

In *The sword of Arhupal*, the magical sword Arhupal, which in *Scorpion's treasure* was used to confront and defeat Baron Davard, is stolen by the baron's grandson Luc-Alexandre Davard. Guillaume Vignal and Didier Bertin, fearing the return of sorcery and evil in Neubourg, join forces to try to recover the sword hidden in the manor. Didier gains access to the manor by posing as an apprentice painter. Soon, however, danger mounts, and trapped in the cellars of the manor, Didier is pursued by Luc-Alexandre in a mad chase. With help from an unexpected source, Didier and Guillaume succeed in returning the sword to old Philanselme in Neubourg.

Both stories have suspense. Indeed, Sernine is a master at creating situations and building them to a climax while keeping his readers turning the pages in anticipation. His strength is not in character development, but in the description of events involving intricate and believable characters. Still the complexity and cumulation of events make the novels confusing at times and require the reader's full attention. This is particularly apparent in *Scorpion's treasure* in which three subplots are developed simultaneously, leaving the reader puzzled at times.

Both texts are competently translated by Frances Morgan who faithfully captures the essence of both original novels.

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## SCI-FI'S BREEZY AND SERIOUS SIDES

**I spent my summer vacation kidnapped into space.** Martyn Godfrey. Scholastic-TAB, 1990. 136 pp. \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-43418-7; **Those who watch over the earth.** Daniel Sernine. Trans. David Homel. Black Moss Press, 1990. 109 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-214-4; **Argus steps in.** Daniel Sernine. Trans. Ray Chamberlain. Black Moss Press, 1990. 170 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-216-0.

Martyn Godfrey, a former teacher who has won a number of awards for his books, may be best known for his Ms Teeny-Wonderful stories. His first publications were in the field of science fiction, however, and it is to this that he has returned in *I spent my summer vacation kidnapped into space*.

Intended for readers aged eight to twelve, this tale describes the adventures that befall two twelve-year-olds in "the near future." Kidnapped while rock-hunting in the asteroid belt, they are transported to a distant planet where they must first fight two giant slime worms for the entertainment of the al-

iens, then rescue a princess held hostage by her ambitious cousin, before they manage to escape.

These adventures are all far-fetched. Even with the aid of computers, it is unlikely that twelve-year-olds will be allowed to fly space craft, or be capable of handling them if they were. Their perils, moreover, are too easily overcome. But then none of this should be taken too seriously. It is all a light-hearted romp. Reeann and her best friend Jared are a lively and resourceful pair, with the natural adaptability of their age group, and no problems about sex roles. The alien princess is a wilful but likeable three-year-old with an obstinate sense of justice lacking in the adults of her race.

Children should enjoy this book as a lively and at times humorous account of young people triumphing against unfair and autocratic adults. Since they succeed too easily, however, readers are unlikely to learn anything meaningful from it.

The lack of seriousness in Godfrey's book is more than made up for in Daniel Sernine's novels, which begin a series about an advanced civilization that watches over Earth from space. In *Those who watch over earth* Marc Alix is a brilliant fifteen-year-old living in Montreal, where he attends university and assists his uncle in brainwave research. When the Canadian secret service tries to take over the project for its own sinister purposes, Alix finds his life in danger. Fortunately, he is rescued by members of an advanced civilization based on the moon and the asteroid belt. Their purpose, it turns out, is to protect the inhabitants of Earth from their own destructive impulses.

In *Argus steps in* Marc returns to Earth in order to prevent scientific knowledge from falling into the wrong hands yet again. This time he helps rescue a Russian scientist who has defected to the West to prevent his discovery from reaching the hands of the Russian secret service, only to find himself held prisoner in a Scottish castle by the British secret service. It wants his discovery for its own, equally ruthless, purposes.

Both stories generate suspense as the hero and his friends seek desperately to elude their pursuers. Unfortunately, this suspense is dissipated by two weaknesses. First, the superior technology of the off-worlders enable them to defeat their unwary opponents too easily. Second, Sernine is too fond of stopping his narrative to lecture his reader. Thus in the second novel he writes, "The day was cool and misty, typical for coastal regions where the sea is cold. This was the Firth of Moray, which empties into the North Sea. The country was Scotland, with its rugged and rarely sunlit landscape" (11). This is an awkward way to introduce information, much of which is of little relevance to the story anyway, and it slows the pace of the plot. To add insult to injury, some of the information is misleading: the kind of castle described so intrusively in this novel is found in England and Wales rather than Scotland.

Of equal concern is the naive attitude towards a subject that is treated so seriously. While the author may be justified in viewing all secret service or-

ganizations with suspicion, the reworking of the same basic situation in both books suggests a paranoia that serves only to undermine the criticisms of these organizations. Moreover, the separation between noble-minded research scientists and ruthless secret servicemen is too simplistic an approach to the situation that prevails in the military-industrial complex. At the very least, it ignores the common bond of single-mindedness that can lead both astray.

Sernine's warning against the unscrupulous exploitation of power by those in authority is valuable, and his portrayal of a teenager alienated by an uncaring society will strike a responsive chord in young people. This makes all the more regrettable those ineptitudes that mar his performance.

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#### UNE RECETTE USÉE À LA CORDE

**Mougalouk de nulle part.** Danièle D. Desautels. Saint-Lambert, Héritage, 1989, 126 pp., 7,95\$ relié. ISBN 2-7625-4491-2.

Voilà un roman fabriqué de toutes pièces à partir d'une recette usée jusqu'à la corde. L'auteure met en scène Rosalie, la parfaite petite héroïne. Un bon matin, l'espiègle enfant fait la rencontre dans l'autobus scolaire d'une étrange passagère venue de nulle part, Mougalouk. Nous sommes alors invités à passer une journée à l'école en compagnie de cette étrange extraterrestre presque humaine. Évidemment, la nouvelle venue se livrera à une série tout à fait prévisible de petits tours de magie, ingrédients d'ailleurs uniques de l'action de ce roman. Tantôt elle fera gravir à Rosalie les marches de l'escalier grâce au rayon vert de ses yeux, tantôt elle redonnera vie à des tulipes fanées et ailleurs elle fera valser les équations au tableau vert... Nous avons droit à la panoplie complète des envoûtements, des sortilèges, des charmes et des pouvoirs magiques.

Le problème avec ce texte ne réside pas nécessairement dans les ingrédients de la recette utilisée. D'autres ont déjà réussi à créer une oeuvre avec ces éléments de trame. Le problème tient davantage à la platitude du récit, à l'insignifiance un peu boursouflée de l'écriture et aux intentions clairement didactiques de l'ensemble. Danièle D. Desautels écrit son histoire pour enseigner quelque chose à l'enfant-lecteur. Et ça se sent à plein nez, de la première à la dernière page: un bon enfant doit savoir s'organiser, un bon enfant doit accepter intégralement tous et chacun, un bon enfant doit savoir qu'il "n'existe pas de frontières à l'imagination et à l'espoir, sauf celles que l'on se crée soi-même" (p. 126). Au lieu de laisser le lecteur retirer lui-même de son expérience