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A Girl, A Boy, and a Monster Cat: Gail Gauthier

April 10, 2007

It's often difficult to find interesting books for early readers. Fortunately, Gail Gauthier is up to the task with her upcoming title: *A Girl, A Boy, and a Monster Cat*. Brandon, who seems to be about 8 or 9, is forced to spend every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoon at Hannah's house. And Hannah, who reads many books, is always dragging Brandon into make-believe adventures.

Because Hannah is pretty bossy, Brandon is usually relegated to roles like the assistant pirate who always mops the deck, or the ambulance driver, or the hospital patient. Particularly galling is the fact that Hannah's cat often gets better parts. "Buttercup is big and fat and orange with runny red eyes. He's missing a part of one ear and the tip of his tail. Sometimes he smells just awful." And yet, Buttercup gets to be the mountain lion, the bandit, the plant-eating monster cat. It's enough to make any boy frustrated. Then Hannah, Brandon, and Buttercup start facing real adventures when a crazed Chihuahua with a doting mistress moves in next door.

This book is quite entertaining. Gail Gauthier has a knack for writing laugh out loud funny - a gift that's hard to come by. Hannah reminds me a little bit of a young Anne Shirley (albeit a slightly more bossy one). Hannah is almost entirely ruled by her imagination, seeing villains around every corner, and converting tree limbs into helicopters. And yet she can be practical when necessary, too. Here's an example, after Hannah tells Brandon to make a torch (to scare off a "wolf").

"We're not supposed to use matches, Hannah. How are we supposed to make a torch?" I asked.

"Out of yellow and red colored paper, of course," she said. "What's wrong with you? We can't have real torches in the house. We'd burn the place down." (Chapter 6)

As for Brandon, his wry voice reminds me a bit of Kyle's voice from *Happy Kid*, except younger (and this I consider a compliment, because I loved Kyle). Brandon is exasperated by Hannah's games, but he's also pulled in by them, unable to resist the excitement. Here's Brandon, early in the book:

The perfect plan would have been for me to go to Sam Clark's house. His family has a big-screen TV that they keep on *all* the time. Plus Sam is a boy and I am a boy. Anyone can see that I should be at Sam's house three times a week. But Mom wouldn't even ask Sam's mother if I could stay there. Even though I told her about the big-screen TV.

Instead, I'm stuck with Hannah. (Chapter 1)

And here he is later in the book, interacting with Hannah:

"And we'll need a shovel so we can bury our treasure," she added. "You'll find one in the garage."

"I guess I have to dig the hole, too, huh?" I said when I got back from my errand.

"I'm the captain," Hannah reminded me. "Captains never bury treasure themselves. They tell someone else to do it. Besides, you love digging holes."

That's true. (Chapter 8)

A Girl, A Boy, and a Monster Cat will be a fun treat for boys and girls new to chapter books. There are illustrations every six or seven pages, some realistic, others depicting whatever imaginary game is afoot. There is plenty of dialog to break up the text. Some of the chapters feature cliffhangers to keep kids reading, while others allow some closure for the reader before a break.

The dynamic between the two kids is fun and believable (though some may be bothered by Brandon giving in to Hannah most of the time). The pictures help, making it clear that Hannah is bigger than Brandon. There's almost a big sister/younger brother dynamic, minus the hero worship. *A Girl, A Boy, and a Monster Cat* will be a welcome addition to the libraries of new readers.