

## WHAT ABOUT COMBINING A MONSTER AND A DAD, OR A FISH AND A FOETUS?

**A monster in my cereal.** Marie-Francine Hébert. Illus. Philippe Germain. Second Story Press, 1990. 54 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-92005-12-0; **The amazing adventure of LittleFish.** Marie-Francine Hébert. Illus. Darcia Labrosse. Second Story Press, 1990. 24 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-92005-15-5.

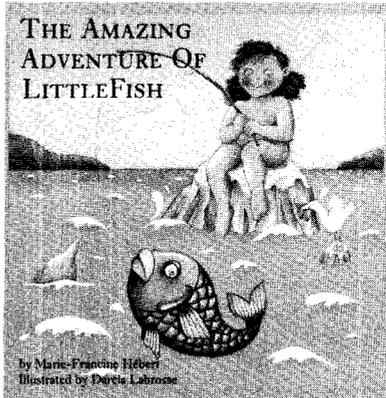
**A monster in my cereal**, offers a familiar plot fairly cleverly reworked. Poppy (age not stated) is left in Dad's care for two days. A monster, not *in* her cereal, but *on* the box, comes to life and listens to her complaints about her selfish father. Poppy blurts out three wishes. She adds a fourth: "Sometimes I wish I didn't even have a father!" The monster grants the first three, then disappears. Dad's nature is changed. What can Poppy do before Dad vanishes? The short, final chapter puts all right. Poppy confides in the reader: "You probably think I made this all up, or that it was only a dream. So do I!" A misleading confi-

dence, since there are white hairs all over the house and Dad now talks as the monster did.

Dad's complete conversion is unbelievable. Poppy's disclaimer that children "let their imaginations run wild" and the suggestion that dreams can right things could mislead young, observant, sensitive readers or leave them truly dissatisfied.

Ironic contrasts of scenes, speeches, and chapter titles give shape and meaning to the story. Whether young readers will "laugh away their fears," as the back cover blurb promises, is a moot point. They may quibble about some illustrations. The monster is "like a huge white cat with fluffy fur," yet it looks like a cross between a dog and an orangutan. They will find other pictures truly supplemental to the text. The words "Groutch" on the cereal box and the word "Frais" on the shaving cream can should appeal. In spite of what Marie-Francine Hébert and Philippe Germain should have "put right" in the book, young readers will probably enjoy it.

Marie-Francine Hébert's *The amazing adventure of LittleFish* juxtaposes two stories. Illustrations, as important as text, appear on thirteen of the book's twenty-four pages. The first story begins when the only creatures were fishes. Born from an egg, LittleFish, according to an illustration, is the offspring of two clownish-looking fish of different species, and has a human face. She "wanted to know what lay beyond the water," a place to which "no fish had ever swum." The middle pages show her in an uninhabited



world, swimming up onto land, and taking a deep breath. The following two-page-spread shows her progress by means of four figures representing stages of human evolution. Suddenly, LittleFish is fully human, (age indeterminable), fishing (where no fish ever swum before!) and catching a fish (as is a seagull)...a creature from which she so recently evolved! This illustration (used for the book's cover) should prompt queries and comments.

The second story, by parallels, shows how we "grow and change in much the same way as LittleFish" from a fish-like foetus, through birth, to a young child. Illustrations, again invite reactions. Why doesn't a picture of the developing foetus show it sucking its thumb (a missed parallel with a previous picture of LittleFish)? The birth picture pleases; however, queries will rise. Is it anatomically misleading? Is the male (never referred to as "father") lying on the bed with the mother? The book's final picture is evocative.

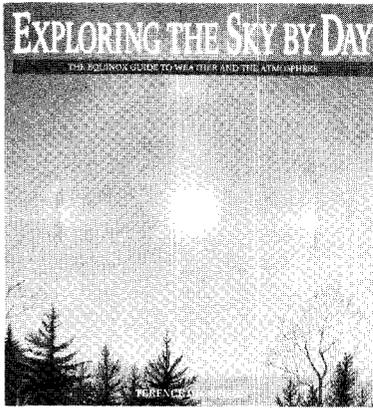
Unfortunately, the book fails in integrating the two stories, and in making the significant parallels. Yet the book is an attempt to meet incipient ques-

tions. It definitely allows adults many chances to "fill in," "add," and "explain."

The title suggests that "an adventure" is a sufficient expression for Little-Fish's evolutionary journey and, except for vague allusions in the name, "Little-Fish," does not integrate the two stories. The original title, *Le voyage de la vie*, is more fitting and adequate. Could there have been a better translation?

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## EXPLORING THE WORLD AROUND US



**Exploring the sky by day.** Terence Dickinson. Camden House, 1988. 72 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-920656-71-4; **Exploring the world of birds: An Equinox guide to avian life.** Adrian Forsyth and Laurel Aziz. Camden House, 1990. 72 pp., \$15.95 \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920656-98-6, 0-920656-94-3.

Everyone in the family will appreciate the clean design, excellent illustration, and general philosophy that characterize these Equinox Guide Books. While the books do not ignore the negative impact of human activity on the natural world, they depend primarily on the positive pleasures of observation to inspire conservationist principles.

Both books relate their facts to everyday experience. As one might expect, however, the two subjects touch human lives and emotions in very different ways, so *Exploring the sky by day* ties atmospheric phenomena to geographical location and practical application, while *Exploring the world of birds* treads the fine line between describing bird behaviour in human terms and keeping the two clearly distinct.

*Exploring the sky by day* asks and answers dozens of questions in interesting ways. Raindrops, we learn for example, are not tear-shaped, but "are shaped like tiny hamburger buns, with the flat side down," and the amount of water in clouds is helpfully measured in swimming-pools-full.

Taken separately, the 29 sections of this book are well-written, interesting, and helpfully illustrated with photographs, excellent diagrams, and humorous drawings. It is difficult, however, to discern the organizing principles: why, for example, are hurricanes and tornadoes separated by nearly half the book from