

# Rex Zero, the Great Pretender

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**Rex Zero, the Great Pretender** Tim Wynne-Jones

**Commended, Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Books: Historical Fiction**

It's September 1963 when Rex is blindsided by some unexpected news. His family is moving again -- just to the other side of the city, as it turns out, but it might as well be the other side of the moon as far as Rex is concerned. In desperation, he secretly starts taking public transit back to his old school -- a plan that works just fine until he runs out of money.

When his sister Annie catches him stealing change from his mum's purse, sisterly blackmail becomes another problem. Not only that, but Rex has got on the bad side of Spew, the hockey thug bully from his old school, and Spew and his sidekicks Puke and Dribble are out to get Rex -- and they know where he lives. Rex ends up using his wits and lively imagination to get himself out of his pickle, with some sobering and surprising consequences.

## Rex Zero, the Great Pretender Details


Date : Published 2009 by Groundwood Books

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Author : Tim Wynne-Jones

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# From Reader Review Rex Zero, the Great Pretender for online ebook

## Heather says

Topic: International book

Theme: friendship, pretending, moving, new kid,

My thoughts: This is the concluding book in a series. At this time I have not finished the earlier books, so I will reserve my opinions until I do.

Activity: If you had to move again like Rex what would you pack? Create a list of the items that you would not leave behind and give specific reason for your top five items.

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## Polly says

I can never decide how I feel about Rex Zero. I end up liking all the books by the end, but there's a point in the middle of all of them where I wonder why on earth I'm reading it, not because they're bad, they just drag a little, plus I always have a problem with protagonists who do things they know will get them in trouble and worry about it all the time. Definitely I like the Rex Zero books less than pretty much everything else Time W-J has written, but they are worth reading once, anyway, and are still a lot better than much of what's out there.

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## Robert Kent says

Rex Zero is a series of humorous historical fiction novels. I haven't read them all yet, but you can bet I will. The Great Pretender is actually the third book in the series and although it may spoil parts of them, it is not necessary to have read the first two books to enjoy this third. I had no problem picking up the story as a first time reader of Rex and I enjoyed this book a whole lot. It's funny, it's exciting, it's very well written, and it's got a great story most anyone can relate to. What more could you ask of a book?

The first craft point I want to make this week is regarding Wynne-Jones' gift for exposition. Notice how effortlessly he establishes important info the reader needs to know as soon as the reader needs to know it (within the first thirty-one pages):

Saturday, August 24, 1963. Moving day. Overcast. Rain on the way.

You Esteemed Readers who check the blog regularly know what a fan I am of writers just coming out and stating the date. It just makes things easier for the reader and when in doubt, a writer should almost always make their decisions based on what will make their book a better, easier experience for their reader. If I'm searching for a date or a frame of reference, I'm not caught up in your story and swept away wherever you were hoping to take me (and I want to come, so just throw me a bone and tell me the date so I won't worry about it).

Now prior to working in the actual year, Wynn-Jones drops plenty of hints that we are not in present day and of course, if I had read the first two Rex Zero novels, I would know the time period—but I hadn't and a writer can't count on my having read them. The music selections that come up as well as the fact that they are played on a record player clue the reader in as to the time period early. Also, the fact that Rex is reading the original Hardy Boys novels. Also, the mentions of the costs of things that are extremely cheap by today's standards. My father paid a nickel for his comics, I paid a little over a buck, today's kids pay almost two bucks, and my children will probably pay five—although this is standard inflation, I still blame Ayn Rand.

Here's is another example of exposition cleverly worked in:

I pound the carpet and dust puffs up. "When we move it will be the eighth house I've lived in. The eighth! I'm twelve years old and I've lived in eight houses."

This sounds like something a twelve-year-old boy would say when upset and now we know he is a twelve-year-old boy. That works out nicely, doesn't it? It's also important we know about the eight moves.

My second craft point is how well plotted this book is. The novel's main antagonist doesn't show up for about sixty pages, and even then he's only a minor force of antagonism for several more pages. But the novel doesn't need him until that time because the opening is rooted in conflict. By the end of the first chapter, Rex learns his family is moving and he will have to go to a new school away from his best friends and it isn't fair. Over the next couple of chapters we learn that the family is only moving to the other side of town, just far enough to put Rex in a different school district.

