

ity that is welcome in a genre which can easily present the elderly as relics to be bypassed, or as stock sympathizers, in league with youth against repressive parents. Bedard breaks the stereotypes and makes us encounter Arthur Magnus, a man, who happens to be very old.

Though ostensibly a young adult novel – Cass and Maddy are about fifteen – the subtlety of Bedard's handling of relationships represents a maturity missing in a great deal of adult fiction, not to speak of the plethora of superficiality aimed at teens. Michael Bedard is worth reading.

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### A FINE BEGINNING

**The survival squad.** Floyd Priddle. Breakwater Books, 1990. 200 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-920911-45-5.

One thing is certain: Floyd Priddle, a seventeen-year-old Newfoundland student, has begun his writing career with audacity, tackling a subject – the often vicious survival techniques of a group of teenagers following a nuclear holocaust – which many more-seasoned novelists would shun. When a novel is set in the distant future or is pure fantasy the author has greater leeway in his/her portrayal of the "secondary world" being created. A novel set in the near future (in the real world) must balance the real and the imagined, for the world itself (in terms of ideas and attitudes) will not have changed a great deal. So, given these considerations, how does Priddle fare?

As far as believability is concerned, Priddle is to be commended. The post-holocaust world he creates seems convincing enough, mainly because he concentrates on the efforts of his teenage survivors to stay alive and does not try to describe in minute detail the physical effects of the nuclear devastation. There are, to be sure, some seeming implausibilities – such as the ready-made shelter – but since one has to maintain that "willing suspension of disbelief" for most futuristic novels, one can accept Priddle's imagined world of 1997 as a reasonable facsimile of what the real world might be like following such a catastrophe.

As a storyteller, Priddle also deserves praise. He has a very good ear for teenage conversation (as well he should), knows how to maintain a steady story-telling pace (sustaining reader interest), and provides plenty of challenges for his protagonists (which should keep his teenage readers engaged). This does indeed seem like the kind of novel teenage readers would enjoy. Though, even for them, the following criticisms might cause some concern.

The weakest aspect of this novel is its sheer length. What has taken Priddle two hundred pages to describe could have been more succinctly (and as effec-

tively) done in fifty fewer pages. It is, in other words, a long, drawn-out book and therefore becomes tedious towards the end. The fact that it seems to change direction also compounds the tedium. Priddle initially conveys the strong bonds of friendship which later enables the four intrepid teenagers to survive the holocaust. Confronted by unforeseen enemies, they exhibit great strength of character. And this seems to be the dominant theme of the book. What begins as a novel of personality, however, becomes one of action and gimmicks, and degenerates into monotony. The reliance on lead pipes and guns, rather than teenage ingenuity, weakens what – in my opinion – should have been a consistently engaging story.

But I do not wish these criticisms to persuade anyone not to read *The survival squad*. Given the youth and artistic inexperience of the writer, one cannot but applaud Priddle's effort and thank Breakwater Books for taking a chance on such a daring venture. With our encouragement, better novels will emerge – ones which we may all look forward to reading.

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#### QUAND LES HÉROS ET LES ROMANCIERS SE RENCONTRENT...



**Le roman d'Agatha.** Yves E. Arnau. Illus. Caroline Merola. Montréal, Tisseyre, 1989. 137 pp. 6,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89051-363-7.

*Le roman d'Agatha* est le deuxième dans la série "Une aventure d'Edgar Allan, détective", qu'Yves E. Arnau offre aux jeunes de 10 à 12 ans. Mais ce détective farfelu charmait les jeunes même avant la publication du premier roman, *Le Fils du soleil*, en 1988, puisque "Edgar Allan, détective" a tout d'abord été une série d'émissions pour la jeunesse, produite et diffusée pendant trois saisons à Radio-Canada.

Le détective Edgar Allan, "grand amateur de romans policiers", et son jeune assistant arabe, Ben Saïda, accourent à l'appel de la grande romancière Agatha Grisly, menacée, alors qu'elle rédige son 86<sup>e</sup> roman policier. Le héros-détective de ses romans, le célèbre Ulysse Rhubarbe, ne peut rien pour la vieille dame de plume, qui ressent, cependant, l'importance de cette occasion solennelle et émouvante, où l'on se trouve entre Ulysse Rhubarbe et Edgar Allan, "en équilibre sur la frontière de la Fiction et de la Réalité". Mais notre héros "réel", à son insu, est