

reader with a taut, suspenseful adventure that is considerably better crafted than Marjorie's favourite Drew mysteries. Dueck carefully twines together the mystery plot and its wallops of surprise and suspense with the inevitable nagging admonitions of Marjorie's mother, dull interludes that attenuate and intensify the exquisite moments of suspense. And Dueck turns the screw tighter when Marjorie's earlier desire to be "anywhere but here" becomes uncomfortably ironic as the clues she and Craig uncover would seem to implicate her father.

As a writer of mystery, Dueck does breach the etiquette of not withholding vital clues from the reader: the "familiar voice" Marjorie recognizes in the barn is not named until twenty pages later. Also, the lightening-lit capture of the culprits teeters on the melodramatic and the incredible. On the other hand, the dialogue throughout is natural and well conceived, the internal monologues of Marjorie are suitably idiomatic, and the lighter touches of description are well executed. Here is Marjorie's Saskatchewan, for instance: "The land stretched endlessly out like a giant's patchwork quilt in splotches of green and brown, with a splotch of yellow here and there from flowering canola. There weren't many trees to see, just an occasional shelterbelt row dividing the fields like stitching." Perhaps the greatest limitation of this kind of writing is that it can only be read once. It is like Marjorie's birthday mystery that she undertook to reread: "It wasn't as exciting when I knew what was going to happen." The characteristic ennui of youth everywhere would demand another good read, soon, from this author.

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*Mary J. Harker teaches children's and young adult literature at the University of Victoria. She is currently working on a book to do with the fantastic in children's literature.*

### Mystery Lessons

*The Mastodon Mystery.* Dorothy Perkyns. Lancelot Press, 1996. 112 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88999-620-2. *The Mystery at Eagle Lake.* Dayle Gaetz. Illus. Isabelle Langevin. Quintin Publishers, 1996 (Junior Nature). 156 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 2-89435-066-X.

These two books succeed in an area in which much can go terribly wrong: it's hard to incorporate educational, factual information into an exciting, mystery-story format.

*The Mastodon Mystery* packs an amazing amount of information about digging for, preserving and transporting mastodon bones, in a story inspired by an actual discovery in Nova Scotia in 1991. James and Emily take part in the dig, uncover an attempt to steal the bones, and successfully track down the criminals. The suspense is kept up as the children race to find the criminals before the bones can be smuggled out of the country. While factual information is well-integrated into the story, other elements are more clumsily treated. Clues often lead nowhere (any reader who tries to remember James's careful description of the suspects on page 101 will be disappointed; the clue is never mentioned again). There are numerous incidents of this kind: events which may be

thought-provoking or funny, but which are not developed or integrated into the story. For example, James's stereotyping of his 60-year-old aunt as a boring old woman who walks with a cane leads to an amusing misunderstanding which is, however, of no relevance to the main story. More importantly, I felt that the events which cause James's parents and Emily's mother to be away that summer, leaving the two children free to have their adventure without adult interference, are too serious for the superficial treatment they inevitably receive. In an adventure story of this kind it is important to keep the story moving, and Dorothy Perkins succeeds in this. It would, perhaps, not be possible in this kind of book to also adequately examine the effect on Emily of being abandoned by her mother, who has left for Toronto in search of a more fulfilling life, but its superficial treatment was unsatisfying. I felt this particularly strongly when I reached the "happy ending" in which Emily's mother and father are re-united. It felt false, since none of their marital problems had been resolved.

While the plot of *The Mastodon Mystery* is cluttered, in *The Mystery at Eagle Lake* Dayle Gaetz takes the reader right into adventure:

'Someone's shooting at us!? Dustin croaked, his voice catching in his throat, his eyes bulging. He threw himself to the ground. (5)

Someone is shooting in the woods, and it isn't hunting season. Tobi, a self-described "trained detective" and her younger brother, Justin, on holiday at their grandfather's cabin at Eagle Lake, British Columbia, set out to solve the mystery of who is shooting the protected bald eagles and why.

Vitality is breathed into the adventure through its sense of place, its depiction of the Douglas Firs and Alders, lakes, woods and wildlife of Eagle Lake always feeding rather than slowing the main story line. Like Dorothy Perkins's description of the Mastodon dig, Gaetz's description of the bald eagles and the efforts of the Canadian Wildlife Service to protect their nesting sites is well-integrated into the story.

A bonus for mystery lovers is the way in which Gaetz weaves debate about the nature of evidence in detective work into the story — the unreliability of witnesses, the difficulty of collecting evidence that is more than circumstantial, the prejudices that people bring to their interpretation of events: all are touched on. Justin and Tobi's parents disagree on the character of Will, one of the main suspects in the killing of an eagle, yet their reasons for their views are subjective — their mother finds him dirty and rough, while their father thinks him an amusing but likable eccentric. Tobi and Justin learn that clues are also open to subjective interpretation and must be analysed with care — does the dirty ashtray in Max's cabin mean that he was lying when he said he had given up smoking, or is it quite likely, given his rough and solitary lifestyle, that he would not have bothered to clean out the ash? In the end Gaetz gives us a clear resolution (the real criminal is tricked into revealing himself) but most of the book has a refreshing and thought-provoking indeterminateness unusual for books in this genre.

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*Gay Christofides is the Administrator of CCL and an avid reader of children's books.*