

# Mini-Reviews

**The Reading Solution.** Paul Kropp. Random House of Canada. 1993. 208 pp., \$20.00. ISBN 0-394-22266-0.

I cannot believe that the day of the printed book is passing. A book is such a convenient object; you can carry it anywhere.

(Robertson Davies)

The thrust of Kropp's book is to re-encourage reading as an active form of pleasure and enjoyment. To that end, he provides concrete step-by-step solutions to the problems besieging reading, both in the home and in the schools. His text is complemented by useful and informative statistical and anecdotal sidebars. The strength of this book relies on a notion which seems all but forgotten: the responsibility of a child's interest in reading (or for that matter, in life-long learning) falls firmly into the laps of parents or guardians. It is not the sole responsibility of the school! It must be remembered that during a seven-day week, children spend less than 18% of their time in school. Paul Kropp has produced a useful guide to help occupy the balance of a child's time.

**N.J. Gossage** currently lives in Guelph. He suggests you read Neil Postman's *Technopoly* and *Reading and Writing* by Robertson Davies.

**Adventure on Thunder Island.** Edna King and Jordan Wheeler. James Lorimer, 1991. 95 pp., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-133-X.

Three of the four stories in this collection are written by Jordan Wheeler and one by Edna King. All of them present young Native protagonists as just ordinary kids who play, create mischief and who feel the effects of peer pressure. None of the Native kids back down from a challenge, even if it means confronting a notorious troll who might steal their imagination, or being precariously perched on a very high bridge where slipping means death as in "Pigeon Bridge" or walking into a haunted forest as Milton Whitehawk does in "Ebony Forest" to help a spirit reunite with her living sister; all of the protagonists confront fear and come out triumphant.

"The Troll" by Jordan Wheeler, the first story, pits the wits of a Native boy against a troll and with its opening line provides a lyrical portent highlighting what can be expected in the collection: "It lived in Colony Creek and had a voice like the *baa* of an angry sheep. It could be heard at night among the frogs' croaks and the sound of the crickets, warning the children to stay away." Jack Waboose

meets this troll while looking for his Frisbee but rather than recoil in fear he asks the troll why he scares kids. The troll, he finds out, is stinky but harmless and homesick.

The unexpected prowls in every one of these stories. Any reader, boy or girl, between seven and eleven would enjoy this collection.

**Paul Lumsden** is the father of two boys. In his spare time he is teaching assistant and Ph.D. candidate writing his dissertation at the University of Alberta.

**Murphy the Rat: Tales of Tough City.** Paul Duggan. Illus. Daniel Sylvestre. Red Deer College Press, 1992. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-084-9.

*Murphy the Rat*, says the advertisement, is intended “to revive the spirit and fun of Halloween year-round.” Those who find that one night of Halloween a year is enough may have trouble warming up to this book. It is advertised for “ages four and up,” but both the poems and illustrations seem too sophisticated to make this a reasonable guideline. Older children and adults, however, might find a good deal to like here.

The poet, as a former high school teacher, may come by his knowledge of the “tough city” honestly. Those who can appreciate a leaner, meaner “Alligator Pie” will find Duggan’s black humour and clever word-play effective. Skeletons and ghouls rub shoulders with rats, sewers, and juvenile delinquents. Typical of his humour is “The reason skeletons don’t wear clothes”:

The reason skeletons don’t wear clothes?  
Socks won’t stay on bony toes,  
And underwear just sags and slumps  
When hanging from their bony rumps.  
Shirts slide off their bony backs,  
And pants drop like potato sacks;  
And since they can’t wear fancy stuff,  
Skeletons walk ‘round in the buff.

Our girls agreed that the book was “too scary for little kids”, although they laughed at a couple of the poems. The illustrations are strikingly gruesome and complement the darkly off-the-wall nature of the text.

**Kevin McCabe** teaches Classics at Brock University. With the help of daughters Cathy and Julie and wife Sue, he also reviews children’s books.