

In some ways the setting is also a problem: it is more like Nazi Germany or some other repressive state than a fantasy world. The elves and fairies of this land are basically indistinguishable in characteristics from humans, which weakens the fantasy element considerably. Given these weaknesses, the book is not likely to engage children at all.

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Tribe of Star Bear. Victoria Mihalyi. Borealis, 1998. 238 pp. \$16.95 paper. ISBN 0-88887-832-X.

Tribe of Star Bear is a first novel by Victoria Mihalyi, whose prior experience as an environmental journalist shows very clearly throughout this book, which celebrates the life of the forest creatures set against the destructive greed of humans and their machines. This book is not as grim as it sounds, however: Mihalyi has set the plot in a fantasy world where human children and all forest creatures can communicate easily, where humans themselves are not the perpetrators of the horror but rather machine-like creatures called Rumlbers, and where the Saroo, who released the Rumlbers through their own greed, are now forced to serve them. This delightful fantasy world is far enough away from reality to be acceptable without being too confrontational.

However, there are inconsistencies within the story that spoil it at times. Although it is common to anthropomorphize animals within such a fantasy, the dialogue and narration oscillate between extremely complex, very adult-sounding words and very childish or inappropriate slang. The grating juxtaposition of these speech patterns shifts the appropriate age group from for six- to eight-year olds to teenagers. The characters themselves are reasonably consistent most of the time, but there is no sense of development, only a confusing and disorienting switching of roles.

The setting of the story is well drawn — both the forest and the clear-cut, ravaged wasteland that is left after the Rumlbers have been through. The plot is fast-paced, exciting, and engaging. The gratuitous violence of the Rumlbers gorging on animals as they go, complete with descriptions of shredded flesh and screams, seems excessive for this age group. Although the ending is a little incongruous as the human member of the group goes back to her parents who have been joined by searchers using lots of machinery, the novel has some very good qualities.

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Ahmed and the Nest of Sand. Kristin Bieber Domm. Illus. Jeffrey C. Domm. Nimbus, 2000. Unpag. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55109-338-3. Ages 3-6.

In *Ahmed and the Nest of Sand*, the writer has a message to convey rather than a story to tell. In seeking to enroll our efforts at caring for the lives of the threatened Piping

Plovers, Kristin Bieber Domm cleverly chooses as her messenger an immigrant child from a far-away land who misses the pet birds he has had to leave behind. The slight thread that holds the narrative together (a visit to Ahmed's school by two conservationists who befriend the boy) is greatly strengthened by the large and appealing pictures which generously illustrate the text. The engaging portraits of dark-haired Ahmed as well as those of the lovely Piping Plovers and their tiny offspring disporting themselves on luminous beaches will help to ensure the attention of young listeners, as will also the page-large depiction of the Plover's foremost enemy, the great dark raccoon, dramatically depicted in the moonlight, as he patrols the sand in search of Plovers' eggs.

Printed very small, the introductory page that relates the real-life incident which gave rise to the book, as well as the documentary pages which give us the history and description of the Plovers, the current threat which they are under and the identity of the team involved in their protection, clearly mark the book as a tool meant for parents and teachers. Though it is definitely a didactic little tale rather than an imaginative story, it can be said to succeed in its attempt to help instill in the very young an interest in nature and a desire to treat its smallest creatures with care.

Claudine Pope writes in Toronto.

The Lost Crown of Meleor. George Tepy. Annick, 2000. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-601-2.

The Lost Crown of Meleor started with a good idea. The book is set primarily on the planet of Meleor, a place where you can grow anything you want in your garden, like a hot dog tree, or your house, or a spaceship. There are wells of lemonade and quirky creatures of all different shapes, sizes, construction, and colours who live in happy harmony. What more idyllic setting in a fantasy story for young children?

The problem is the weak story line and the stilted style, the repetitive and awkward diction, and the condescending tone of the question-and-answer format throughout the book and the frequent direct address by the narrator. The whole style of the story sounds as though the author is trying to be "cute." The artwork, which does not show the sort of things the reader might most want to see (such as what a cheesecake tree looks like), is also "cute" and rather silly. It is also imprecise while being quite cartoon-like. Good authors write *for* children, not *down to* children, and there is a big difference between the two. Overall, this is a most disappointing book, one that will not engage either the minds of children or their imaginations except in a most superficial way.

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