

the time-honoured task of going to her aunt's for a loaf of bread, learns what happens to bread when it comes in contact with water in a ditch. It is a little story with a child's vision of the world, companioned by illustrations as frisky as the story. Too often, a sprightly slender story, given to a staff illustrator, gets obliterated by full spread, neon-colour, rock-video-inspired illustrations. Marion Mineau does her own, in a loose Lynn Johnson style which suits Rose and her small catastrophe.

Sometimes, however, the illustration directs the reader how to read the story. This I think is the case with *Jill and the big cat*, by Etho Rothstein, illustrated by Maureen Paxton. The story features a timid little dog, Jill, who learns from the neighborhood cats how to fluff up her fur and look fierce. A cougar strays into Capilano and Jill, with her new-found trick, scares it up a tree. It is a pet story again with time-honoured appeal, dramatized and heightened by illustration which experiments with distortion. This distortion of course communicates the emotion in the story. We know how Jill feels when she sees the cat; similarly we know how the cougar feels when it sees Jill.

My one reservation about this picture book is that the black and white illustrations don't quite meld with the coloured ones; the reader finds it distracting having to switch from one medium to the other. More seriously, the change in medium seems to affect the visual interpretation of Jill. This is a flaw in technique. Still, there is life and originality here, which needs to be developed.

I look forward to seeing more Black Moss Press books for children.

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A QUESTION OF POWER

In the City of the King, William Psnak. Douglas & McIntyre, 1984. 144 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-027-8.

C.S. Lewis's argument that the best writing for children is produced by those who have something to say holds particularly true for the fantasist. Any true artist creates from an inner compulsion, using his medium to transcend the reality of this world and is to some extent a fantasist. But actual writers of fantasy can easily become so immersed in the technicalities of creating a secondary reality that they ignore the necessity to illuminate the primary world. Many a skilled technician fails artistically because his work lacks the power derived from purpose and meaning.

Canadian writers of fantasy all too often have been unable to move beyond the awesome reality of their country to create strong, deep works of mystery,

enchantment, and wonder. Canadian fantasy is mostly too purposeless for adults, too moralistic for youngsters. A new generation of Canadian fantasists, led by Ruth Nichols, is fortunately transforming this situation, but William Pasnak, their contemporary, is not yet their equal.

In the City of the King is Pasnak's first novel as well as his first attempt at writing for children. It is the story of a young performer, Elena, who sings and dances her way across Estria. Her partner, Ariel, is particularly concerned about conditions in the country, especially since the King is surrounded by sinister priests and beyond the aid of the secret society (to which Ariel belongs) dedicated to protecting him. Upon arriving in the unnamed City of the King, Ariel and Elena meet with conspirators led by the missing crown prince, and Elena plays a central role in the overthrow of the Black Priests and the restoration of the true monarchy.

The typical motifs are there — secret societies, evil forces, words of power — and the secondary world is believable, but not enough happens. Pasnak spends entire chapters setting a scene, but in so doing deals more with little puzzles and differences that fascinate than with great forces and mysteries that inspire awe, such as pervade a Narnia book. The central character — relevantly female — is presented in the heroic mould, but what she *does* is limited indeed, or, as in the final action, confusing. Pasnak's concerns are simply too descriptive and not sufficiently narrative throughout to grip the pre-teen group likely to read the book let alone to lead them to self-analysis, as the best fantasy, like an Earthsea book, must by nature do.

Born in 1949, Pasnak undoubtedly grew up aware of some modern fantasy classics, and his work reflects their influence. This work is technically good; with colourful, readable prose, and careful handling of songs and tales to emphasize oral tradition. Overall though, Pasnak neglects what matters most, having something to say about the primeval truths of existence. From delving into the greatest truths, not tinkering with charming and fascinating trickery, the power of fantasy emerges.

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JEU SUR L'IDENTITÉ DE L'AUTEUR

Casse-tête chinois, Robert Soulières. Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1985. Coll. Conquêtes. 180 pp. 9,95\$ broché. ISBN 2- 89051-287-8.

A la fin de *Casse-tête chinois* de Robert Soulières, il y a un questionnaire préparé,