

expected in a book for children, the full misery of life in the mines is played down. The overall tone is matter-of-fact, as Wallace focuses on the miners' sense of community and their understated courage.

Although the crisis is trite and predictable, *Boy of the Deeps* treats the cave-in almost as though it is an everyday occurrence. The danger is foreshadowed early in the book by the mother's warning ("Take care, my son. You know the deeps is dangerous") and by the depiction of the mine entrance jutting up "like a beast rising from the sea." When the ceiling collapses on James and his father, the camaraderie they had enjoyed as they worked the mine and shared their lunch now takes the form of father and son helping one another to survive. As they dig their way through the debris, they reach the miners on the other side, who joke with them and pass James around "like a prize puppy." The resilience of the miners is apparent: "Tomorrow they would go down into the deeps again, for they were miners and that was their job."

As in *Duncan's Way*, the illustrations move the narrative forward in a sequence of full-page scenes. Following the golden seascape of a Cape Breton dawn illuminating the endpapers, the illustrations move from a warm family kitchen to the early-morning village street, then to the looming mine entrance. The rest of the illustrations (eleven out of fourteen) are black, deep brown, and midnight blue. Human forms seem to meld into this dark background, except for the lamp-lit faces, shoulders, and arms. The faces, however, are not individualized. Even the pony is a large shadowy figure, more a machine than a living creature. As a result of the prevailing darkness, the illustrations risk becoming monotonous. The single bright note is the motif of the "three wild daisies tied with a cherry red ribbon" which James's mother has placed in his pie can, "On top of his bread and cod"; these blue-tinted daisies are a link to the living world and the blue sky aboveground.

Duncan's Way and *Boy of the Deeps* both draw attention to human ingenuity, cooperation, and resilience. Wallace is skilled at evoking atmosphere and his stories are strongly rooted in a sense of place and tradition. His young protagonists are not just participants in, but often initiators of, the action. (Although James doesn't exhibit the initiative and determination of Duncan, he does take in stride, and even looks forward to, a job that would daunt most children today.) The books balance an awareness of the hard lives some children experience with an appreciation of human accomplishment. They are thus effective in introducing young readers to ways of life and work that are now disappearing. "[My grandfather's] adventures were thrilling," says Wallace in a prefatory note to *Boy of the Deeps*, "but as the years passed, I began to understand how privileged I was to be born at a time in history when a boy could be a boy, growing naturally into manhood and free to choose his own destiny."

Diana Shklanka teaches English at the Williams Lake Campus of the University College of the Cariboo.

Mothers Helping, Children Coping

Bun Bun's Birthday. Richard Scrimger. Illus. Gillian Johnson. Tundra, 2001. Unpag.

\$15.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-520-3. Ages 3-6. *An Island in the Soup*. Mireille Levert. Groundwood, 2001. Unpag. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-403-6. Ages 3-5.

Bun Bun's Birthday and *An Island in the Soup* both focus on a child's problem: in the first book, a girl's jealousy is sparked by preparations to celebrate her baby sister's birthday, and in the second, a boy is reluctant to eat his soup. Both children resolve their problems with the help of their understanding mothers.

In *Bun Bun's Birthday*, when Winifred learns that all the party preparations — balloons, colored streamers, and cake — are for Bun Bun, she runs to the back of a closet to sulk. Mommy then takes the time to help Winifred deal with her jealousy by assuring her that, since Bun Bun won't remember her first birthday party, Winifred will have to enjoy and remember it for her. The book ends with the predictable doublespread party scene, family and guests sharing the birthday cake.

The cartoon-style illustrations reinforce the humorous tone of the narrative. The nervous lines, the bulging and tilting objects, the inconsistent perspective, and the shifting point of view create a sense of energy. The minimal settings and lack of detail promote quick reading rather than close observation. The comic figures, especially the older children, are vividly characterized: Eugene is calm and complacent, in contrast to the emotional and sulky Winifred. Mommy is reassuring and understanding; Daddy is a background presence; and Bun Bun completes the family portrait. Whereas the text focalizes Winifred throughout, the illustrations shift focus from Winifred to Eugene to Bun Bun. In the birthday celebration scene, Winifred is almost lost behind the cake, only her head appearing over the rear edge of the table, while Bun Bun enjoys the attention of Daddy and Nana. In the closing vignette, a contentedly sleeping Bun Bun dangles a heart-shaped locket, but nothing in the book tells us whether Winifred is equally contented and rewarded.

