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Scrap: Tale of a Blond Puppy – Vince Ford

Publisher: Scholastic New Zealand

RRP \$14.99

Scrap, abandoned as a very young pup, finds himself in a farmyard with other strange creatures around him. Slowly he learns who and what they are in the wider scheme of things, that he is a dog and what his role will be.

An old dog, Bill, helps him along - though not without the occasional joke at Scrap's expense. Bill's wisecracks add humour, as do some of Scrap's innocent questions. For example 'What's a million? And what's a Zealand?' when he is told there are about 40 million sheep just in New Zealand.

As first Bill then Lionel teach Scrap what he needs to know to be a successful eye dog, the reader learns many things - parenting and mentoring, the importance of doing as one is told, of doing one's best at all times, of using one's head, of kind and unkind treatment of animals.

Lionel's kindnesses and his generous use of praise make this a heart-warming story. Bill's patience, wisdom and sympathy add to this.

But Bill is not all-wise, as when he's asked why the farmer cuts the wool off the sheep and why the lambs are put on a truck and sent away. Even how to tell left from right ... Parental explanations required!

Learning why he was dumped, who his mother is and that he is leaving Bill and Lionel - these are all major lessons in life that children may relate to.

One of a series (Book 2 is out, Book 3 will be out soon) Scrap is bound to become much-loved by many young readers who will be able to identify with his inquiring mind, the scrapes he gets in to and the challenges he faces.

The move from picture books to chapter books is a form of coming-of-age for some readers, and with twelve short chapters this story will make the transition both simple and attractive. Each chapter feels well-rounded and leads seamlessly to the next. For many this may well be the first series they identify with and request more from the school or local library or from parents.

Reviewed for Bookrapt by Chris Wright

