ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

The Adventures of Roopster Roux
Lavaille Lavette Illustrations by Louis Henry Mitchell
Louis Henry Mitchell
Pelican Publishing
978-1-56554-362-1
(August 1998)

Series ISBNs:
1-56554-362-9 (Monster All-Stars)
1-56554-360-2 (Vulture's Roost)
1-56554-359-9 (Slammin? Slime)
1-56554-361-0 (Surfing the Net)

This is a new children's series targeted for the "reluctant reader aged 5-12." The Adventures of Roopster Roux features a schoolboy chicken hero who battles to save the world from fiendish fowl Tagore and his birdbrained assistant Boris. Roopster gets help from feisty Grandma Roux, wise hipster librarian Mr. Figby and friends on the Woodville Vikings basketball team.

For literate parents who bemoan comic books as lowbrow fodder, Roopster Roux is harmless chicken feed. Pre-teen hero Roopster, while lacking the sophistication of Spiderman, the X-Men and other superheroes, maintains a clean-cut image and promotes not only the values of reading, but also teamwork, street smarts and sheer small-town goodness.

Children may have a difficult time with pronunciation of the Cajun name Roux ("Roo"), as well as sometimes choppy plot progressions that confuse and elude both the reader and plucky hero Roopster. In addition, a basic assumption of the series is that "reluctant readers" are into sports; if true, the books may succeed in snaring these hoop enthusiasts, but bore other kids with basketball terminology.

A big part of the books? literacy/marketing strategy is the endorsement and participation of professional basketball stars Brent Barry, Cynthia Cooper, A.C. Green and Tammi Reiss, who narrates audiocassette versions of each book (not available for this review). A portion of the books? proceeds will benefit Reading is Fundamental (RIF), the national non-profit children's literacy program.

The paper quality of the books is more durable than traditional comics, with glossy

covers and a big paperback size for longer shelf life. Inside, big, clean type makes reading a breeze, while the less dense storyboards make good use of white space, enabling readers to follow the action more easily. The bright cartoon drawings convey gee-whiz dynamic energy to engage readers in Roopster Roux’s colorful world.