Rex and his homies figure out a plan: Rex can take the city bus across town and go to school with them. He just needs to stop his parents from registering him at his new school and to lie to them about where he goes each day and to lie to all of his teachers about where he lives and not to draw attention to himself lest he be found out. Simple, right? Of course not! This is a situation so rife with conflict and the complications of further conflict that an antagonist is not needed for pages upon pages. There's plenty of suspense without him for a good long while. And when he finally does show up, I promise, it's worth the wait.

Is Rex found out? What lengths is he willing to go to to keep his secret? I cannot tell you without spoiling the book and I don't want to do that, so we'll leave it here. And I haven't even told you about Rex's sister Annie (by far my favorite character) or the other beautifully drawn characters that populate these pages.

I'll leave you now with some of my favorite passages from the book:

"Just because I put a cow's eye in his locker, last year."

I stare at her in disbelief. I almost ask what Bobby did to deserve a cow's eye in his locker, but I don't bother.

"A cow's eye?"

"We were dissecting them in biology. I took a couple extra."

That's my sister. Always planning ahead.

A lot of words pile up in my mouth: words with spikes and claws and sharp teeth.

My mind is buzzing and bouncing around like a bee in a flower shop.

“Good,” says Annie. “And can we use the shed?”

“What for?”

“Science experiments.”

“You’re not going to make explosives, are you?”

“No,” says Annie. “George’s dad is a scientist at the experimental farm. We’re doing botany experiments.”

“Botany,” says Mum as if it’s the nicest word she’s ever heard.

My heart is bouncing around like an India rubber ball in my chest...

...The rubber ball in my chest finally stops bouncing and just sits there feeling hard and worn out on this concrete floor inside my chest.

To read an interview with author Tim Wynne-Jones or to read interviews with other authors and literary agents, log onto my blog at [www.middlegradeninja.blogspot.com](http://www.middlegradeninja.blogspot.com)

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### **Heather says**

The Rex Zero books are a lot of fun, and I especially love the plot of this one. Very entertaining.

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### **Joelle Anthony says**

Four stars for adults, Five for kids, I think, which is all that matters! A great read and I look forward to the others in the series even though I apparently read #3 first!

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### **Lorelie says**

I am a big fan of Rex Zero! This book has been just as good as the others. It is difficult to change schools. I loved how Rex tried to make it easier on himself! But what I liked best was the resolution of the story. Read it to find out how Rex solves his dilemmas!

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### **Kim says**

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Gr 5-8—When Rex Zero finds out that his family is moving yet again, he is devastated. Although the move is only across town, it means that he will start middle school at Connaught instead of at Hopewell with James, Buster, and Kathy. The four friends decide that regardless of the Ottawa City Council’s views on zoning, Rex should attend Hopewell as planned. His records have already been sent over there, and when he offers to take his enrollment paperwork to the new school for his mother, she gratefully accepts: the chores of moving households and raising a family of eight are exhausting. In 1963, it is easy enough for the boy to make his

enrollment paperwork disappear and to use the crosstown buses to get to Hopewell. The deception is successful for a while, but Rex learns in the process how taxing the life of a pretender can be. Complicating matters are a budding romance with one of his classmates, threats from a bully and his sidekicks, and a secret laboratory experiment that his older sister is conducting in the back shed. Family dynamics and friendships are skillfully fleshed out, with fully developed characters to whom readers will readily relate. The humor of Rex's first-person narration does not diminish Wynne-Jones's ability to deal with tough issues candidly, and the resolution fully satisfies. This title does stand alone, but it will be most appreciated in libraries where Rex already has a strong following.—Kim Dare, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

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### **Nils Andersson says**

Everyone needs a place to call home, even Rex Zero. Having parents that keep moving, and being forced to make new friends only to lose them with the next move... well, no surprise Rex finds this difficult. He decides to deal with it, predictably landing himself in trouble.

This may be a light read, but it deals with the heavy subject of friendships. Written with the humorous touch of the previous books in the series, it is a good read. Should work well for young readers that are about to enter the age when friendship issues can become tricky, I'd say age 10-11, perhaps.

