

who have had an abundant harvest with a surplus of decorations for export. The four establish friendly trading relations and arrange for a successful if unusual delivery system. Consequently, there are no bare Christmas trees in the north that season and the reputations of Bing and Bong are assured. Poulin's vibrant paintings depict well the two fantasy worlds in which the elves, a duck, a friendly whale and a monstrous moose all play important roles.

*The end of the world* and *The Christmas elves* are both likely to have considerable appeal for young children. Unfortunately, they will not stand up well to wide usage. They deserve a better binding.

**Betty M. Brett** is a Professor of Education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's.

### EASY-READING ADVENTURE STORIES

**A horse for Josie Moon.** Sharon Siamon. Lorimer, 1988. 153 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-129-1; **A question of courage.** Irene Morck. Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988. 169 pp., \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88833-257-2.

*A horse for Josie Moon*, written for Lorimer's "Blue Kite adventure" series of easy novels, returns us to the Big Pickle Lake community of *Fishing for trouble*. As the story opens Siamon pokes a little fun at the "horse story" genre. Eleven-year-old Josie narrowly avoids piloting her father's powerboat into a neighbour's rowboat while daydreaming about riding imaginary "Panther", a wild black stallion she has bent to her will. Josie must figure out how to acquire a horse and keep it on her tiny island, while evading the ridicule of her arch rival Kiff. A blueberrying expedition leads to the discovery of four abandoned horses, but they are rough, burr-matter and wild. In a fast-paced denouement the children unite to save the horses from hunters and a forest fire. Josie's dream is realised, but modified, leaving her with a better understanding of the realities of horsekeeping.

An established author of juvenile fiction, Siamon has produced a competently-crafted tale within the confines of the beginner novel. There is one slip ("like it was") and an apparent confusion of halter and bridle. The horse "Skydive"'s actions stretch likelihood and I regret the lack of caution about mixing inexperienced children with unschooled horse. The theme is a perennial favourite and the plot moves briskly. The characters, though not rounded, are sufficiently defined to invite reader involvement. The children are capable and refreshingly non-sexist; their dialogue, full of amiable insult, is believable.

ble if somewhat stilted, and the humour will appeal. Parents are sympathetic; family members co-operate. Their Northern Ontario lifestyle is well revealed as is the need for respectful interaction with the natural environment, though one feels the beer-swilling hunters from "down south" are scapegoats for a broader group. A map and line sketches add focus. (Lifejackets worn in the story are not shown.) An interest-grabbing cover enhances this overall worthwhile addition to the collection.

*A question of courage* is Morck's promising but flawed first novel, for readers about 11-15. Unlike Josie, Keri is a physical coward, terrified of cantering her gentle mare (another argument for responsible instruction), bullied even by the chickens on her family's prairie farm. Her parents, otherwise supportive, press her to conquer her fear and there is room for sympathy. But Keri is also a moral coward and as Morck expands her exploration of the title idea, we see a fifteen-year-old who is a bit of a whiner, convinced that no one likes her, conforming to ingratiate herself with the in-crowd, revealing a class cheating episode mostly to draw attention from her own problems. She borrows a neighbour's beloved old pony so she can learn to gallop a less scary mount, then, in spite of becoming deeply attached, causes her death. Word gets out and the remorseful Keri suffers at school. On a class skiing trip Keri, who has panicked on the baby slope, screaming and crying when she falls and finally being lured to the bottom in a truly ridiculous scene, learns a classmate is immobilised by fear atop the most dangerous run and, in a melodramatic conclusion, sets out alone to effect a rescue.

Morck's initial idea is good and she has patches of confident writing but she often strains her credibility. We are given no valid reason for Keri's conviction of unlovability (two boys befriend her and a girl tries), and she swings too mercurially from childish self-pity to mature analysis of her own motivations. Her moments of introspection seem contrived and the resolution of her fears unbelievable because not shown as an evolution of character. The stereotyped peer situations are extreme and the teacher, Fisher, unreal. Morck makes one serious grammar error (13), then has a teacher correct a student for a similar one (27). The protagonist-alone-against-the-world is a surefire theme with this age group (letters from test readers cite identification with Keri as a major draw), and Morck can keep a story moving. Some minor characters are well drawn and dialogue is a strength. Younger teens will probably like this book, but when Morck reins in the purple prose she will write a better one.

**Dinah Gough** is head of Children's Services at the Oshawa Public Library.