. There's no rhyme or reason to it; awards and critical acclaim don't mean too much. The book is simply chosen, and becomes the centre of the child's universe for a week, a month — a lifetime.

As a parent, you can only hope that the book chosen as the current 'one' is one that you will at least half-enjoy. After all, this is the book that *you* will read night after night. *You* will be the one answering the tricky questions ('But why can't we plant a dummy tree?'). While you may be lucky enough to enjoy many of your children's books (I'm as attached to Dr Seuss's *The Lorax* as my children are) there are many, many more that you'd probably rather burn.

*Raised by Frank* falls into the first category. Here is an hilarious book that will delight adults as much as it does children. When Ruby and Rory's volcanologist parents are called to an eruption (armed with a toasting fork and packet of marshmallows), horrible Auntie Beryl is sent in to look after the kids. One day at the washing line, Auntie Beryl is reduced to a pile of ashes, much to Rory and Ruby's relief. But now, who will look after the kids? Frank, the family cat, steps in and takes over the fun, if demanding, job of raising Rory and Ruby. Dave O'Neil's delightful Frank takes his new position very seriously. He's so busy cooking and ironing and cleaning out gutters that there's no time left for himself, no time

for 'sleeping, coughing up furballs and running from one room to another for no reason at all'.

Kiran Morris's quirky illustrations complement the text perfectly. It's hard to imagine the characters looking any other way than Morris has depicted them. O'Neil — clever comedian, radio and television presenter, actor, and vocal 'Save Footscray Pool' campaigner — now has another title to cram onto his business card, and has a promising career ahead as children's writer, especially if he continues the author-illustrator partnership with Morris.

In Lisa Shanahan's *Gordon's Got a Snookie*, there is great anticipation at the zoo as the animals await the arrival of Gordon, the silverback gorilla who's coming from overseas to 'take care of the girls'. On arrival, Gordon makes a great impression — he's just as big and strong and hairy as the girls had imagined — until he pulls out his red blanket. The girls, and all the other animals, ridicule him, and Gordon becomes the loneliest animal in the zoo until one day when there is a bit of a drama, and Gordon (and his snookie) save the day. His reputation is restored, and now the girls can't get enough of him. While there are many versions of this type of toddler self-help book around (dealing with the dilemmas of the dummy/the tattered comforter/potty training etc.), *Gordon's Got a Snookie* takes a refreshing, cheeky angle, showing that you can be big and strong and hairy, and still need a snookie, too.

A book about dinosaurs deserves to be big, and Andrew Plant's *Could a Tyrannosaurus Play Table Tennis?* is abundant in size and information. Plant has produced an A to Z of dinosaurs — and yes, there are dinosaurs beginning with Q and X and Z. In order for readers to gain some concept of the actual size of each dinosaur, Plant has drawn the 'props' in each picture to scale, allowing for an immediate and, in many cases, hilarious recognition of the size of the creature. Visualise a Mamenchisaurus (twenty-seven metres long) attempting to play a minute kettle drum, or a tiny Wannanosaurus (sixty centimetres) trying to reach the bar on a set of weights. By using the open-ended 'Could a ...?'

to introduce each dinosaur, Plant leaves ample room for thought and discussion: 'Could a Lambeosaurus do the limbo?' Perhaps, if the bar was raised considerably higher. 'Could a Yangchuanosaurus go yachting?' Probably not now that it's eaten the hull and sails. Plant very kindly provides the phonetic spelling for each dinosaur (an absolute necessity when reading aloud about Parasaurolophuses and Zizhongosauruses), and has illustrated the book himself. This will surely become a firm favourite amongst little dinosaur lovers.

Emily Rodda's *Squeak Street* could easily have been called *Sweet Street*. In this one-to-ten counting book, the reader is taken on a walk with Ben, the post-mouse, as he delivers the mail along Squeak Street. We get a glimpse of the varied characters in the street — including rich Old Bun, Pink-Paw, the artist, and Quick-Sticks, from the band the Squeaky Chicks. Rodda celebrates the diversity of each household, showing that, while mice (and people) may live differently, they can still live harmoniously. The soft charcoal and watercolor illustrations by Andrew McLean complement Rodda's simple rhymes. There is a gentle rhythm to *Squeak Street*, paralleled in the one-to-ten counting and in the flow of Ben's day. Rodda, acclaimed for her popular Deltora Quest series, has proven herself a versatile children's author, writing equally as well for pre-schoolers as she does for young adults.

And so the books have been reviewed. But who knows, until they're taken into the home, if any will become the chosen one. Chances are some will — that's part of the magic of books.