

FORGETTING THE RULES

The Flight of the Stoneman's Son. Terence Munsey. Munsey Music, 1993. 208 pages, \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-9697066-0-X. **The Keeper of Three.** Terence Munsey. Munsey Music, 1994. 220 pages, \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-9697066-1-8.

In these first two books in his Stoneman series, Munsey follows the Tolkien tradition, weaving a tale involving a reluctant and unlikely hero, a quest, magic, good and evil, a number of rules, and a mysterious and wise mentor. Bilbo's parallel in Munsey's stories is Julian, the Stoneman's son, a simple bachelor craftsman who is suddenly drawn into an adventure over tea. Julian is both afraid of water and of heights but it is he who must save the Utopian world of the Southlands from evil represented most immediately in the form of the Lord Merm of Gottland. There are rules aplenty for Julian and his young nephews to abide by as they seek to restore the Balance, and magic abounds. A contemporary twist in these tales is "D," or Darla, the wise and mysterious woman, who awakens Julian to his true role, while awakening his bachelor's heart in other ways as well.

The traditional sketched map is augmented in the story by rich detail concerning the various landscapes and their inhabitants: The Southlands, Julian's home; Gottland, the domain of Lord Merm; the Burning Forest with its sentient pines and reclusive Dwellers, and the dramatic Ice Barrens which spawn the formidable mercenary Riders who work for Lord Merm:

The land of Ice, or "Ice Barrens" as it was known, lay to the distant north. It was both magnificent and cold. Lengths upon lengths of ice, [sic] covered its sub surface, which was at one time, warm, fertile and exposed. Now, and for as long as recent memory, its landscape was boundless in its icy blue glow.... After long enough exposure to these Barrens, the inhabitants: the Kith of the Ice, became addicted to the blueness of the atmosphere and found themselves unable to stay for extended periods in the more mellow outside worlds. (45,Bk.2)

Unfortunately, both books suffer greatly from the need for editing and re-writing. While the story is interesting, the characters and places intriguing, the writing itself is first-draft quality. Both books are peppered with spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors which are wearying for the reader. The misuse of "it's" as a possessive is frequent. Misplaced commas, as in the quotation above, and word use errors, such as the two examples below, are common.

She looked stunning with her silky hair and taught body [presumably meaning "taut body"]. (6, Bk.1)

Any who are near me may also convoke its anger [possibly meaning "provoke its anger"]. (69, Bk.2)

A December 1993 interview in the *Toronto Sun* claims that Munsey wrote *The Flight of the Stoneman's Son* in six weeks. He got the story on the page. What is missing now is good editing and disciplined rewriting.

Munsey's style betrays a fledgling writer. He does not trust dialogue to stand alone, following it with commentary that slows the pace of his adventure.

'Any outsider who would stay the night after entering the wood of the Moonfruit, must be running from something pretty awful. I hope we don't meet it while we are introducing ourselves!' Thodox

was trying to lighten the mood. 'Perhaps. But what if this traveler takes us for his adversary,' the idea was left hanging, 'We should consider our approach. Just in case?' Quei was asking for an opinion more than making a statement. (43,Bk.2)

Munsey also attempts to create a dialect for the Riders, characters in his tale who come from the desolate Ice Barrens. However, his difficulty with consistency in this dialect makes passages of extended Rider dialogue cumbersome.

Taken side by side, the books suffer from similar difficulties and show the same glimmers of promise. Book One, *The Flight of the Stoneman's Son*, does have two problems the second one escapes. Munsey opens the first book with first person narration, placing Julian by his hearth to tell us a tale. He drops this point of view as he opens chapter two, opting for a wandering omniscient style, never returning to Julian and the first person narration that opens the book. It may be that he plans to make such a return in Book Four, but here it makes for an abrupt jump and a disjointed tale.

The other error concerns a lost sword which makes a brief re-appearance in the owner's hand some 20 pages before it is found.

No such glaring inconsistencies show up in Book Two, *The Keeper of Three*. This second book is more sharply focused as well, using the trick of converging travelers to bring three story lines together. But I found myself wearying of the quest at this proposed halfway point in the series. Munsey's writing is not the smooth and confident kind that carries a reader through. The tale may be worth telling, but the telling is too often awkward.

As juvenile literature these books have another responsibility that makes the copy-editing concerns more than just nit-picking. The written word should be modeled well for young people. Even as characters in a fantasy are burdened with rules as they pursue their quests, so are writers of fantasy. Munsey forgets the rules too often.

Bonnie Ryan-Fisher *is a free-lance writer and editor who also currently teaches philosophy, writing, and life skills.*

"GRANDMA WENT A-TRAVELLING"

Gifts. Jo Ellen Bogart. Illus. Barbara Reid. North Winds Press, 1994. 32 pp., \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-24177-X.

The success of *Gifts* may be measured by its versatility: it may be integrated into a lesson plan, and it will entertain an audience. The text is a series of apparently random and unconnected memories, narrated in short, descriptive sentences by a first-person voice. There is no conventional plot.

The artwork tells of the loving relationship between the aging grandmother who travels the world and the growing granddaughter who requests souvenirs or gifts from those travels. The joy and intimacy of shared moments that make