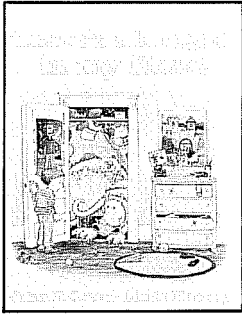


MINI-REVIEWS

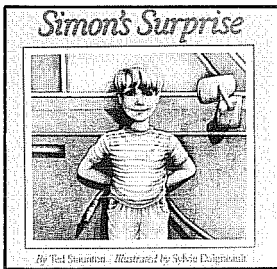


There's a dragon in my closet, John F. Green. Illus. Linda Hendry. Scholastic, 1987. 30 pp. \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-59071705-7.

Jonathan awakes one morning to find a real, live, huge, and slightly confused dragon in his closet. It's embarrassed to be there, moreover, because it skidded off a page in a book when chasing a knight through a forest.

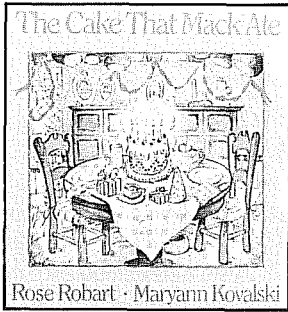
When Jonathan relates this fantastical event to successive people — his mother, father, big brother, baby sister, the letter carrier, a delivery boy, his schoolteacher, and friends — he is scoffed at. So he invites them to a formal dragon showing at 4 p.m., and how they scatter when he opens the closet door! The dénouement occurs with his liberating the dragon back into the proper book. When Jonathan announces a few days later that there's a giant in the spare room, he enjoys every child's delight — total attention.

This book has a quick pace, imaginative diction, and subtle characterization. The excellent illustrations add to the story and are full of detail for the child to study as the text is read aloud. This is a story designed to demonstrate there's excitement in books!



Simon's surprise, Ted Staunton. Illus. Sylvie Daigneault. Kids Can Press, 1986. Unpaginated. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919964-97-4.

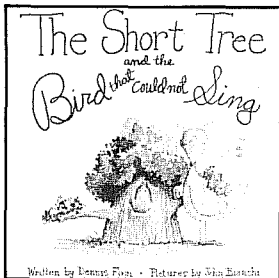
Simon is one of those bright little children whose energy level gives his parents little rest. While they sleep one morning, he begins washing the car. His enthusiastic use of silver polish, abrasive pads, tooth and hair brushes, as well as of far too much soap, results in a capital mess. His exhausted parents awaken to the sight of billowing and creeping suds, and Sylvie Daigneault captures their dazed and dumbfounded looks extremely well. The punch line — with cherubic and proud little Simon standing amid his mess — will amuse both parents and children.



The cake that Mack ate, Rose Robart. Illus. Maryann Kovalski. Kids Can Press, 1986. Unpaginated. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-9199646.

This book is modeled on the cumulative tale of "This is the house that Jack built." Beginning with the line, "This is the cake that Mack ate," the text continues to show us the egg that went into the cake, the hen that

laid the egg, the corn that fed the hen, the farmer that planted the corn, the woman that married the farmer and then made the cake, etc. Racing along with this growing cumulative tale, the reader doesn't notice that no one has identified the "Mack" in line one. The abrupt final lines which do identify him show the timing of a superb storyteller. This book (which already has sold foreign rights) has the marks of a classic.



The short tree and the bird that could not sing, Dennis Foon. Illus. John Bianchi. Douglas & McIntyre, 1986. Unpaginated. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-046-4.

There's something both touching and zany about this story, and the writer and the illustrator are perfectly attuned. A perky purple bird puts down in a short, sad and lonely tree

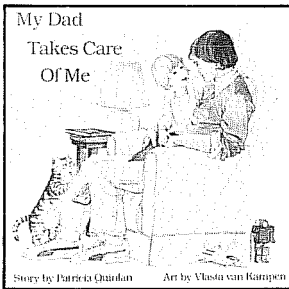
and begins to sing "On top of Spaghetti" in an irritating way. From this disharmonious start, they become best friends. The mobile bird flies afield every day and brings exciting tales from the world to the stationary tree. But fall comes and the bird must fly south. The tree pleads, turns manipulative, and is angry at being deserted, but eventually accepts its loss and is warmed by memories. Spring comes, the warm winds blow, and the bird returns. The story, in summary, sounds sentimental, but the skill of both storyteller and artist make it into a warm and funny tale. Beneath the surface, the undercurrents about seasons, change, loss, friendship, and loneliness give the story a nice resonance.



Rainy day magic, Marie-Louise Gay. Illus. author. Stoddart Publishing Co., 1987. Unpaginated. \$12.95. ISBN 0-7737-2112-6.

The story is simple. It's a rainy day, and a little boy and his girl friend play inside, trying to be quiet because "dad" has a headache. They ride their bikes noisily through into fantasyland, have adventures, and are

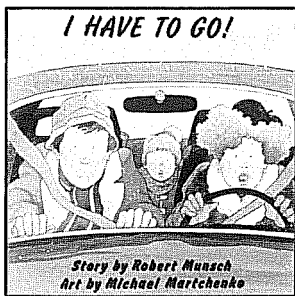
then called to supper by "mother." Their journey, told in lively rhyme, has the same familiar elements of Sendak's "Where the wild things are" — parental disapproval, a child's banishment, adventure in another world, and a safe return to warm food at home. This classic structure is accompanied by Marie-Louise Gay's extremely original and distinguished illustrations. Her children are unforgettable—their grins and their movements show their overactive imaginations and irrepressible physical vitality. Particularly noteworthy is Gay's skillful use of illustrations which sometimes advance the story ahead of the text's words. As the children in one story crawl up a hump-like surface, they think it's grass, then a bumble-bee; but the child *listening* to the story can move his eyes ahead to the right side of the page and see there that the hump is the back end of a tiger — one whose groggy-red eye has just opened because of the tickling on its back. Until the page turns, the outcome is uncertain. This book is a delight.



