

## KIDS BOOKS



BY ANNE MARIE OWENS

In time for the return to school, some books that share a delight in words that should captivate laggardly, end-of-summer learners with the enduring power of wordplay.

## ON POETRY



Tiffany Stone's first book of children's poems, *Floyd the Flamingo* (Tradewind Books, \$9.95), re-minds one of the delightful perspective that comes out of good children's poetry, which looks straight at something but always, seems askance because it is the lopsided world view of a child.

Consider, "What flavour is a jellyfish? Strawberry? Grape? Or peach? Or does it taste like ocean, With just a hint of beach?"

Or this one, about a Great Dane with an unfortunate and unlikely name: "Fluffy's not a dog's name. It's way too small and cute. I am NOT a Fluffy. I'm a massive brute." Or *Nighttime Rhyme*: "I eat the stars like candy. They tingle and they fizz. And when my belly's finally full, I'm amazed how dark it is."

The B.C. poet's spare and *funny* verse is captured perfectly by Kathryn Shoemaker's playful black-and-white illustrations.

## Children's Books

## Strange adventures end Buffie trilogy

By Helen Norrie.

CAN Emma find the four magic wands (Water, Earth, Air and Fire) before the evil druid Eefa? Will she ever see her family alive again? Can she trust Tom, her Watcher, although he keeps secrets from her?

These are some of the questions posed in *The Finder* (Kids Can Press, 410 pages, \$9), the third novel in Winnipeg Margaret Buffie's trilogy set in the game-playing world of Argadnel.

Like her previous two books, *The Watcher* and *The Seeker*, Buffie's novel overflows with strange characters (e.g. Cill; a "leaf person," and Finn, "a selkie"—half man, half seal) and even stranger adventures.

Buffie's creativity and ingenuity are admirable, but it requires a three-page list of characters (luckily, supplied) to keep the protagonists straight.

Her characters are consistent, if not always likable. Emma (also called Ena, and formerly Winter) is a courageous, daring but somewhat bossy young woman. Tom, while loyal and caring, never seems to believe in her abilities and constantly tries to take over control.

Will fantasy fans find this novel riveting enough to finish over 400 pages? Will the super cast of characters cause readers to give up in frustration? These are just two of the dangers faced by *The Finder*.

However, Buffie's many fans will probably persevere to help Emma, and Buffie, complete her quest.

Good books of humorous poetry for young children are rare, but *Floyd the Flamingo* by Tiffany Stone (Tradewind Books, 65 pages, \$10, paperback) can be counted among this exclusive company.

Vancouver first-time author Stone has a delightful sense of the ridiculous: a kite that is scared of heights, a robin that has hay fever and a "Mummy" who is "mysteriously serious."

The black-and-white illustrations, by Kathryn Shoemaker add a whimsical touch.

As poet Sheree Fitch has commented on this book, "In a world that largely makes no sense making nonsense makes sense."

Parents will enjoy reading these poems to preschoolers and beginning readers will chuckle over them.

Two books about two different wars will provide thoughtful reading for readers 10-14 years. *The Flags of War* by John Wilson (Kids Can Press, 168 pages, \$17 hardcover, \$8 paperback) is about the American Civil War and is set in 1860.

It takes place in both South Carolina and in Ontario, called "Canada West," and concerns two cousins, Nate and Walt MacGregor, who have never met.

Separated by a family feud at the time of the American War of Independence, Nate's family has grown upon a cotton plantation while Walt's live on a remote farm in the Canadian wilderness.

Walt is drawn into the conflict to fight against slavery, while Nate joins the Confederate troops to protest union with the north. At a climactic moment in the novel they find themselves face to face on the battlefield.

Wilson, who lives on Vancouver Island, attempts to show that both sides in the Civil War had legitimate concerns. He also shows the futility and waste of armed conflict.

*Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo (HarperCollins, 186 pages, \$10) is set during the First World War and concerns two brothers, Charlie and Tommo Peaceful.

Charlie is impulsive, brave and a bit of a rebel. Tommo, the younger brother, is more sensitive, quieter and always in Charlie's shadow. Together they go off to war and face as much harassment from their superiors as from the enemy.

This is a memorable story by a master storyteller. The surprise ending will both shock and sadden the reader.

Morpurgo has recently been appointed Children's Laureate, a post which will carry him to schools and libraries all over Great Britain.

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