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### **Joseph McGee says**

Sad that this is the last of the Rex Zero books!! Rex and his sister, Annie Oakley, really grew on me through the series. Wynne-Jones really does a fantastic job in growing the characters through the series of books (even though they can be read as stand alones). Again, great pacing and handling of multiple scenes/settings.

Great middle-grade read. Highly recommended.

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### **Cheriee Weichel says**

This is another Red Cedar book for this year.

I wasn't really sure about this book at first. Rex starts out doing something that I knew was going to get him in trouble. That is the problem with being a grown up reading children's books. You see the consequences and cringe – either that or you worry yourself silly over the mess these characters can get themselves into.

Thankfully, by the time I finished this book, I loved it and remembered how much I liked the first book in the series.

The Rex series is set in the 1960's in Ottawa. While I am sure kids won't always get the references to pop culture like Paul Anka, it does reveal what life was like in those times.

Rex has moved 8 times in his 12 years. In this tale, he and his family are moving again. Only this time, it is just across town, and Rex decides he doesn't want to move schools. The family moves in the summer and his transcripts are already sent to the new school, so Rex decides to lie to his parents, and go where he can be

with his friends. His life gets very complicated as he pretends to go to his new school, but instead scrounges money to takes the two buses every day to and from school across town. To make his life even more difficult, the school bully has it in for him.

At home, where Rex is one of eight children, life is crazy. His sister Annie is dealing with problems of her own and mixing up evil concoctions in the garage. His mother has taken to smoking in the garden.

I'm not going to spoil the story for you, but before it all over, Rex ends up having to go to his new school, makes peace (more or less) with the bully, and eventually, realizes how lucky he is to be in the family he is in.

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### **Sebastian Johnson says**

I think this book was really good cause I read it in like a couple of weeks, It went by fast I really want to read the other books by the same author they are Rex Zero books too. I liked this book cause it seemed liked an adventure and it was funny. I fineshed like 4 weeks ago That was a good book I really liked it.

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### **Colin says**

Historical fiction/realistic fiction. Set in the early sixties in Ottawa. My only criticism is that the historical element has simply been thrown in - the story could have been written in the present with nothing lost or gained. This is a rather low key story about a boy who has moved too many times and schemes to stay at this old school. A rather low key adventure with some very realistic dialogue and carefully observed family scenes. The subplot involving Zero (the main character and a bully (Spew) ends up being rather poignant. Younger students in grades five or six who are heading towards Junior High might enjoy this one. Just don't expect any explosions, murder, drugs, suicide, etc. Itching powder in varsity jackets is about it ...

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### **Kklingon says**

I just discovered Tim Wynne-Jones in the Horn Book and I enjoyed this book so much. Zany, funny, serious, never a dull moment. Rex Norton-Norton, aka Rex Zero (a friend of his says "Norton minus Norton is zero", hence the nickname) has three older sisters and a toddler brother. His parents are British, but the family lives in Canada and they move a lot. Rex is constantly having to start over--new place, new friends, new school, new doubts and questions. He embarks on some pretty crazy adventures, while trying to make sense of life and his place in it. Breezy and a lot of fun, with serious undertones. Quality writing, and Rex is a terrific character.

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### **Emily20 says**

It was a pretty cool book but Rex (the main character) is a little weired and doesn't have the best ideas. It's baissically about a kid in the 1960's, who moves but has a great idea to go to the same school that all his friends are going to without telling his parent. I know this could only end well.

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## **Phoebe says**

Rex is used to moving around but the day he finds out that his family must move to the other side of town, he isn't happy. Moving means he won't get to start grade 7 at Hopewell with the rest of his friends. Rex plays on his mother's odd new distracted demeanour to register himself at Hopewell and start taking the bus there, all the while pretending that he's really going to Connaught. Things go along OK until the day Rex gets into a fight--and then the game is up. As usual, readers are offered a funny, poignant, smart story about pre-adolescence that just happens to be set in Canada, 1963. Wynne-Jones does an outstanding job of making his main character feel contemporary. A great new installment. I love this series.

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