

MINI-REVIEWS

The Night Hazel Came to Town. John Ibbitson. Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1993. 148 pp., \$15.55, \$10.35 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-02-954098-4; 0-02-954209-X.

At seventeen, Lee Kendall leaves his widowed father in a small northern Ontario town to make his way in Toronto. Through quick observation, nerve, and the ability to take advantage of chance, he lands a job as copy boy on the *Toronto Telegram*. Largely through his friendship with Murphy, a skilled but alcoholic reporter, he is soon involved in gathering and reporting news: a domestic assault, the landing and attempted abduction by *Telegram* reporters of Marilyn Bell after her swim across Lake Ontario, and even a hanging. Finally, in Hurricane Hazel, he helps save a man's life in the swollen Humber River. At the book's end Lee has become a regular reporter, a job he will obviously do well.

The book is well and clearly written, with convincing pictures of Toronto in 1954 and life in a busy newspaper office. Episodes quickly follow each other, and the reader is kept eager for more. Though the hero's opportunities probably arise more frequently than they would in real life, and the speech of the reporters is obviously "cleaned up" (a necessity for this kind of book today), life is generally viewed with a clear, cold, sometimes disturbing eye. The reporters do not see the hanging (the punishment for a killing which would certainly be considered manslaughter today), but hear the accused being dragged, screaming, to the gallows. Some drownings during the hurricane (more than fifty actually occurred) are described in unsentimental detail.

Treatment of character is brief but effective. Lee's father, a reserved but helpful presence in northern Ontario, is well aware that his son is finding his own way. Lee just as quietly returns his affection. A bitter-sweet romantic episode — Lee's love for and loss of Angela, a would-be actress, nine years his senior — is handled subtly, with humour and feeling. Like many other young-adult novels, this is a story of a young person's growth, but done with a strong attachment to reality.

Donn Kushner is a Professor of Microbiology and Botany at the University of Toronto. He is also a writer of books for children, including *A Book Dragon*, *The House of the Good Spirits*, *The Violin-Maker's Gift*, *The Night Voyagers* and others.

Dead Water Zone. Kenneth Oppel. Kids Can Press Ltd., 1992. 170 pages, \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-092-X.

There's no doubt Kenneth Oppel knows how to keep the action moving and the suspense building. *Dead Water Zone* is what we all would recognize as a page-turner. And although the story is directed at the juvenile market, with a sixteen-year-old protagonist and a supporting cast of good guys and bad guys (almost all teens as well) the author succeeds in maintaining a style and voice that does not talk down. The result is good action fiction that is as appealing to an adult as to the teens for whom it was written. In fact, except for the parade of teen characters