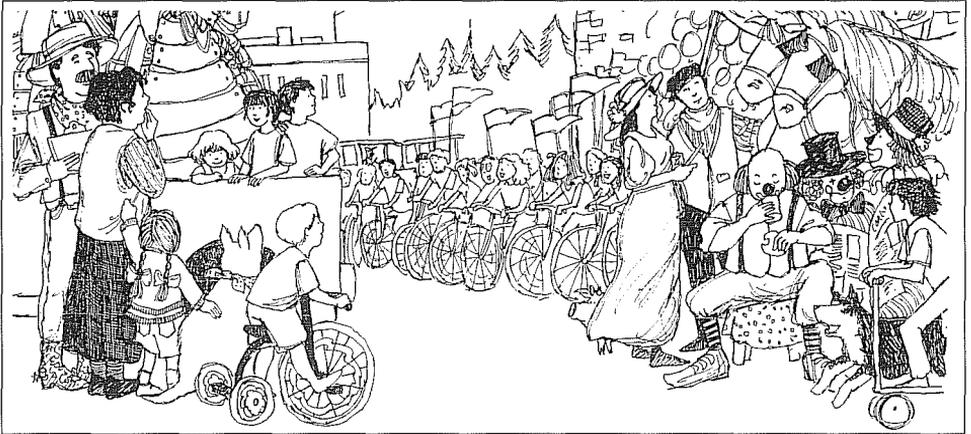


describe the experiences they share. But in a book as readable as this, it is disruptive to brake every few pages to switch narrative voices. The transitions could have been introduced more subtly than by headings of "Chad" and "Jill," and the spaces between paragraphs, explicable only as an attempt to bulk up this slim novel, exacerbate the choppiness. By foregrounding the technique she used to construct her narrative, Stinson prevents her audience from becoming wholly engrossed in Chad and Jill's fictional lives. Readers cannot fully indulge the greatest pleasure of enjoying realistic fiction: forgetting, if only for a while, that it's just a book.

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CAT LOVERS BE CHOOSY

The Case of the Marmalade Cat. James Heneghan. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1991. 86 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-73824-0. **A Cat of Artimus Pride.** Hazel Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press Ltd., 1991. 96 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-199-1.



Illus. from *A Cat of Artimus Pride*

Both Scholastic's *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*, by James Heneghan, and Annick's *A Cat of Artimus Pride*, by Hazel Hutchins are mystery-adventure novels in the big print format.

In *The Case of the Marmalade Cat* the O'Brien Detective Agency, comprised of Bernice, Sadie and Brick must find Miss Parsnip's missing cat. A quiet woman, who lives alone in a large, frightening house, Miss Parsnip is a mystery; is she a real witch, or not? In *The Cat of Artimus Pride*, Cortez the cat enlists the

help of Claire, Griff and Amy in finding the buried diary of his beloved first owner, Artimus Pride. The surprise is that Cortez is a 100-year-old talking cat.

Hutchins' intricate plot and quick-changing action demand more from the reader than *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*. Relationships between the characters are positively portrayed: in Griff, the "boy-next-door," Claire finds a creative and sensitive best friend who helps her build a prize-winning float for the Heritage Day parade. Claire and Griff both deal effectively with neighbourhood bullies and pretentious peers. Cortez is the most memorable character. His outspoken wit and charismatic personality charm readers and empower the main characters.

In *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*, however, the less-complex (and consequently, less interesting) story centres on finding a lost cat. Many of the characters' actions don't realistically represent those of children. For instance, the children willingly miss out on Halloween trick-or-treating just to search for a cat.

Relationships here are fraught with tension. Sadie, the wise-talking book-worm, responds to Bernice's authoritative leadership with often harsh sarcasm. These failed attempts at humour alienate readers. Brick is portrayed as a quiet boy who moves with cat-like stealth. His role in the novel is peripheral to that of Bernice and Sadie. One is left to wonder what draws the characters to each other, much less to the reader.

The Case of the Marmalade Cat will leave children with many unanswered questions about the plot and the characters. *A Cat of Artimus Pride*, on the other hand, ends with mysteries solved, reputations restored, and lessons learned. Also, an environmental theme is woven into the story. One is only left to wonder how Hutchins puts so much into such a short novel while avoiding oversimplification and overcrowding.

Kids who love cats as well as rich plots and fun, interesting characters will derive much more reading pleasure from *A Cat of Artimus Pride* than *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*.

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THE WRONG KIND OF ARTISTRY

Chinook Christmas. Rudy Wiebe. Illus. David More. Northern Lights-Red Deer College Press, 1992. 32 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 0-88995-086-5; **A Happy New Year's Day.** Roch Carrier. Illus. Gilles Pelletier. Tundra, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95. ISBN 0-88776-267-0.

At first glance, these two picture books look quite different from each other. But they have a surprising amount in common—and what they have in common represents some unfortunately common assumptions about quality in picture books.

Both books have texts by well-known writers—that is, writers well-known