Text and illustrations are not always synchronized. In one opening, on the lefthand page a tiny Eugene appears to be tipping the chair from which an apparently headless Daddy is about to fall; this scene doesn't illustrate the words above (the relevant sentences occur on the next page). Gaps in both text and illustrations may need to be explained to a child. For instance, when Winifred hides the tape which Daddy needs to hang up the balloons, the text doesn't say so explicitly; a picture provides the missing information, but the object beneath Winifred's foot is not easily identifiable as a roll of tape. The cover and title page illustration is puzzling: why should Bun Bun be sitting on her birthday cake?

In spite of such inconsistencies, *Bun Bun's Birthday* is a humorous and pleasant story of the type intended to teach children how to cope with a difficult situation, a story in which family dynamics are realistically and positively portrayed.

In *An Island in the Soup* (winner of the 2001 Governor General's Award for illustrations), the child's problem is resolved not through the mother's verbal persuasion but through the child's imaginings. Throughout the book, the mother-child bond is emphasized as the mother participates in Victor's fantasy, rescues him from the bad mother figure, and reassures him. Victor views his bowl of fish soup with suspicion until, at this mother's prompting, the crust in the thick soup is transformed into an island in a "cheesy swamp full of huge, stinky fish." In the spoonboat provided by his mother, and with her encouragement ("Be brave, my knight"), Victor navigates through a storm of giant peas and carrots to reach the island, where he eludes sinister creatures in a celery forest, escapes a red pepper dragon, and dashes into a castle, only to fall into the power of Bad Fairy Zoop ("Eat, eat, eat

your soup, naughty boy"). Armed with a watering can and drapery cords, Victor's mother rides to his rescue ("Hold on, . . . my lovely boy, my bunny, my chick). After Prince Victor and his Queen are reunited beside a chocolate pool and rewarded with two large pieces of cake, Victor is amazed to find that the soup now "tasted better than any soup he had ever eaten."

At first viewing, the illustrations may appear confusing, for the large solid blocks of saturated reds and greens, as well as the lack of pictorial depth, create an impression of clutter. However, closer scrutiny yields details and associations not mentioned in the text. The two red goldfish in the bowl are analogous to Victor and his mother in the soup world; Zoop's castle is a transmutation of the castle in the goldfish bowl; and the dragon originates from the design on Victor's T-shirt. If Zoop is intended to represent the dark side of Victor's mother, the link between the two is implied by color, for the blues of the mother's dress and tea towel are repeated in Zoop's apron and headdress.

Except for two doublespreads depicting the encounters with the dragon, half-page close-ups alternate with full-page action scenes. Such formatting is effective in portraying Victor and his mother as normal-sized humans in the ordinary world, then as small, vulnerable figures in the soup world. Any sense of threat is modified by the comical rounded figures and circular shapes that are characteristic of Levert's art. The penultimate Madonna-like portrait of mother and son, as well as the final picture in which the mother hovers protectively like a guardian angel, reinforces the overall impression of safety and harmony.

It is somewhat disappointing that Victor, unlike Sendak's Max or Levert's own Rose (in *Rose by Night*), does nothing himself to confound his fears or his darker feelings; he has to be protected and rescued by his mother. Nevertheless, a young child will find both the story and pictures of *An Island in the Soup* reassuring and rewarding — even if the book is unlikely, I suspect, to engender a love of fish soup.

Diana Shklanka teaches English at the Williams Lake Campus of the University College of the Cariboo.

Novels Show Facts about Dinosaur Life

Time-Travel Runaway. Jan Lister Caldwell. Menagerie, 2000. 72 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55212-493-2. *Cousin Clash*. Jan Lister Caldwell. Menagerie, 2001. 87 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55212-716-8.

The first two books in the *Time Tripper* series, *Time-Travel Runaway* and *Cousin Clash*, are adventures set primarily in the Cretaceous period, about seventy-five million years ago. In the first book, Billy, new to country life and missing the excitement and friendships of his former life in town, tries to escape his boredom and frustration by trying out the time machine belonging to a mysterious neighbour and finding himself back in the Cretaceous period. In *Cousin Clash*, Bill's troubled cousin Donny comes to stay and both find themselves in the time of the dinosaurs after taking an inadvertent ride in the time machine.

The plots of both books are exciting enough to keep the interest of most young-