

n'ose plus me toucher et il a une peur bleue que quelqu'un d'autre le fasse" (p. 17).

Pour Léa, à la fin du roman, au moment de passer la porte de la maison pour aller à son premier rendez-vous d'amour, le cauchemar du commencement du texte lui revient à l'esprit et elle se retient un moment, incapable d'avancer plus loin. Mais elle prend finalement une bonne respiration et sort en claquant la porte "assez fort que [s]a peur s'écroule comme un château de cartes" (p. 147). Ce récit, une sorte de *bildungsroman* contemporain en miniature, présente une lecture riche en expériences qui sera appréciée surtout par les filles de douze ou treize ans.

**Lynn Kettler Penrod** est professeur agrégée à l'Université de l'Alberta où elle enseigne la littérature de jeunesse et la littérature française du vingtième siècle. Elle est aussi avocate avec Durocher, Maccagno, Arès, Manning, Lynass, Carr & Simpson, avocats et notaires, à Edmonton.

#### SCI-FI PLUS

**The live-forever machine.** Kenneth Oppel. Kids Can Press, 1990. 223 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-010-5.

Kenneth Oppel's *The live-forever machine* is a neatly crafted story that weaves together elements of the traditional epic, science fiction, and the contemporary adolescent novel. The story focuses on Eric, who lives with his father in a broken down house surrounded on all sides by modern highrises. Eric's house signals the past in which his father lives, writing stories about Eric's mother, who had died mysteriously some years earlier.

Eric spends a great deal of time in the museum, where he encounters two people, a boy and a man – each of whom has learned the secret of immortality. But the boy, Alexander, is a lover of the past, and to this end hordes the great treasures of history deep under the city; the man, Coil, wants to destroy the past; he looks only to the future.

The novel's action derives from the struggle to control the "live-forever machine," which had given both Alexander and Coil immortality. Eric, at first the willing pawn of Alexander, learns that Alexander in his holding on to the past is just as misguided as Coil. Consequently when Eric learns that his mother committed suicide, he is better able to respond to his father, who has been shaped in the present by obsessive concern with the past.

To a certain extent, the conflict of old and new is a bit tired. The idea of a desperate struggle of two almost allegorical figures representing the past and the future is hardly original. The accomplishment of the story is that Oppel convincingly brings the conflict into the modern urban world, integrating it with the very personal issues that Eric faces in living with a father who has

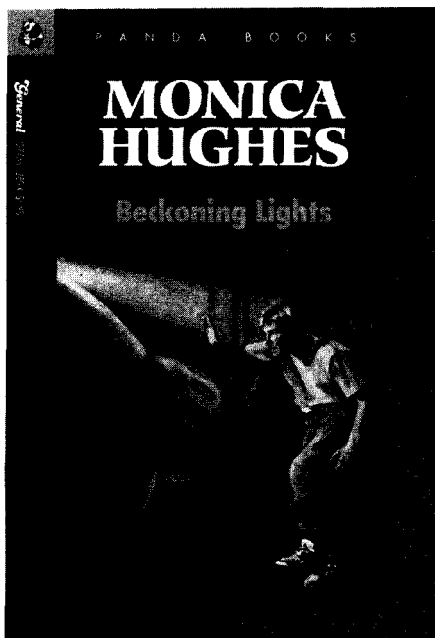
shut him out. Opper is a good storyteller, always holding enough back to maintain interest and suspense. One does not, for example, discover who Alexander is for some time, even though Opper provides a lot of hints. The struggle with Coil in the tunnels under the city, while echoing several recent television programs and films, is nonetheless action filled. Perhaps the only disappointment is the rather maudlin ending in which Eric, possessing new understanding, is able to rebuild his relationship with his father. Nothing in life is that easy.

The novel is sufficiently fast paced, and possesses enough science fiction and fairy tale to appeal to any adolescent. For the more thoughtful young reader, Opper's message is not obtuse, yet he avoids being preachy or too obvious.

**David W. Atkinson** is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

#### WHAT IS AN ALIEN?

**Beckoning lights.** Monica Hughes. General Paperbacks, 1990. 104 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7280-X.



Julia Christie tells how her foolhardy twin brother races to a landed UFO and is captured by aliens, leaving her with the mission of rescuing him, their father, and, ultimately, an entire race. She is a timid girl, particularly fearful of dark enclosed spaces – and she must face head on her claustrophobia to fulfill her quest by crawling through a narrow tunnel to collect a life-saving fungus. The gripping story delivers moral messages that are neither trite nor simplistic; indeed, Hughes shows remarkable skill in conveying sophisticated concepts in ways accessible to a young reader.

For example, she illustrates the essential aloneness of all human beings by Julia's discovery of how cut off she feels when her brother is for the first time too far away to be reached telepathically. As she realizes that the terrible isolation she

experiences is the human norm, she feels a rush of pity for her fellows. To com-