

Chance on Safari

Mark Piper

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This adventure story for young readers will prove both thrilling and challenging.

Set in 1930s Australia, Mark Piper's engaging *Chance on Safari* is the first installment of the Stock and Station series. The tale combines an exotic locale, exceptional writing, and a thoroughly appealing Huck Finn-like character to deliver a galloping adventure.

At almost thirteen, Chance loves everything—even the hard work—about living on a vast sheep-station-turned-game park that is owned by his affectionate guardians, Jim and Betty. Broadening his world are visitors and hunters who come from all over, bringing glimpses of distant lands, tales of adventure, and newspapers in foreign languages.

Though small for his age, Chance is eager to mature from boy to man, and is soon presented with his first opportunity—as a runner for a safari party, chasing game on foot through the bush. When he is charged by a wild boar, there's a real question as to whether his first adventure will also be his last.

Though the story is clearly aimed at tweens, the writing and other elements reach a more sophisticated level. Chance is vaguely aware of the sexual tension between Loretta, Betty's sister, and station hand Steve, as well as the suppressed flirtations between the maids and jackaroos who look after the guests. Ultimately, though, Chance is more interested in emulating the lead tour guide, Will, than he is in anything else.

This is prose that deserves special attention for the way that it creates tension and pulls readers in through sheer descriptive power. In picturing the outback after a morning rain, Piper writes:

*Steam rose from the earth as a burst of sunshine played upon it. A mob of kangaroos stood stock still
... Water glistened on their fur as they chewed grass, ears flicking every so often.*

To children raised in well-padded car seats and dodgeball-free playgrounds, Chance's jaunt to the safari site—on a wooden seat attached to the front of a truck's grill, with the wind and brush slapping at him—will seem like wild adventure. A bright, modern cover and detailed pencil illustrations are frosting on the cake.

While the vocabulary may challenge some readers, it's well worth the stretch, and would be an excellent read-together experience for young readers and parents who could help to explain the occasional bit of Oz slang.

Piper's *Chance on Safari* is an excellent adventure for young readers, with top-of-the-line writing that will make them eager for the next installment.

SUSAN WAGGONER (January 11, 2017)

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