

too numerous dreams, a great storm engulfs the ship and the captain is forced to plot its course by dead reckoning, "a combination of taking an educated guess about where you are and knowing how deep the water is where you are." The over-confident and rather arrogant captain, however, constantly assures his crew that he knows what he is doing, an error that, the great-grandfather comments, would cost him his life.

Burtinshaw's description of the tragedy from the viewpoint of a young boy works quite effectively, providing a vitality and immediateness that one cannot find in the historical accounts of the *Valencia* that she lists in her acknowledgements. We care about this boy and mourn with the old great-grandfather who has never really forgotten that he was one of the very few that survived. And the reader realizes that, indeed, this is a story that needed to be told.

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A Promising Start: Four Titles from Orca's Young Reader Series

Three on Three. Eric Walters. Orca, 1999. 122 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-170-X.
Full Court Press. Eric Walters. Orca, 2000. 152 pp. \$6.50 paper. ISBN 1-55143-169-6.
Jesse's Star. Ellen Schwartz. Orca, 2000. 108 pp. \$6.50 paper. ISBN 1-55143-143-2.
Ellie's New Home. Becky Citra. Orca, 1999. 82 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-164-5.

Eric Walters, a former teacher and basketball coach and a popular and prolific author of junior novels, has the credentials to back *Three on Three*, in which underdogs Nick and Kia enter a basketball contest at school, and the sequel, *Full Court Press*, in which they try out for the school team. Considering the impressionable age of his intended readers, it is disappointing that Walters gives white Nick a house and two professional parents while his black friend Marcus (not so described but so drawn in the illustrations) is the school's best athlete and lives in a single-parent family in a housing "complex."

In books for developing readers we should be able to count on a competent use of English. Walters, a teacher, should be able to use "like" grammatically (*Three on Three* 10, 13, 26) and not write "those sort of things" (45) and "he weren't going to let us" (*Full Court Press* 106). He does not explain why Nick, by all indications an able student, is ten years old in grade three. In the plus column, Nick's relative timidity when a bully threatens and his tendency to "psych" himself out when odds mount against them on the court are refreshingly juxtaposed with Kia's boundless confidence and game-saving technical skills without this lapsing into a message-laden gender reversal. The conversion of bully Roy from menacing detractor to friend evolves believably from a motive of self-interest. The author effects a satisfactorily thrilling battle for the championship and does not resort to a fairy-tale ending. Walters has capably constructed interesting stories around a popular topic and he keeps them moving along. Dialogue is good and descriptions of on-court action excellent. The theme of younger children being accepted and successful

among their envied older schoolmates is guaranteed to please. Interior pictures by another artist are generally poor but John Mantha's covers are eye-catching. Walters intends to continue Nick and Kia's story in future volumes that will likely see vigorous circulation.

Jesse's Star is about the persecution of Jews in Russia in the 1880s and the struggles of a group of villagers who flee to Canada. The author adopts a now-familiar convention of historical novels to provide a hook which will help draw the modern reader into her tale. She introduces a present-day descendant of her protagonist and then uses a linking object, in this case, a Star of David medallion which has been passed down in the family, to propel Jesse backwards to live a few weeks of Yossi's very different life. Schwartz, whose own parents escaped the pogrom at the turn of the twentieth century, gives her readers a very realistic sense of the fear and helplessness felt by the trapped villagers who are being starved and terrorized by Russian soldiers for no better reason than that the victimizers are more powerful. The theme of "klutz" Yossi trying to win the respect of his family and neighbours by mastering stilts, only to see each well-meant scheme end in disaster and ridicule, will surely strike chords among Schwartz's pre-adolescent audience. They will enjoy the courageous, if slightly unrealistic, way he outsmarts the enemy and creates an opportunity for the villagers to steal away to freedom. As appropriate for young readers, Schwartz limits description, focusing on action while making good use of dialogue to reveal plot and character. In her depictions of villagers and soldiers she neither gilds the former nor demonizes the latter, but shows simply and tellingly how, among people who all really want much the same thing, ignorance becomes prejudice. One does feel a bit of a chill reading that "He was grateful to Yossi, too, for helping the family get to Canada — to a place where people didn't hate you or kill you just because you were different" (105) — a rather categorical statement, all things considered. Kirsti's pictures here are more successful than in the Walters books. Don Kilby's attractive but quiet cover may cause some readers to overlook what is actually a fairly rousing story, which ends with two pages of historical material to provide context for the novel.

Ellie's New Home is also an immigration story, this one set in 1835. After the death of Ellie's mother, Ellie's father takes her and her younger brother to homestead in Upper Canada. Ellie's enthusiasm for adventure is undimmed by the long ocean crossing, but wanes when she and Max are left with strangers while Papa goes ahead to build a cabin. Fresh from England with her nice clothes and unfamiliar with such realities of rural life as chickens and butter churning, Ellie earns the instant scorn of her hosts' daughter. Mary wants a friend but has had no opportunity to learn how to be one and Ellie is too distressed over Papa's absence to read her clumsy overtures. Becky Citra shows us two quite real children faltering toward friendship. The crucible for the sealing of this friendship is straight from stock — a stormy midnight race through the forest to fetch a doctor — but the reactions are very believable. Use of first-person narrative helps the reader step into Ellie's shoes as she encounters life in the wilderness. The writing is confident, sometimes lively. Citra has a talent for evoking clear pictures with an economy of words, especially in scenes with a litter of kittens and on the frightening night walk to town. Another fine Kilby cover wraps up this compact, well-crafted package.

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