ForeWord Reviews
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JUVENILE FICTION

Adventures of Button Broken Tail: Book II
Richard W. Leech
Xlibris
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Animals have lives beyond panting at the feet of their masters or lying in a patch of sunlight on the kitchen floor. Take Button Broken Tail, for example. She has a comfortable home and a boy who loves her, but her real life takes place beyond the backdoor, in the forests, fields, and swamps that surround her neighborhood. It's here in the wilderness that she finds her true friends, and her true enemies.

Over several chapters, Button and her friends—Sally the beagle, Iggy the squirrel, and Ssserek the rattlesnake—find adventure and danger in the wild landscape around them. In the first story, Button's friends run her through an intense training program to prepare her for a dog show. In another story, Button and Ssserek defeat a hunter and his dogs. Later, the animal friends help each other recover from a tornado and are treated to a visit from a princess dragon. Embedded in each adventure is a lesson about valuing friends and treating others with respect.

Richard W. Leech, MD, a retired professor of medicine and author of two previous books, proves himself capable of producing highly imaginative scenarios. His collection of characters maintain distinctive personalities throughout the book, and even the secondary characters recur regularly with worthwhile new roles to play.

Unfortunately, a few problems will keep readers from thoroughly enjoying this book. First, while the author recommends a readership of children between the ages of nine and twelve, there are several instances of language and drama that are inappropriate. For instance, the exclamations of the dragon princess will not be appreciated by parents reading to their kids: "She was trying to wiggle but couldn't 'Shit and double shit' came from within as she continued in her attempts to release the grip of stone upon her tail." Likewise, the description (dead coyote puppies) in chapter five is a bit too graphic for this age group: "In their minds, all of the pups could see a mound of dead bodies, blood slowly running from eyes and nose."

The ponderous pace of the narrative is another troublesome issue. The characters often verbalize their high level of urgency, or nervousness, or excitement, only to then spend precious

page time exchanging banter and barbs, with no urgency reflected in their actions. This sets up a false expectancy for readers, especially younger ones, who would be more satisfied with action that bubbles along at a steadier pace.

Tales of the animal kingdom have been used for centuries for entertainment and education, and boundless material is still to be explored. While Leech may have partially missed the mark with this book, his capable imagination has many more chances to prove itself.

Andi Diehn