

This is a gentler, less brash, side of Munsch.

Bright illustrations add both energy and humour (the endemic frogs are especially fun!).

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This Means War! Bev Spencer. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 139 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12440-4.

A home is more than just a building; it is the foundation that enables families to stay together. Having a home also helps to foster a sense of belonging — a sense of community. In Bev Spencer's pre-teen novel, *This Means War!*, twelve-year-old Laney's family unity is threatened when her family is given notice that they have to vacate their apartment building because their landlord, Mr. Dutton, "wants to turn the apartments into condominiums and sell them" (11). In order to fight the eviction, Laney, who wants to be a "World Famous Reporter" (18), decides to use her newspaper know-how to expose Dutton's plans. In the process, Laney not only grabs the attention of the city papers, but she also gains a community, as neighbours and tenants join together to protest Mr. Dutton's actions.

Spencer's novel clearly demonstrates that the actions of one person can make a difference; however, she also clearly signals that people must work together to enact real change. It is only through the tenants' combined efforts, and particularly their combined financial resources, that the apartment building can be saved — even Laney's five-year-old sister Emma donates a jam-covered "purple dime" (110) so that they do not have to move.

This Means War! is an effective novel for exploring the power of the individual, the community, and even the media to enact change within legal boundaries. During a street protest, a fight breaks out between Dutton, Laney, and her siblings. The police officer who responds to the scene informs Mr. Dutton and the children that "the others are too young to be charged [with assault]. Elaine [Laney] is considered old enough to be responsible for her actions'" (70). By including these references to the Young Offender's Act, Spencer signals the responsibility that Laney must accept if she is to become a mature member of the community. Spencer also reinforces the reality that with responsibilities come certain rights since the same police officer states that "Elaine can also charge [Mr. Dutton] with assault" (70). Spencer thus states explicitly that everyone, including children, has the agency and the right to fight for what they believe in, to save their home, and to create their own community.

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