

love, the longing to belong are universals which Martha Brooks has shared ably with the reader.

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MYSTERY AND MESSAGE

Nightmare Mountain. Myra Paperny. Overlea House, 1988. 224 pp., \$15.95, \$3.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-7172-2478-3, 0-7172-2479-1.

Myra Paperny's latest children's novel combines adventure, mystery, nature and ecological awareness, the problems facing children of a "broken marriage", the trauma of having to fit into a new family unit, and the budding friendship between two adolescents, Cassandra and her new step-brother Jordan. The novel can scarcely contain all these themes and it is a toss-up whether it is essentially a problem novel or a detective story.

Young readers will gravitate to Cassandra Fox with the love of hiking and outdoor life which she shares with her father. Jordie is ill at ease hiking, but young readers will come to enjoy and respect him as friendship develops between him and Cassandra. Each child is in a precarious situation: Jordie is defensive of his father, Cassie of her mother, yet by the end of *Nightmare Mountain* both appreciate their "new parents".

The world of nature is where Cassie and her father feel they belong. That world, Cassie discovers, has remained stable and secure. To her father Dan, it is like the "other world" of fantasy. He explains to Jordan the night before they are to set out on their hiking trip: ". . . It's like lifting an evergreen curtain--and we'll disappear behind it--presto" (24).

Sometimes the adults, Dan in particular, talk like a book as they lesson the children, yet even the adult reader accepts Dan's rather stilted style. His enthusiasm for the outdoors and wild life is part of his character, and he seems to want to impart all the knowledge he has gleaned from his reading to the children. Some of this information, we realize later, is necessary to explain comments by participants in the poaching mystery which unfolds later. For instance Dan misinterprets Jordie's simple question about the marvellous Rocky Mountain sheep's mysterious appearance and disappearance, "Where did they come from?" and gives a dictionary definition of the sheep and their cousins: the all-white Dall's sheep, brownish Stone's sheep with amber horns, smaller types in the southern deserts, and the Rocky Mountain bighorn. This information will be useful later in determining the meaning of a hunter's

"grand slam".

Paperny's plot which offers suspense, tension, and life and death confrontations with cut-throat poachers is in keeping with juvenile mysteries. Cassie's long-awaited vacation trip with her father and Joy turns into a nightmare. The four criminals who don't want any interference from children in their lucrative business look like Long John Silver's buccaneers. Any sense of morality and humanity leaves them. Neil McDevlin has hired Chance to help make a "Grand Slam" record for the Boone and Crockett Club in America: Roy, the handy man at Goliath Lake Lodge where the family is staying, arouses suspicions meant to be misleading as in any detective story. The four criminals use just about every illegal hunting trick in the books. Cassandra verbalizes the reader's feelings when she says, "They're all monsters but Neil McDevlin is the worst" (182). Ultimately all the pieces of the puzzle fit together and the children learn that a "grand slam" has nothing to do with bridge.

The climax of the novel and Cassie's accident at the hands of the poachers is somewhat confusing on first read, but fantastic as it seems, we accept that Cassie flew over the crevice in the glacier and Roy fell in and got wedged there, that the wardens were tracking the poachers, had found the children's trail and were nearby on foot when the helicopter was flying to their rescue. That Cassie gets off with a minor head injury is more surprising, but again we accept this and applaud her suggestion that the trophy head which the warden feels belongs in the park be mounted with the story printed beneath it to deter any would-be poachers.

Young readers will not find Paperny's style at all flat, for the passages in which facts or information are given are the only ones in an intrusively didactic style.

One slightly irritating aspect of Paperny's style is her metaphoric language. When Cassandra tumbles into the creek, "The current drew her into a wringer, flip-flopping her down to the ooze of the murky stream bed" (43). When she emerges she "felt like a mangled sheet of blotting paper" (44). It seems to me that Paperny has the wringer and the agitator of a washing machine confused. The Cassandra who emerges from the creek is anything but wrung out--she is sodden. When the children escape from the poachers by following the goats' trail behind the falls, their path is both wet and difficult, "like slogging through fields of mashed potatoes" (192). Vivid the metaphors may be, but they also seem forced.

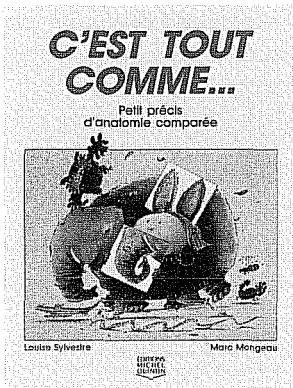
Jordie and Cassie's overnight adventure which demands survival techniques may remind some readers of Farley Mowatt's *Lost in the barrens*, or even of a Houston adventure story. It links also with Monica Hughes' *Hunter in the dark* in which Mike stalks his deer only to realize the importance of allowing it to live. *Nightmare Mountain* offers mystery and excitement as well as a conscientiously expressed philosophy of nature aimed at protecting Canada's parks and lakes. The message has not merely been superimposed on

the story as it appears to be in Barbara Smucker's *White mist*.

Paperny's book is a mystery-adventure, with secondary family and personal relationship themes. The importance of maintaining the environment and the wild life in our National Parks is however the urgent message of the book. A good read, *Nightmare Mountain*, shows Paperny's versatility in keeping many threads of a narrative going. The price she pays is that none of them can be developed in real depth. One suggestion for future editions is that a map showing the location of Goliath Lake Lodge and the trails going out from it be included so that readers may more fully enjoy Paperny's verbal depiction of the lay of the land and its flora and fauna.

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MINI-COMPTES RENDUS



C'est tout comme...Petit précis d'anatomie comparée. Louise Sylvestre. Illus. Marc Mongeau. Waterloo, Québec, Michel Quintin, 1988. 24,95\$ Livre, guide et jeu. ISBN 2-920438-22-0.

Cet ensemble pédagogique fort attrayant repose sur le principe de la comparaison entre la biologie des humains et celle du monde animal. Chaque partie de l'anatomie est rapprochée, par le livre illustré autant que par le jeu de cartes qui l'accompagne, de ses composantes correspondantes chez les animaux domestiques et exotiques. Les

auteurs ne font aucun compromis sur le plan du vocabulaire et utilisent les mots scientifiques exacts: "organes tympaniques de la sauterelle, syphons de bivalve, etc...". Or il y a dans cet album-jeu apparemment bien imaginé une discordance fondamentale qui en rend l'utilisation difficile. En effet, les illustrations fantaisistes de Marc Mongeau, absolument superbes d'ailleurs, sont tellement autonomes qu'elles ne servent nullement à clarifier le vocabulaire beaucoup trop ardu pour la catégorie d'âge visée (les 5 ans et plus). Le résultat, c'est que le savoir anatomique se situe seulement au niveau du langage. On dirait presque de la poésie, tant l'ancrage dans la réalité animale est absent. Une fois que nous savons que les narines humaines se comparent aux "fentes bronchiales de la baleine" ..., que savons-nous de plus? Que les baleines ont un nez? On nage entre deux mots, il me semble.