

younger brother, who proves to be just as entertaining as his older brother. Korman's figures illustrate how youth learn to be active in achieving their goals. For example, Elmer Drimsdale, a typical Science geek, falls in love with fellow Summer Science Fair contestant Marylou Beakman, a student at Miss Scrimmage's School. A passive Elmer declares his love to Marylou by sending her rare and valuable gifts — a rodent skull and the droppings of the Tasmanian Mountain Sparrow — anonymously. Contrary to Elmer's intentions, such offerings send Marylou into a tizzy and prompt Miss Scrimmage to increase security around her campus. A despondent Elmer becomes inspired to act by the more dynamic Bruno and Boots, and sets out to woo his love in person, braving the dangers of Tyrannosaurus Rex and the Banshee II alarm siren.

Korman's adult figures prove that it is possible to be "old" and still seem young at heart. The students of both schools genuinely admire and respect "The Fish" and Miss Scrimmage. More importantly, the ongoing feud between the two adds tremendous humour to the novel.

Korman skilfully weaves many tales together to create *Something Fishy at Macdonald Hall*. The mystery of "The Phantom" is not solved until tale's end and the various subplots end happily for all characters involved. Seldom do readers encounter such a complete cast of lively, round characters who become entangled in so many truly hilarious events. Here's hoping that Mr. Korman brings the entire cast to life again soon.

---

*Sheri Henderson earned Bachelor degrees in German Language and Literature and Education at Queen's University. She teaches English at Northern Collegiate in Sarnia, Ontario. She specialises in selecting informative, inclusive and intriguing texts for use in the secondary school English curriculum.*

### The Pleasures of the Text — Of Suspense and Boredom

*Anywhere but Here*. Adele Dueck. Red Deer College P, 1996 (Northern Lights Young Novels). 111 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-147-0.

For eleven-year-old Marjorie, the prospect of a long summer on her family's drought-stricken Saskatchewan farm is dismal. Her best friend has just moved away in the most recent tide of émigrés fleeing an impossibly straitened farm existence, and Marjorie finds herself saddled with endless household chores and baby-sitting while her mother sews to augment the family's income. As she explains to her new friend, Craig: "farmers don't have any money. Dad gets up at six almost every day of his life. He works 'till dark or later almost every night. When I need something, he tells me we can't afford it because the price of wheat is dropping and the price of fuel is going up."

But Marjorie, "living in the middle of nowhere doing nothing," is also a veteran reader of Nancy Drew mysteries, and it is precisely this experience that gives her a predilection for the mystery of the chemical thefts that rapidly unfolds into her boredom. Adele Dueck provides Marjorie and her young

reader with a taut, suspenseful adventure that is considerably better crafted than Marjorie's favourite Drew mysteries. Dueck carefully twines together the mystery plot and its wallops of surprise and suspense with the inevitable nagging admonitions of Marjorie's mother, dull interludes that attenuate and intensify the exquisite moments of suspense. And Dueck turns the screw tighter when Marjorie's earlier desire to be "anywhere but here" becomes uncomfortably ironic as the clues she and Craig uncover would seem to implicate her father.

As a writer of mystery, Dueck does breach the etiquette of not withholding vital clues from the reader: the "familiar voice" Marjorie recognizes in the barn is not named until twenty pages later. Also, the lightening-lit capture of the culprits teeters on the melodramatic and the incredible. On the other hand, the dialogue throughout is natural and well conceived, the internal monologues of Marjorie are suitably idiomatic, and the lighter touches of description are well executed. Here is Marjorie's Saskatchewan, for instance: "The land stretched endlessly out like a giant's patchwork quilt in splotches of green and brown, with a splotch of yellow here and there from flowering canola. There weren't many trees to see, just an occasional shelterbelt row dividing the fields like stitching." Perhaps the greatest limitation of this kind of writing is that it can only be read once. It is like Marjorie's birthday mystery that she undertook to reread: "It wasn't as exciting when I knew what was going to happen." The characteristic ennui of youth everywhere would demand another good read, soon, from this author.

---

*Mary J. Harker teaches children's and young adult literature at the University of Victoria. She is currently working on a book to do with the fantastic in children's literature.*

### Mystery Lessons

*The Mastodon Mystery.* Dorothy Perkyns. Lancelot Press, 1996. 112 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88999-620-2. *The Mystery at Eagle Lake.* Dayle Gaetz. Illus. Isabelle Langevin. Quintin Publishers, 1996 (Junior Nature). 156 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 2-89435-066-X.

These two books succeed in an area in which much can go terribly wrong: it's hard to incorporate educational, factual information into an exciting, mystery-story format.

*The Mastodon Mystery* packs an amazing amount of information about digging for, preserving and transporting mastodon bones, in a story inspired by an actual discovery in Nova Scotia in 1991. James and Emily take part in the dig, uncover an attempt to steal the bones, and successfully track down the criminals. The suspense is kept up as the children race to find the criminals before the bones can be smuggled out of the country. While factual information is well-integrated into the story, other elements are more clumsily treated. Clues often lead nowhere (any reader who tries to remember James's careful description of the suspects on page 101 will be disappointed; the clue is never mentioned again). There are numerous incidents of this kind: events which may be