

Children's Book Week reviews

The winners from the Children's Book Council of Australia's 1989 short list will be announced Friday, 21 July, 1989. The list of award winners will be published in *InCite* 13, 28 August. (See this page for the short-list titles.) The following are reviews of some of the titles by those working in the field of children's literature.

Drac and the gremlin

by Allan Baillie, illustrated by Jane Tanner

What a delight is this grand fantasy. It can be approached from two totally different levels. The exciting text gallops along with juvenile inventions. The anti-gravity solar-powered planet hopper (a tyre on a rope), and the emerald eaglon (a rosella), are totally believable, as is the heroine, Warrior Queen of Tirmol Two. The other level is a delightful romp of brother and sister playing with their pets in the luxuriant vegetation of their backyard.

Jane Tanner's superb photographic-style illustrations marry well with the story. The characters leap from one page to the next, in and around the garden. There are close-ups on one page, continuous scenes on the next, then distant shots on the next, creating a most dynamic effect.

I have a few small quibbles. An anticlimax is created after the big build-up to the rescue of the White Wizard (in butterfly form). With a third of the story still to go, the game turns into smaller incidents — just as child's play would be continuing. As well, the occasional underlining, for emphasis, grates — why weren't italics used?

I'm sure *Drac and the gremlin* will be a success with everyone from 3 years upwards. Some of the words may be obscure for younger children, but they will have no trouble identifying with the characters, and they will be carried away by the exciting pace.

Everyone will admire Jane Tanner's glorious pastel illustrations. She has almost moved into the skin of these children. Her art is much developed from her earlier *There's a sea in my bedroom*. Somehow she has captured the children in their game while managing to add the fantasy element from Allan Baillie's imaginative text. What more can I say — buy it.

Juliet Reynolds
President
Children's and Youth Services Section
WA Group

The best-kept secret

by Emily Rodda, illustrated by Noela Young

This book is on the Children's Book Council short list for Book of the Year: Younger Readers.

Emily Rodda has already won this award twice — in 1985 with *Something special* and in 1987 with *Pigs might fly*. Now, in 1989, her third book, *The best-kept secret*, is on the short list. As with *Pigs might fly*, the idea on which this story is based is delightfully clever.

When a merry-go-round mysteriously appears on a vacant block of land near her home, Jo, her friend Cecelia and some of their neighbours are drawn by its music. Although a sign invites riders aboard, not everyone is able to open the tent flap to gain entry. At first Cecelia is unsuccessful, but when the tent flap opens easily for Jo, she slips in too. They join Mr Angelo from the fruit shop, Mr Milligan the bank manager, Shark Murphy, a young trouble-maker, and others on the ride of a lifetime. The merry-go-round takes them 7 years into the future.

The best-kept secret is a satisfying read. That may not sound high praise, but that's how I felt when I put it down — completely satisfied. The ending brings all the threads of the story together perfectly. So perfectly that it seems like a realistic story more than a fantasy.

The large, clear print and cover illustration suggest it is intended for junior primary readers, but language used will not limit it to this age group. It could easily be read aloud to middle-primary classes. Noela Young's illustrations, some full page and others half or quarter page, complement the text.

I thoroughly enjoyed the book. But will children like it? While I don't think it has as much child appeal as *Pigs might fly*, there are certainly children who will enjoy it. One of the advantages of being on the short list is that school and public librarians, who aim to get the right book to the right child at the right time, publicise and promote the short-listed books. So children who are ready for just such a fantasy as *The best-kept secret* will get to hear about it.

Val Noake
President

Children's and Youth Services Section
NSW Group

Wiggy and boa

by Anna Fienberg, illustrated by Ann James Dent

Wiggy, short for Ludwig, and Boa, short for Boadicea, are good friends. Both characters come from unusual family situations. Boadicea lives with her grandfather, Admiral Bolderack, who runs his household like he ran his ship's crew, which means discipline, canned food and punctuality. In reactions Boa is 'an unnatural child' at school.

Wiggy van Weezelman is orderly and unadventurous; he hates mould, washing up and noise, because he has plenty at home. His parents are musicians who practise incessantly, and Wiggy lives in clean,

orderly isolation in his bedroom.

One day Boa unwittingly calls up some old crew members from her grandfather's past. They appear and tie up the admiral and make themselves at home. Only Wiggy can help Boa, and his solution solves not only the immediate problem, but remedies the domestic situation for both children.

The illustrations are humorous and fitting. Children can respond to family situations with exaggeration, which lends itself to lively humour and entertaining reading.

Shae Duggan
Children's
Librarian
State Library of
Queensland



Children's Book

The following is a short list of titles for the Children's Book Council of Australia.

| OLD | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Author | Title |
| Baillie, Alan | Megan's star |
| Macdonald, Caroline | The lake at the Deepwater |
| O'Neill, Judith | You take the hi |
| Pershall, Mary Kay | Answers to Bru |
| Rubinstein, Gillian | Beyond the lab |
| YOUNG | |
| Author | Title |
| Carr, Roger Vaughan | The Split Creek |
| Fienberg, Anna Ann James | Wiggy and Boa |
| Grant, Joan (ed.) | Australopedia |
| Park, Ruth | Callie's family |
| Rodda, Emily | The best kept s |
| Rubinstein, Gillian | Melanie and th |
| PICTURE | |
| Author | Illustrator |
| Base, Graeme | Base, Graeme |
| Knowles, Sheena | Clement, Rod |
| Hirst, Robin | Early, Margaret |
| Wild, Margaret | Harvey, Roland |
| Baillie, Alan | Huxley, Dee |
| | Tanner, Jane |