

if you don't, she's the sort of person that did this and such three weeks ago (or three novelettes ago)." But most appalling, some writers advertise future additions to the series (this happens twice in #4) by alluding to events yet to come in a jarring sort of flash forward not to be confused with its powerful cousin, foreshadowing.

Each story needs to be written as though it were the only one ever—none before it, none to come—with all explanatory material precisely selected for those details which build plot and characterization. Especially blighted with this flaw, Storybook #6, "Conversions," also contains a plethora of writer's gaffes from verb tense errors, to excessive use of passive voice, through to plain old awkward constructions, all heaped on top of a story-line ill-suited to pre-adolescent interests.

With overwhelming frequency, teleplays employ the convention of omniscient narrator. But in the Avonlea storybooks this voice doesn't work well. It's too heavy, too knowing. What if the stories had been told entirely through the pre-pubescent eyes of Sara and Felicity? At least we'd have the confusions of youth and inexperience, which, after all, is a greater part of the charm of the TV series. As it is, with some exceptions, the storybooks are insufferably predictable.

While the Road to Avonlea writers can profit from the discipline of other games, yet they must figure out what rules work for the short novel. Better look up a good karate teacher—master the discipline of the short story; in other words, no cameras or sound crew, no first and second Assistant Directors to keep things going, and above all, no TV screen to show you your characters. Truly "Each time has to be the first time" is more than an actor's rule; it's a storyteller's rule too.

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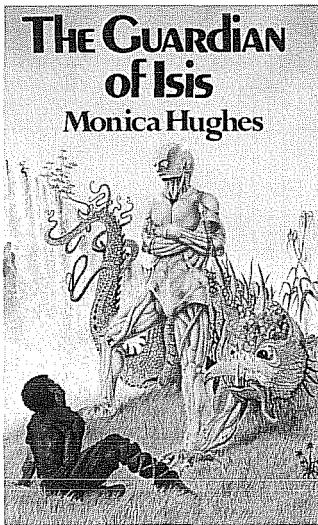
THE HEIGHTS ARE GLORIOUS, BUT NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

The keeper of the Isis light. Monica Hughes. Octopus, 1991. 136 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7497-0405-5; **The guardian of Isis.** Monica Hughes. Octopus, 1992. 140 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7497-0214-1; **The Isis pedlar.** Monica Hughes. Octopus, 1991. 121 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7497-0215-X.

Monica Hughes's publishers call it the Isis trilogy, but of the three books recently re-issued more than ten years after their first publication, only *The keeper of the Isis light* is a truly self-contained story. In this book the protagonist is Olwen, the Earth girl physically altered by her robot, Guardian, to protect her from the dangers of living on the high-radiation world of Isis. Her resulting reptilian appearance, disguised for her first encounters with a colonizing expedition from Earth, eventually disgusts Mark London, one of the settlers.

Olwen must learn the meaning of fear and loneliness and unrequited love, and she has to leave her home, yet at the end, in one of the most generous acts ever written in children's literature, she tries to free Mark from his shame at making her love him. "Isis is mine," Olwen tells him, "from the valleys to the mountain peaks, summer and winter and cosmic storm. You can't share that with me and I will not spend my life as a prisoner" (*The keeper of the Isis light* 135).

At the end of the first book Olwen has lost everything she once had, except Guardian, and gained only in the knowledge of her own true beauty. The reader will rejoice at Olwen's refusal to see herself as ugly, but it will be difficult to rejoice for *her*, knowing her lonely fate. This is a courageous book in its sorrow and dignity, a *tour-de-force* of writing and characterization that possesses a profoundly painful inner truth.



Equally honest as a book is *The guardian of Isis*. Two generations have passed, and the settlers, like sheep, have obeyed Mark's edict to forget their origins. To them Olwen has become "That Old Woman" (Death), and Guardian a god to be worshiped. The traditional agrarian ways are the only allowable ones; technology is banned. Only young Jody N'Kumo questions, and so he is banished to the oxygen-thin, radiation-filled heights. He survives his climb, partly because of his sun-resistant black skin, but mostly through determination and adaptation, and so learns the truth about Olwen and Guardian.

The heights are a symbol, of course; their deadly beauty accessible to humans only through change: physical change such as Olwen's, and mental change such as Jody's. But at the end of this book Jody must leave the heights. Everything returns to the *status quo*. Jody knows the truth, but agrees not to tell it. This dissatisfying ending is mitigated in the sequel, *The Isis pedlar*, but it means that *The guardian of Isis* does not stand well on its own. It requires *The Isis pedlar* for its real resolution.

In this third and final Isis book, Jody's nephew David has centre-stage, along with the space-girl Moira, whose mission on Isis is to prevent her corrupt father from despoiling it. This book is weakened by unbelievable things like the galaxy-hopping spaceship with its old-fashioned refrigerator and whisky bottles and its broken hyperdrive that is fixable by a fifteen-year-old girl on the lam with her (all-too-broadly Irish) father. Also unbelievable is the character of David N'Kumo, whose character is not developed enough for the reader to understand why he climbs to the taboo heights after Moira, or why he falls in love with her.

His presence in the book feels contrived, intended to provide a “happy ending” to what is essentially a pessimistic trilogy.

Still, Hughes is too good a writer to abandon completely the truth she has built so deeply into her world of Isis. The Isis settlers now know about prisons, slavery, improvidence, the lust for power, and murder. Despite the resolutely hopeful tone and the pairings-off, and despite an insightful new leader and some potential for technology, we know that these descendants of the colonists who came from an Earth grown too hideous to live on will inevitably return to what their ancestors once were. Eden is gone; the valley grows overpopulated; the heights are still uninhabitable; and there are wolves among the sheep.

Hughes is saying that it doesn't matter where humans go; the same mistakes will be made. This is the profound core of the Isis sequence, the inner truth that makes its beauty—like the beauty of Isis itself—so terrible. “To be human is to make mistakes,” Guardian says just before leaving Isis and the settlers to their own devices, essentially forever. “You'll learn from your mistakes, and grow.” But Isis, we cannot help but feel, will have a job on its hands.

Welwyn Wilton Katz has written seven award-winning novels for children and young adults, including *False face* (Groundwood, 1987), *The third magic* (Groundwood, 1988), *Whalesinger* (Groundwood, 1990) and *Come like shadows* (Viking, 1993).

CHARACTERIZING THE GROUP, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL, IN THE 22ND CENTURY

Invitation to the game. Monica Hughes. HarperCollins, 1990. 179 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-647414-4.

Released in 1992 in paperback, *Invitation to the game* by Monica Hughes is one of the most powerful works award-winning Hughes has written amongst an impressive line-up of excellent novels. Set in the early twenty-second century, *Invitation to the game* initially sets up a bleak world of over-population, mass unemployment and almost universal urbanization, with its accompanying atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. However, never a depressing writer, Hughes brings into this situation of desperation a glimmer of light which leads to a clever and truly surprising twist ending full of hope and new beginnings. The setting itself is central to the effectiveness of the novel where, as usual, Hughes has drawn a frighteningly convincing world through her evocative descriptions of both place and atmosphere.

Despite an intriguing, sometimes nail-biting plot, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this particular novel is the lack of centrality of individual characters. In a dehumanized world where co-operation is the only way to both survive and truly function, the individual, while important, is no longer central. He or she must be sublimated to the group to some degree. Accordingly, Hughes