

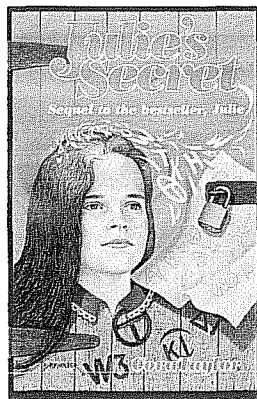
Dinh says, "I have seen death and horror and betrayal. I am not a child...." Yet he is in a child's body, in a child's environment, and is the victim of childish taunts and pranks. The book juxtaposes Dinh's situation with that of Dinh's enemy, who is also a victim, but the victim of over-ambitious and uncaring parents; Dinh learns that even rich white boys have personal sufferings. Hence both boys have scars.

Ibbitson's *The big story* is cast in a lighter vein than Kropp's as it depicts a rather happy-go-lucky seventeen-year-old with the ambition to be a newspaper reporter. Andy is hired by the local rag as part-time copy person, and gets himself into trouble with both the newspaper, the town's major employer, and his father when he tries to scoop a big story on the source of the pollution of the local river. In this fast-paced story Andy tries to unravel the truth and cope with the attitudes that develop around him when jobs and a way of life are threatened. In the end his idealism becomes infused with practicality, but his optimism and enthusiasm remain undiminished.

Both books are good reads. Using first-person narration, each deals with individual problems and large issues; neither moralizes or patronizes the reader. In attempting to resolve the controversy inherent to the story neither book forsakes the believable for the realm of fantasy: the happy endings are prosaic. Dinh is still poor, but he is able to give as good as he gets. Andy gets his job back, but he is not the town hero, nor does he win the girl. Both books are in the typical *Series 2000* format with excellent black and white drawings. The bold type and double spacing make them an easy read – even for reluctant readers.

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AS REAL AS PRAIRIE GUMBO



Julie's secret. Cora Taylor. Western Producer Prairie Books, 1991. 117 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88833-343-9.

One of the things that sets me apart from child readers is that I don't usually like sequels. Whereas the kids I know want sequels to every book they've read and liked, I have been too often disappointed by book number two. *Julie's secret* is certainly one of the exceptions. It is quite different from Taylor's 1985 award-winning novel *Julie*, but just as satisfying.

We learned in the first book of young Julie's unusual and, to her, disturbing psychic abilities. That book ended with a dramatic scene in which Julie res-

cues her father from a near-fatal accident. As *Julie's secret* opens, the now ten-year old girl has fallen into a kind of numbness following this event. She is wrenched from this protective state when a spring blizzard maroons her and her sister in a neighbour's barn and Julie senses evil all around them. So begins a plot involving murder, torture, and child abduction. This sounds like powerful material, and it is. In the hands of a writer less grounded and in control than Cora Taylor it could be melodramatic. But she takes the stuff of horror fiction and makes it as real and tangible as prairie gumbo.

The supernatural is given high relief against Taylor's fresh and convincing descriptions of ordinary life. Like Susan Cooper, in *The dark is rising*, she creates a large and ebullient family in which one member, the seventh child of a seventh child, participates fully in family events while bearing the heavy responsibility of his or her particular gift. One of the most winning scenes in *Julie's secret*, a scene steeped in the details of prairie life, involves the children going "horse skiing."

Julie's secret is much more plot-driven than *Julie*. We are concerned not so much with Julie's internal struggles as with the unravelling of the stories that lie behind her unease. And Taylor handles the technical challenges of a suspense story admirably, flicking from scene to scene, seeding the plot with hints of revelations to come. She does a lot with a few words: "It was Death and it was at the north side of the barn" (42).

In the course of the plot various people are forced to more or less openly acknowledge Julie's gift. How this new openness will affect the girl is left up in the air. Book number three would be a good way of answering this question. I'm with the kids: let's have another.

Sarah Ellis is a Vancouver librarian and writer. Her latest book, entitled *Pick-up sticks* (Groundwood), won the Governor General's Award.