My dad takes care of me, Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Vlasta van Kampen. Annick Press, 1987. Unpaginated. \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-79-X, 0-920303-76-5.

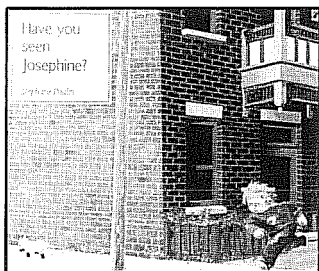
There is a need for books that reflect contemporary children's concerns and life styles. What do you say when your dad is unemployed and you are asked at school what he

does? This little boy got a stomach-ache until a friend in the same situation came up with a good answer: "He takes care of me." The story sketches in other problems (like the dad's depression) and depicts a caring nurturing relationship between the boy and his father. The attractive pictures which show children of various races—oriental, caucasian, negroid — certainly reflect many big-city Canadian schoolyards. This is a comforting book for our times, and it gives the answer to a disturbing question that children may encounter.



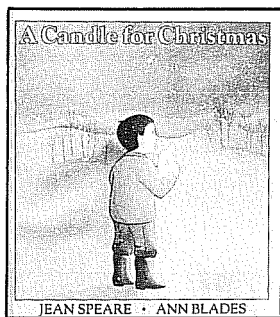
I have to go!, Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1987. Unpaginated. \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0920303-77-3, 0-920303-74-9.

The children to whom this book is dedicated may not thank their parent(s) when they are teenagers. The story is built on a situation that every parent has endured — when a child picks an inopportune time to say “I have to go pee.” Munsch makes the most of repetition in his story-telling — Andrew waits till he’s in the car, or in a snowsuit, or in bed — and Martchenko’s illustrations reveal how terribly satisfied Andrew is when he discombobulates the adult world with his urgent announcement. In fact, there’s a ritualized power-struggle in this situation: the adults hover too insistently over him to get him to go to the bathroom *before* getting into cars, snowsuits, or bed. It’s very comic in the inimitable Munsch style, which includes throw-away lines for parents like when the grandmother says “I never had these problems with *my* children.”



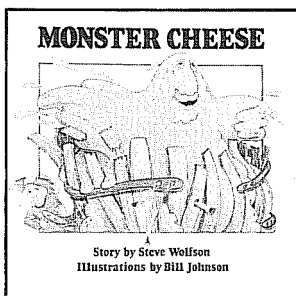
Have you seen Josephine?, Stéphane Poulin. Illus. author. Tundra, 1986. 24 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-180-1.

The colourful and detailed illustrations in this book are wonderful. They catch the atmosphere of Montreal’s east end, where the 26-year-old author/artist lives. It’s a friendly old urban neighbourhood, which looks both seedy and quaint. The pictures are very realistic as far as building, street scenes, cats, and adults are concerned — but the child’s face is sometimes odd and unesthetic. He looks different in different pictures-sometimes he seems like a strawman/boy, othertimes like a bug-eyed dwarf, and once like a ghoulish child. (It seems that many Canadian children’s illustrators have trouble drawing children’s features). Otherwise, Poulin’s pictures are altogether charming and rich in detail. Supporting the pictures is a text which will intrigue children and cat-loving adults alike — where does Josephine the cat go on Saturdays when she slips out? Daniel and his father follow her through the city to find out and there’s a sense of mischievous feline trickery as she eludes them again and again-but the reader gets a capital tour of the Saturday sights of old Montreal in the process, and the warmth of the area comes through in people’s responses to the little boy’s question “Have you seen my cat?”



A candle for Christmas, Jean Speare. Illus. Ann Blades. Douglas & McIntyre, 1986. Unpaginated. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88894-7836.

The storytelling is leisurely, with details building slowly: Tomas is an Indian boy living on a Western Reservation, and his parents have gone to check on an Uncle who seems to be in trouble. Tomas stays behind with "Nurse Roberta." We are given the rhymes, textures, and flavour of life on the reserve as suspense builds around whether the parents will return by Christmas, when they promised to. Nurse is called out to help with a sick baby, and more suspense builds when it looks like groggy Tomas may set the house on fire either by overfueling the stove or by careless handling of his candle. But his parents return and all is safe again. The illustrations are warm and colourful and the story itself provides both suspense and reassurances, while giving us a glimpse of yet another part of Canada's multicultural mosaic.



Monster cheese, Steve Wolfson. Illus. Bill Johnson. Coteau Books, 1985. Unpaginated. \$11.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0919926-44-4, 0-919926-43-6.

This is a story for those who like tall tales. Sam asks to help his Grandmother, who lives in a village in the Alberta mountains, if he can help make the cheese. Too much "secret ingredient" gets dumped in the milk, and a monster cheese emerges and begins rolling down the mountains and across the prairies. Everything it rolls over gets incorporated into its growing bulk: gardens disappear and people scatter as it races towards Saskatoon and then Winnipeg.

The escaping orange cheese is a round monster-like blob with a human face and the two-colour drawings give a sense of the Western landscape.

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