

frame each picture. I have not seen such colours since my childhood in India.

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### Protected by an Inukshuk

*Dreamstones*. Maxine Trottier. Illus. Stella East. Stoddart Kids, 1999. 22 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-31911.

Readers of *Dreamstones* will come out of this book with an understanding and appreciation of the nature and purpose of the Inukshuks found in the Arctic. This knowledge is augmented by the "Author's Note" at the end of the story, which provides a translation of this Inuktitut word ("to look like a person") and explains that these "compasses of the Arctic" are still used as markers "in a place where people have always had close ties to the land and each other."

By the time the "Author's Note" is read, the young reader of *Dreamstones* has already established an intimate relationship with Inukshuks, thanks to Maxine Trottier's imaginatively evocative story and Stella East's captivating illustrations. Although directed to young readers from four to five years old, this book will attract much older readers as well, due to the truly tantalizing illustrations and the layers of story. Combining some practical information about the Arctic with a story that touches the mystery and spirituality of the landscape, *Dreamstones* is both attractive and powerful.

David, the young son of the captain of the *Lily*, is unexpectedly immersed in the winter world of the Arctic, along with the crew members of the *Lily*, which is stuck in the ice that arrives earlier than expected. The creatures studied and sketched by David and his father in field notes during the summer months become mysterious and elusive during the sunless winter, which seems to go on forever. David is offered the privilege of joining the dreamlike suspension of this winter world, invited by the animals and protected by the Inukshuk. David, in the company of the Inukshuk, witnesses the return of the sun to the Arctic in a spiritual moment that unites the land, the animals and the people.

The cold of the Arctic winter, which can trap a ship for an entire season and plunge a land into darkness, is portrayed by both the story and the illustrations in a vivid manner that will impress the young reader, commanding the awe and respect felt by David. The close connection between the people and the land is embodied in this moment by the fire, in which David, wrapped in sealskin and protected by the Inukshuk, witnesses the special moment when the sun returns. This is the Arctic that can never be captured by field notes and collections. This is the Arctic that the reader, along with David, is invited to witness. We are told by the Inukshuk, "If you are patient, you will see it." As outsiders, we cherish the privilege that we sense is offered only to those who are open to the land itself.

The link between the Arctic and the European world is emphasized by the

old people of the Arctic telling this tale “of a ship and a boy and a tall stone figure” and “of how the Inukshuk walked that one, special night.” This Arctic-European connection is also reflected in the setting that inspired East’s paintings — Norway in the winter — and in the book’s dedications “to the memory of Jan Helms, mariner, adventurer, and friend” and “for the Inuit and their homeland.” The wondrous meeting of the young European boy and the old stone Inukshuk is permeated with the mystery and power of the land in which it takes place. For the reader, the stone Inukshuk is a memorable introduction to this land that can take away the sun and trap ships, but can also inspire incredible dreaming, even among stone.

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### A Question of Balance

*The Forest Family.* Joan Bodger. Illus. Mark Lang. Tundra, 2000. 100 pp. \$18.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-485-1.

In *The Forest Family*, Joan Bodger asks what happens to a happy family when the father returns from war as a broken, bitter man. Interspersed with this main narrative are tales drawn from folklore, mythology and the bible, told by the characters as counterpoint to their own story. The marriage of Sir Gawain and the story of Ruth and Naomi are recounted in this way. Bodger uses folklore motifs in her main narrative too. In seeking to cure Bruno, the broken husband, his wife Sylvania visits the mysterious Green Knight in the woods, the family befriends a bear and the children rescue a bad tempered gnome. Mark Lang’s bold illustrations enliven the text.

Bodger is a fine writer, and the tale is well written, but it is possible to have too much of a good thing. The stories within the story add subtle shading to the main narrative. However, the many folklore motifs clustered around the main story obscure more than they illuminate. At the end of the story, we discover that Bruno was the Green Knight, the bear and the gnome, even though he was presented throughout as an ordinary man. He is restored to the family partly through the courage of his wife and children, but not in any straightforward way. The Green Knight asks them each to collect hairs from the chin of a live bear. The mother does this. The two girls bring tufts from the beard of the gnome. The Green Knight says this does not matter, but instead of making the promised potion to restore Bruno, he throws the hairs into the fire and tells them only Bruno can change himself.

At end of the book, the family seems to be recovering without the father. Then, Bruno is suddenly restored when he, as bear, kills the threatening gnome who is another manifestation of himself. The ending reveals an uneasy balance between folktale and realistic story that is never really resolved in this book. The idea that a family can recover from the loss of a member is a theme that can resonate strongly with young readers in current realistic fiction but Bodger’s folktale themes require the restoration of the lost hero. In much of this book, it feels as if the