

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

legends alive for American (and many Canadian) children. This book gives Canada a turn.

*Whooping crane adventure* offers non-stop excitement. Jeff, his sister Mattie, and Gordon are only one and two years older than Jonna and Mat, but they seem much older, and the story more mature. This may be because the tale was first written 25 years ago.

Bird-lover Jeff and his family spend the summer of 1960 camping in Northern Alberta, searching for the secret valley where endangered whooping cranes nest. Two villains are also anxious to find the cranes--dead or alive--for profit. After they steal Jeff's ancient map, the race becomes serious: the children paddle into dangers that require all their outdoor skills and wits, and the help of another secret inhabitant of the valley.

Although much of the story is focused on Jeff, the female characters are all capable. It is refreshing to read about a mother who is not a hovering worrywart, but "keener than any of them on exploring unknown country."

*Moses, me, and murder* also involves the Cariboo Gold Rush of the 1860's. Twelve-year-old Ted McIntosh is the only fictional character in a story based on actual events. Life in a Gold Rush town is interestingly mixed with good adventure and illustrations. Historical notes are saved for the end, where they intrigue, rather than distract from the story.

Ted is abducted by a dark-bearded stranger suspected of murder. This man, James Barry, after being identified by Ted, is tried, found guilty, and hanged. We witness the holiday crowds at the public execution and hear the sounds of the hanging.

Here is the problem in an otherwise fine book. For sixteen chapters we saw Barry as a cold-blooded "monster", who terrifies Ted, and whom the judge and jury declare guilty beyond doubt. Suddenly Ted wonders if Barry is innocent, and mourns, "We didn't have the right to murder him in return. What we did, what the law did is as wrong as what he did." This drastic shift in view is too sudden. It is fine for the author to make her readers think about the results of those thrilling criminal chases, but unfair to sneak her opinions on capital punishment into the mouth of a young boy.

Fans of *Encyclopedia Brown* and other solve-your-own mysteries will enjoy Joan Weir's *Ski lodge mystery and other stories*. Grade five buddies Mike and Tony and friends unravel eleven short mysteries. There is a variety of Canadian settings, and the solutions are neatly explained at the back.

*The turtle connection* is more of a problem book than a mystery. Both the title and the first chapter are weak elements in a generally likeable book.

The school's computers are stolen with the apparent help of an insider. Chris Burrows has good reason to suspect his best friend Ken. The confused grade five/sixer has no one to confide in. His mother is dead and father and his girlfriend, though concerned, are seldom home. Chris ignores his doubts and helps Ken in dubious enterprises. It is a strain to believe that Chris can

feel so badly about what they're doing, yet take so long to stop it. Perhaps this makes the book stronger, for the troubled reader is also torn between loyalty and honesty.

Careful observers of the illustrations will notice the teacher's wheelchair. Mrs. Fisk's disability is never mentioned in the text. What a perfect way to show that the teacher is successfully performing her job without fuss or special attention!

*No safe place* is the third in a series of "Susan George" mystery stories. Here sixteen-year-old Susan's holiday at an isolated lodge in the wilderness of British Columbia turns nasty after the former cook is found murdered. Susan tries to radio for help, outmanoeuvre someone trying to kill her, and babysit her two-year-old cousin. Just as the case seems settled, the real killer forces Susan to fly him to freedom in Vancouver.

After a slow start, the last third of the book is dramatic, with maybe a bit too much technical detail about flying. But thirteen pages of congratulations and explanations after the climax are overlong.

Marion Crook probably intends this book as an antidote for readers suffering from an overdose of saccharine series romances, but I found Susan too determined to prove her independence. And it's hard to imagine a teenager loving a boy because he is "good, kind, honourable, decent, loving and reliable." That's mother speaking.

**Gisela Sherman** is a former public school librarian and a freelance writer. She is currently writing her second children's book.

## MORALE PRATIQUE ET IRONIE SOCIALE

**La patte dans le sac.** Sylvie Desrosiers. Illus. Daniel Sylvestre. Montréal, La Courte Échelle, 1987. 93 pp., 5,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-063-4.

Le titre de ce récit policier destiné aux jeunes adolescents, renforcé à même la couverture par l'amusant dessin d'un chien étonné dont la patte antérieure s'enfonce dans un sac, nous propose d'emblée le monde des méfaits. Et dans ce texte, effectivement, il s'agit d'une série de crimes. Un transfert illicite de drogue à travers la frontière canado-américaine près de Montréal est effectué grâce à un chien dressé à transporter des sachets d'héroïne d'un maître à l'autre. Puis les malfaiteurs, pour se disculper, font accuser un innocent lorsque le chien est pris un soir, "la patte dans le sac," par un alerte douanier.

Les lecteurs seront attirés non seulement par ce chien singulier, nommé Notdog à cause d'une apparence si rebutante qu'on est poussé même à renier