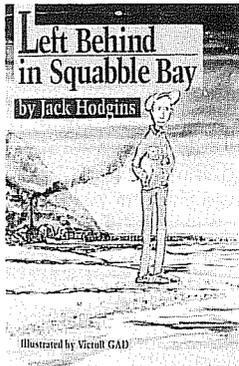


petits-enfants tout en leur apprenant la responsabilité et la courtoisie. En effet, c'est la grand-mère, vêtue en militaire et armée d'un parapluie, qui arrive à la rescousse de Benoît et de Gabrielle, pris à l'improviste par le voleur dans la caverne.

*Métro caverne* brosse avec sensibilité le portrait au sein de la société contemporaine de deux enfants qui suivent l'élan naturel de leur curiosité afin de percer le mystère que contient un espace urbain que d'aucuns diraient stérile. Mélange heureux d'éléments provenant du passé et du présent, le récit présente l'enfance non en tant que période de perturbation, mais plutôt comme apprentissage de la vie, fait d'expériences qui mènent en fin de compte à une meilleure compréhension de soi comme des autres.

**Kenneth W. Meadwell** est Directeur du Département de français à l'Université de Winnipeg. Ses publications portent sur les littératures francophone et anglophone du Canada.

## COMIC BOOK HEROES



**Left behind in Squabble Bay.** Jack Hodgins. Illus. Victor GAD. McClelland & Stewart, 1988. 128 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-4191-8; **The further adventures of Slugger McBatt.** W.P. Kinsella. Collins, 1988. 192 pp., \$22.95, 9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-00-223288-X, 0-00-223281.

While the title might suggest otherwise, W.P. Kinsella's *The further adventures of Slugger McBatt* is not a book of children's stories--though they would certainly appeal to baseball enthusiasts of any age; certainly, some of the stories deal with the world of childhood, but the predominant tone of the collection

is one of adult nostalgia. Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that the most powerful story, "K Mart", is also the most nostalgic, its narrator looking back to the days of his adolescence with a desperate ache of regret for things that might have been different. Then, he had loved a girl, but had been too shy to respond to her obvious sexual interest; instead, he had lied to his friends about having made a conquest of her. But it is only when he hears of her suicide, many years later, that the full impact of his betrayal hits him. He goes to the funeral, and afterwards he and his boyhood friends start playing baseball *inside* the K Mart that stands on the site of the diamond where they had played

in their youth. As the windows smash and the security guards are summoned, the episode becomes a powerful expression of the adult yearning to defy the passage of time, to recover the irrecoverable past.

Not all the stories work so well, however. "Reports concerning the death of the Seattle Albatross are somewhat exaggerated", for instance, despite its intriguing premise that the Seattle Mariners' bird mascot actually *is* a bird--an alien from another planet--rarely succeeds in exploiting its humorous possibilities: such humour as there is is soured by the gruesome conclusion, where a female fan falls to her death from the mascot's "nest" at the top of the Kingdome. Nor is "Punchlines" much better. Here the narrator is a rising young baseball star playing Triple A ball in Vancouver; he is also a sexist, homophobic lout who spends his time drinking in strip clubs, telling dirty jokes, and engaging in acts of mindless violence. The "punchline" turns out to be the closing revelation that the narrator is really gay--a glib narrative twist that does little to illuminate the difficult process of accepting an often socially disapproved-of sexual identity. More successful is the title story, in which a weedy, physically inept eleven-year-old succeeds in ingratiating himself with his more athletic classmates by his skill as a cartoonist. Slugger McBatt, his cartoon creation, is modelled on Freddie MacLeish, the class's baseball star, and for a while he enjoys Freddie's friendship and protection. One rainy afternoon, however, more out of boredom than anything else, Freddie turns on him. Hurt and humiliated, he takes the only revenge open to him: he kills the comic book hero he has so lovingly created. There are no further adventures of Slugger McBatt.

Interestingly enough, the main character in Jack Hodgins's *Left behind in Squabble Bay* is also a cartoonist. Alex McGuire is an anxiety-ridden comic-book fanatic who is left in the care of his sour and quarrelsome aunt and uncle while his father goes off to Brazil. Marooned in a tiny west coast town where no-one laughs, where there are no kindred spirits, and where they don't even have snow in the winter (Alex is from Ottawa), he tries to cheer himself up by drawing caricatures of the local inhabitants. When his pictures are discovered, however, he finds himself in disgrace; faced with the prospect of his aunt and uncle giving away his drawing equipment, he decides to run away. In the course of his attempted escape, though, he encounters The Top Banana--an enormous, clown-like individual whose antics had once kept the town amused before he was driven into exile. With the aid of various other eccentrics--Frantic Freda, who makes fertilizer out of seaweed in an underwater laundromat, and the Duchess-in-exile, who wears a live cat as a collar--Alex makes a triumphant return, decorating the Community Hall with his caricatures to the cheers and laughter of the revitalized townsfolk. Even the formidable Felicity Bogg, his scornful and sharp-tongued schoolmate, becomes an ally in the end, sharing with him the humiliation of having to wear braces on the teeth. The story is recounted with much the same manic energy that characterizes Hodg-

ins's adult fiction; indeed, in some respects it works better. While in novels such as *The invention of the world* Hodgins's use of the magic realist approach of Marquez and Grass, blending fantasy and reality, sometimes seems uneasily derivative, here the mixture seems entirely appropriate. From the perspective of an isolated youngster--particularly one as paranoid as Alex--much of the reality he experiences *does* seem fantastic. Jack Hodgins's skill in capturing this is part of the secret of his success.

**Chris Ferns** teaches English at Mount Saint Vincent University.

## WELCOME ADVENTURES AND MYSTERIES

**The ghost ships that didn't belong.** Lynn Manuel. Illus. Paul McCusker. Gage Educational Publishing, 1987. 127 pp., \$4.75 paper. ISBN 0-7715-6795-2; **Whooping crane adventure.** Max Braithwaite. Illus. Henry Van Der Linde. Gage Educational Publishing, 2nd ed., 1988. 191 pp., \$4.25 paper. ISBN 0-7715-6899-1; **Moses, me, and murder: A story of the Cariboo Goldrush.** Ann Walsh. Illus. Cathie Allen. Pacific Educational Press, 1988. 128 pp., paper. ISBN 0-88865-059-0; **Ski lodge mystery and other stories.** Joan Weir. Overlea House, 1988. 159 pp., \$15.95, \$3.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-7172-2293-4, 0-7172-2292-6; **The turtle connection.** Susan Alcorn. Illus. Rob Johannsen. Gage Educational Publishing, 1987. 128 pp., \$6.20 paper. ISBN 0-7715-6881-9; **No safe place.** Marion Crook. Overlea House, 1988. 196 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-7172-2294-2.

Today, when fear and long distances make it necessary for children to be accompanied everywhere and warned against everything, the mystery/adventure book must be a welcome escape. Adventure book children can overcome danger and hardship by their own wits and courage, and offer our sheltered offspring the thrills they'd like to experience. Here are six they'll enjoy.

The two most exciting are *The ghost ships that didn't belong*, and *Whooping crane adventure*. In the first book, ten-year-old cousins Jonna and Mat encounter a terrible glowing ship blasting across their grandparents' field near Lake Okanagan. No one else can see it, except a strange old woman who typically offers clues as to their "gift". In a dramatic midnight climax, the cousins must escape the ghost ship grinding down upon them as they try to correct, quite literally, a grave error.

Lynn Manuel has turned a true incident from the Cariboo Gold Rush into an exciting modern ghost story, with vivid descriptions, some nice light spots and bits of history slipped in smoothly. This type of tale keeps American