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Lunch Walks Among Us

Laura Wadley

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Benton, Jim. *Lunch Walks Among Us*. Illustrated by Jim Benton. Simon & Schuster, 2003. ISBN 0689862911. \$14.95. 101 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Humorous stories; Adventure stories;

Subject: Monsters--Juvenile fiction; Science--Experiments--Juvenile fiction;

Jim Benton's *Lunch Walks Among Us*, first in the proposed *Franny K. Stein: Mad Scientist* series, introduces us to Franny, who loves bats, snakes, and evil-smelling chemicals, but notices that all her school-mates are afraid of her. In true mad scientist fashion, she makes careful observations of the other children and then transforms herself into a "nice" child. All goes relatively well until the children are threatened by a monster which has arisen from a trash can filled with old sneakers, lunch leftovers, and unstable industrial waste. Franny saves the day by countering with her own monster sewn together out of scraps of school lunch meat, and becomes the hero of her school.

Lunch Walks Among Us may well be one of those books children like and adults don't. It is clearly a Captain Underpants rip-off, but since 99% of Captain Underpants' fans are boys and Franny is a girl, one wonders if an audience will emerge. Noticeably gratuitous potty humor mars an otherwise inoffensive text. The illustrations, by the author, are remarkably Dav Pilkey-like. Amazon.com chose *Lunch Walks Among Us* as one of its best children's books of the year, but someone was smoking something when that decision was made, if you ask me.