

The fact that this book is aimed at slightly younger readers than Duncan's does not excuse its lack of energy and appeal. Selby is presented as a rather reckless, self-absorbed child whose misbehaviour (including breaking into her school) comes across as heroic. Parents and teachers alike may well question why the adults in the story reward Selby for her dishonesty, overlooking the dangerous situation to which she exposes herself.

Illustrations are this book's best feature, especially the one on the front with a shadowy figure chasing the kids down the hall. The cover of Duncan's novel, on the other hand, damages its appeal with its gaudy depiction of the genie oozing out of the toothpaste tube.

First-time novel readers should be encouraged to resist the tempting cover of *Monsters in the School* and turn instead to the superior content in *The Toothpaste Genie*.

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WIZZLES AND WARRIORS

The War with Mr. Wizzle. Gordon Korman. Scholastic Inc., 1982, 1991. 224 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-44206-6; **The Zucchini Warriors.** Gordon Korman. Scholastic Inc, 1988, 1991. 198 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-44174-4.

"Why can't we just go to school like everybody else?" Boots asks his friend Bruno. It's midnight. Wearing infra-red goggles, they are searching the school grounds for four Manchurian bush hamsters, last of an endangered species. In minutes, they'll have to rescue Hank the Tank, being marched across the highway at gunpoint.

Why can't they? Because they attend MacDonald Hall, the boarding school somewhere east of Toronto, founded in the fertile and wacky imagination of Gordon Korman when he was twelve.

Bruno and Boots lead a life kids dream about. Although schoolwork intrudes occasionally, they are usually busy stirring up schemes and chaos. They enjoy a devoted circle of friends, a neighbouring school with "wildly unpredictable" girls eager to complicate any situation, and countless night raids upon the kitchens.

The setting neatly disposes of parents and their restrictions. Mr. Sturgeon (The Fish), the stern headmaster, may assign laborious punishments, but he secretly admires the students' spirit.

Sometimes outsiders threaten this paradise. In *The War with Mr. Wizzle*, Walter C. Wizzle determines to modernize MacDonald Hall with his 515 Magnetric computer, a rigid dress code, and a punitive demerit point system. The boys liked MacDonald Hall the way it was, and fight back with the anti-Wizzle Committee.

The girls at Miss Scrimmage's Finishing School face another battle. Their new assistant headmistress is a former drill sergeant in the marines who believes in sunrise calisthenics, punishing laps around the track, and military drills.

Two visitors complicate life for *The Zucchini Warriors*. Alumni Hank the Tank Carson, former football star and millionaire zucchini king, has built a football stadium for MacDonald Hall. Unfortunately, the boys don't play football. When Hank promises them the rec centre they really wanted if they become a winning team, football fever strikes Bruno, and MacDonald Hall. Enter Kevin Klapper. The mosquito-shaped inspector from the Ministry of Education detests football as the root of destruction and plans a devastating report on the school.

Over at Miss Scrimmage's, life is too quiet—and Cathy resents Bruno's comment, "Football is really a man's game ... You can be ... cheerleaders or something." She can play better than any boy at MacDonald Hall.

Reading these books is like racing a crazy red boat through the rapids towards Niagara. Hilarious events and characters accelerate us onward, until the grand, boisterous, splashy climax.

Both stories zoom along on fun, using one-liners, silly situations, zany characters, comic timing, and rampant visual humour. It's easy to picture the proper young ladies fighting frenziedly through the misty orchard, shooting red and blue dyes from pistols and bombs until Wizzle innocently wanders in their way and becomes, "a man, covered in dye, mud and grass, holding a mashed umbrella." Other unforgettable images include the warriors' Beast tackling the beefsteak tomato.

Korman builds up the plots and the anticipation by switching viewpoints frequently. Thus, we eagerly await the earthquake and the colossal Mr. Wizzle balloon to pop up somewhere inappropriate, and we expect the Manchurian bush hamsters multiplying under the bleachers and the disasters closing in on Kevin Klapper to fit in, as events rush towards the climax.

Characters are strong points in both books. The kids are likeable, believable, and delight in their fun. A great supporting cast of schoolmates includes scientific Elmer who provides earthquake machines and endangered animals, and klutzy Sydney, who trips up plot lines with cleat patterns on his face. Every kid's fantasy must be Bruno's ability to "have the whole campus organized and up to our ears in some crazy scheme." His efficient committees write out lines, spirit incriminating evidence out of dorm windows, build a balloon, and dispose of 700 plates of glutinous zucchini.

The Zucchini Warriors' flabby and flamboyant Hank the Tank is a credible hero to the boys as "us in thirty years," and he returns their loyalty. Kevin Klapper's evasion techniques seem extreme, but we can't help rooting for him.

Wizzle would be more satisfying as a stronger opponent. He's easily conned about an earthquake under his cottage, not even questioning the whited-out and revised confirmation letter. His love for the barking drill sergeant, and their convenient exit, were almost too simple to engineer. I felt vaguely uncomfort-

able that they fell in love while they were totally drunk—unable even to notice the three students sharing their taxi.

Mildred Sturgeon, the vacuous wife of the headmaster, is annoying in both books. She lives to pour coffee and listen without understanding. Her literary job is to play Dr. Watson, showing us the Fish's thoughts. Can't she also "get a life"—find a hobby, read a book, or say something bright?

Our heroes enjoy their mayhem thoroughly. But they remain very moral. Never mean, dishonest or deliberately destructive, they love their school, accept their punishments, and in this day of the glorified underachiever, like to succeed.

These stories appeal to children in grades four to seven. On lazy holidays, even older readers still curl up with these zany favourites. Mention Gordon Korman, and you'll get a smile.

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PLANTING THE TREE OF CORRECTNESS OR WHEN WANGLING WON'T WORK

Ring of Tall Trees. John Dowd. Raincoast Books, 1992. 126 pp., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920417-15-9.

Ten-year-old Dylan, an "urban refugee" from Vancouver, and his great big dog Banjo go rubber-boot to steel-toe with a Brazilian logging company in John Dowd's *Ring of Tall Trees* and win. As the book opens, Dylan and his family arrive at their newly-acquired farm. Dylan and Banjo go exploring nearby in an old-growth forest and stumble upon a circular clearing of trees where an old man, with no shoes, appears telling him to "use Raven." More concerned that his dog has disappeared than with the peculiar advice of the old man, Dylan leaves. He finds Banjo eventually, with the help of his father, in a Native village where he discovers the old man he met was the spirit "Tamtlutna—Tree Watcher." Dad in the meantime has learned that a Brazilian logging company has plans to clear-cut the old-growth forest that surrounds them all—the Native village and the family farm. Dylan and a group of Native kids invoke the powers of the trickster Raven and eventually topple the logging company. The adults try the more conventional approaches of peaceful activism and legal wangling.

Everything about *Ring of Tall Trees* seems correct: its packaging (acid-free, recycled paper), its political message (save the old-growth forests from the environmental devastation of clear-cut logging), its sensitive portrayal of Native people (and discussion of the negligence of the government in resolving Native land claims); John Dowd takes great care to ensure that no group or individual