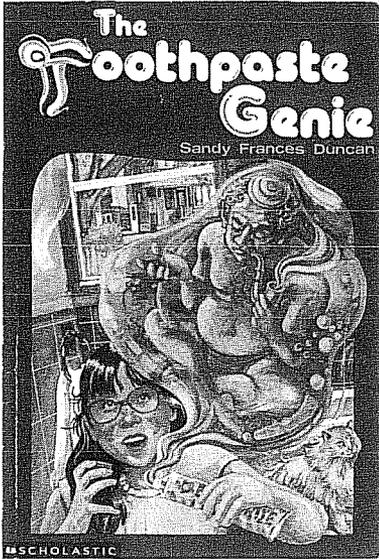


“GENIE” WINS OUT OVER “MONSTERS”

The Toothpaste Genie. Sandy Frances Duncan. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1991. 138 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-13628-0. **Monsters in School.** Martyn Godfrey. Illus. Susan Gardos. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1991. 86 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-74046.



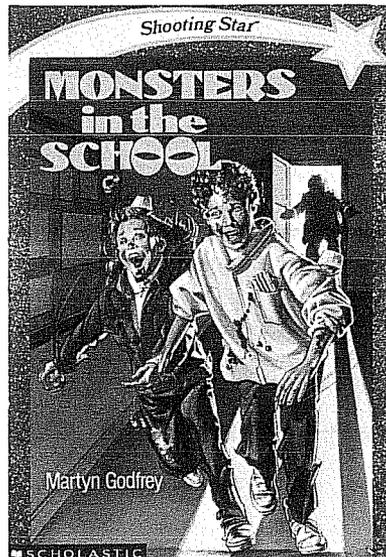
Both of these are recent publications by Scholastic Books meant for first-time novel readers. However, *The Toothpaste Genie* also lends itself well to being read aloud in the chapter-a-day format. In this story, ten-year-old Amanda Atkins becomes master of the genie who mysteriously bubbles out of her tube of toothpaste. The genie's problematic interpretation of her wishes leads her into a series of funny magical adventures.

Kids will appreciate this humorous representation of a child struggling with the expectations of an adult world. Amanda's cleverness endears her to the reader as she comes up with quick-witted responses in hilarious situations. This fast-paced story presents an ongoing question:

what will Amanda wish for next, and how will she solve the problem her wish creates?

The book is best-served by the dialogue sequences which occur between Amanda and the genie as she confronts him about his malicious pranks. Images of the character portrayed by Robin Williams in Disney's "Aladdin" movie are brought to mind by this wise-cracking, cynical genie.

A slightly younger heroine appears in Godfrey's *Monsters in the School*. Selby is an eight-year-old who, like Amanda, copes with the adult world. In this case, she is a youngest child who attempts to receive more attention by devising an elaborate scheme to convince her family that she has been to the future.



The fact that this book is aimed at slightly younger readers than Duncan's does not excuse its lack of energy and appeal. Selby is presented as a rather reckless, self-absorbed child whose misbehaviour (including breaking into her school) comes across as heroic. Parents and teachers alike may well question why the adults in the story reward Selby for her dishonesty, overlooking the dangerous situation to which she exposes herself.

Illustrations are this book's best feature, especially the one on the front with a shadowy figure chasing the kids down the hall. The cover of Duncan's novel, on the other hand, damages its appeal with its gaudy depiction of the genie oozing out of the toothpaste tube.

First-time novel readers should be encouraged to resist the tempting cover of *Monsters in the School* and turn instead to the superior content in *The Toothpaste Genie*.

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WIZZLES AND WARRIORS

The War with Mr. Wizzle. Gordon Korman. Scholastic Inc., 1982, 1991. 224 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-44206-6; **The Zucchini Warriors.** Gordon Korman. Scholastic Inc, 1988, 1991. 198 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-44174-4.

"Why can't we just go to school like everybody else?" Boots asks his friend Bruno. It's midnight. Wearing infra-red goggles, they are searching the school grounds for four Manchurian bush hamsters, last of an endangered species. In minutes, they'll have to rescue Hank the Tank, being marched across the highway at gunpoint.

Why can't they? Because they attend MacDonald Hall, the boarding school somewhere east of Toronto, founded in the fertile and wacky imagination of Gordon Korman when he was twelve.

Bruno and Boots lead a life kids dream about. Although schoolwork intrudes occasionally, they are usually busy stirring up schemes and chaos. They enjoy a devoted circle of friends, a neighbouring school with "wildly unpredictable" girls eager to complicate any situation, and countless night raids upon the kitchens.

The setting neatly disposes of parents and their restrictions. Mr. Sturgeon (The Fish), the stern headmaster, may assign laborious punishments, but he secretly admires the students' spirit.

Sometimes outsiders threaten this paradise. In *The War with Mr. Wizzle*, Walter C. Wizzle determines to modernize MacDonald Hall with his 515 Magnetronic computer, a rigid dress code, and a punitive demerit point system. The boys liked MacDonald Hall the way it was, and fight back with the anti-Wizzle Committee.