ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

The Secret Zoo
Bryan Chick
Chris Sheban, illustrator
Chris Sheban - cover artist, illustrator
Second Wish Press
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When nine-year-old Megan mysteriously disappears, her older brother, Noah, sets out on a rescue mission. His only clues are a story Megan told before her disappearance and a tattered page of her journal left on Noah's pillow by a strange blue bird.

Following close behind in this adventure are Noah's best friends, Ella and Richie; together they call themselves the Adventure Scouts. On a rollercoaster of adventures, the Scouts are led into the fantasy world of the City of Species where they encounter animals with mysterious talents and spectacular abilities, as well as community of humans who live in harmony with these amazing creatures. But their rescue mission is nearly thwarted by the ancient sasquatch community inhabiting the Dark Lands outside the City of Species!

In his first novel, newcomer Bryan Chick introduces young readers to the first of seven Adventure Scouts, and easily bridges the gap from mystery to fantasy. Inspired by his own childhood zoo experiences, the author masterfully transforms simple animals into magical creatures, made both lovable and threatening by their "humanness." Chick's creatively crafted zoo animals communicate mysteriously, with both characters and readers alike.

With a humorous twist, Chick cleverly names the Secret Zoo animals, giving prairie dogs names such as Hot Dog, Chili Dog, and Dog Tag. In vividly described encounters with these special animals, the Scouts uncover additional clues to Megan's disappearance. Chick's characters and animals spring to life with beautiful imagery, and leave readers anxiously awaiting the sequel. This fast-paced novel will appeal to both youthful and mature readers. The intricately designed plot will keep readers turning pages, while moving between the fantasy world of the Secret Zoo and reality.

Amy Falberg