

ity to draw you in.

Such is the premise of Nancy-Lou Patterson's *The Tramp Room*. The narrator is a girl who works as a junior interpreter at a historic house. Dressed in period costume, she falls asleep in the house one night and wakes up in the past, when the Mennonite family who built the house still lived there. This transition from present to past is swiftly accomplished, as is the transition back at the end, and Patterson is not really interested in making the shifts problematic or interesting in any way. The narrator's sudden presence in the past seems to pose no problems for the host family, and the girl's experience as an interpreter enables her to fit into the routines of the past culture smoothly.

Once there, the plot interest is sustained by the presence of another recent arrival in the house, a tramp boy with a mystery in his past. Taciturn and secretive, the boy is nevertheless hard-working and blessed with many skills. Getting to know this boy and helping uncover the mystery that surrounds him becomes the narrator's project, while the host family is a solid and constant presence in the background.

Despite what this plot summary may suggest, the careful unfolding of this background is in fact the main source of interest in the book. Patterson has written an affectionate tribute to a mid-nineteenth century Mennonite family: their work, their folkways, and their culture. The book is crowded with absorbing period detail, and Patterson is very patient in giving space to describing it. The book's style fits its subject, as the reader learns to fit into the slower rhythms of a life before wiring, a life lived by the rhythms of the land.

Young readers will emerge from this book with a better understanding of how people lived five generations ago: how candles and sausages were made, how resourceful one needed to be to write a letter, and how firmly-gendered work was (we see comparatively little of the men's work). The book is carefully situated in history, in geography, even in some aspects of contemporary law. There is much to be learned here. A reader whose notion of narrative pacing has been formed by *Star Wars* will find it slow, but a reader who enjoys museums, or who is just curious about the past, will find much to read for in this well-written novel.

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Two-thirds Success for Trilogy

Goldstone. Julie Lawson. Stoddart, 1997. 170 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-5891-7.
Turns on a Dime. Julie Lawson. Stoddart, 1998. 176 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-59425.
The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain. Julie Lawson. Stoddart, 2000. 232 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-6091-1.

The middle part of a trilogy always seems to get short shrift. Just ask Han Solo, left encased in something or other at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Too often that

second element is just a device to make the leap from the freshness of part one to the satisfying resolution of part three, and Julie Lawson's Goldstone trilogy is no exception.

The series follows the path of a necklace imbued with special powers as it passes from the hands of one girl to those of two others in the same British Columbia family over the course of nearly a century. Woven through all three books is the tragedy of a huge avalanche in Rogers Pass, based on several real events in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

While the first book, *Goldstone*, is certainly a good read, the third, *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*, is the best of all. Both evoke a strong sense of place through lovely descriptions of mountain terrain and an understanding of life shaped by the steel of the railway but still vulnerable to the stronger mettle of nature. Less successful in this regard, as in others, is the middle book, *Turns on a Dime*, which takes place in the more prosaic urban setting of Victoria.

The middle book turns away from the mystical matter of the goldstone's power to focus on the immediacy of life for the young protagonist Jo. While less gripping than the other two books, it succeeds in describing the small daily agonies of pre-teen life through incidents such as the all-too-real ritual of "sharking" in which boys surround a girl to take something from her, or in Jo's tendency to exaggerate for greater effect. Too often, though, the terminology of its 1950s setting is left unexplained, and the barrage of events ranging from a friend's unwed pregnancy to Jo's discovery that she's adopted feels like an attempt to pump life into an otherwise readable, if uninspired tale.

The enchantment missing from the second in the series is present in abundance in the first and third books, which incorporate mystery, prophetic dreams and even a time-travelling ghost. Our heroines, Karin and Ashley respectively, face danger in the swirling snow of the mountains, ultimately triumphing despite sadness. Throughout the series, in fact, Lawson provides counterpoints to the mysterious goldstone through storylines encompassing divorce, a parent's death and the loss of friendships, as well as the stirrings of more-than-just-friends feelings between the girls and some young male pals.

The final book is the most exciting of all because it provides a thrilling climax as well as a peaceful conclusion to the trilogy. It doesn't hurt that its setting is clearly the present day, whereas the reader flounders at the start of the previous two books to establish just when they take place, losing much of the story in the process.

At times Lawson shows an incisive deftness that will have young readers nodding in recognition. "The first day of school always felt like a piano exam," she writes at one point; at another, she describes a hill full of tobogganners as "a festival in itself, a colorful tangle of people and dogs and sliding objects." These moments make up for decidedly unnatural tidbits such as an older boy remarking "I'll get a little respect from the likes of you children," something it's hard to imagine any young person saying at any time.

Girls in particular will quickly lose themselves in these tales of strong-minded heroines who eventually come out on top, not because of the necklace's magical properties, but because of their own resourcefulness and humanity. That

they will absorb a little piece of Canadian history and the real-life magic of the Selkirk mountains while they read is a wonderful bonus.

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Through Distance, through Time

Beyond the Waterfall. Elaine Breault Hammond. Illus. Mary Montgomery. Ed. Jennifer Glossop. Ragweed, 1997. 197 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-68-3. *Explosion at Dawson Creek*. Elaine Breault Hammond. Illus. Dale McNevin. Ed. Jennifer Glossop. Ragweed, 1998. 197 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-75-6.

Elaine Breault Hammond, a Manitoba-born writer now living and writing in Prince Edward Island, has joined the growing group of writers providing younger readers with time-slip fiction. *Beyond the Waterfall* and *Explosion at Dawson Creek* trace the latest adventures in time travel for her principal character, Maggie Baxter, who, orphaned by age six, is now being parented by her Uncle Jeff and her great Aunt Kate. Maggie's adventures begin in the first book of what seems to be a developing series, *The Secret under the Whirlpool* (1996).

Time-slip fiction provides the writer with an opportunity to flex the fiction-writing muscles in two otherwise distinct genres, historical fiction and fantasy. However, there is always a necessary negotiation, explicit or understood, in satisfying the demands of each genre. Hammond gives minimal deference to fantasy, using only the lonely and disconnected life of Maggie as the impetus to send her on her travels in time and space (to eighteenth-century Acadia in the first book, to end of the nineteenth-century Manitoba in *Beyond the Waterfall*, to wartime Dawson Creek in *Explosion at Dawson Creek*). The means used to send Maggie on her journeys are forces of nature, a whirlpool, a waterfall, an invisible wind-like force. Here is no magic talisman, no shimmering portal, not even a wardrobe or telephone booth to which one might turn (and return) as a means of access and so control. Instead, Maggie, and Marc when he accompanies her, is seemingly at the mercy of a force they can neither anticipate nor manipulate.

When Maggie is in the selected past, she fits almost immediately into the situation in which she finds herself, replacing a figure from that time who has mysteriously gone "missing." There is rarely any concern on the part of either character, or writer, that Maggie might make a mistake, might be found out, might be discovered to be a time-traveller. While this works well in allowing the reader to focus on Maggie's discoveries about the past, it also obviates any possibility for enriching the texture of the fantasy itself. Clearly, Hammond's real concern is to explore Canada's past and to bring that past into clear focus for her readers, old and young alike. She also seems to be intent on making sure that the readers know of Canada's past on a broad geographic and social canvas. Maggie lives in Fredericton,