

His presence in the book feels contrived, intended to provide a “happy ending” to what is essentially a pessimistic trilogy.

Still, Hughes is too good a writer to abandon completely the truth she has built so deeply into her world of Isis. The Isis settlers now know about prisons, slavery, improvidence, the lust for power, and murder. Despite the resolutely hopeful tone and the pairings-off, and despite an insightful new leader and some potential for technology, we know that these descendants of the colonists who came from an Earth grown too hideous to live on will inevitably return to what their ancestors once were. Eden is gone; the valley grows overpopulated; the heights are still uninhabitable; and there are wolves among the sheep.

Hughes is saying that it doesn't matter where humans go; the same mistakes will be made. This is the profound core of the Isis sequence, the inner truth that makes its beauty—like the beauty of Isis itself—so terrible. “To be human is to make mistakes,” Guardian says just before leaving Isis and the settlers to their own devices, essentially forever. “You'll learn from your mistakes, and grow.” But Isis, we cannot help but feel, will have a job on its hands.

Welwyn Wilton Katz has written seven award-winning novels for children and young adults, including *False face* (Groundwood, 1987), *The third magic* (Groundwood, 1988), *Whalesinger* (Groundwood, 1990) and *Come like shadows* (Viking, 1993).

CHARACTERIZING THE GROUP, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL, IN THE 22ND CENTURY

Invitation to the game. Monica Hughes. HarperCollins, 1990. 179 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-647414-4.

Released in 1992 in paperback, *Invitation to the game* by Monica Hughes is one of the most powerful works award-winning Hughes has written amongst an impressive line-up of excellent novels. Set in the early twenty-second century, *Invitation to the game* initially sets up a bleak world of over-population, mass unemployment and almost universal urbanization, with its accompanying atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. However, never a depressing writer, Hughes brings into this situation of desperation a glimmer of light which leads to a clever and truly surprising twist ending full of hope and new beginnings. The setting itself is central to the effectiveness of the novel where, as usual, Hughes has drawn a frighteningly convincing world through her evocative descriptions of both place and atmosphere.

Despite an intriguing, sometimes nail-biting plot, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this particular novel is the lack of centrality of individual characters. In a dehumanized world where co-operation is the only way to both survive and truly function, the individual, while important, is no longer central. He or she must be sublimated to the group to some degree. Accordingly, Hughes

centres the novel on a *group* of ten young people who must stick together to survive the prison-camp environment of their urban “designated area,” to which they expect to be confined for life as the completely dispossessed unemployed. Thus the reader gets to know them as a group first, although individual distinguishing characteristics come through very quickly. However, this concentration on group rather than individual has a distancing effect, an unusual and perhaps initially disturbing experience for readers.

This effect is somewhat ameliorated by Hughes’s use of a first-person narrator. Through Lisse’s eyes, we draw closer to the other characters in the group, although we do not really get to know the narrator well until towards the end of the novel as she is as much a reporter of both events and characters as she is a character herself. This technique, unusual as it may be, is totally appropriate for the kind of world Hughes has created in this novel. It also emphasizes some themes such as the importance of co-operation of all kinds, the dangers of technology out of control, the centrality of hope to survival. Through the individuals in the group, and their reactions to their situation and experiences, the reader draws very close to both the reality and the emotional effect of the world Hughes is portraying in the novel. And herein lies the power of this disturbing, provocative and ultimately fascinating work.

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EXPLORING POSSIBLE FRONTIERS

Crisis on Conshelf Ten. Monica Hughes. Mammoth, (1977) 1991. 144 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7497-0894-8; **Earthdark.** Monica Hughes. Mammoth, (1977) 1991. 122 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7497-0404-7.

What do living under the ocean and on the Moon have in common? Weightlessness. And they are both frontiers that science has been exploring for some years.

This two-book series begins in *Crisis on Conshelf Ten* as fifteen-year-old Kepler, the first child born on Moon, takes his first trip to the earth with his father, Moon’s governor. When he can’t adapt to the earth’s terrible gravity, Kepler (named after a Moon crater) is given the opportunity to stay with his relatives on Conshelf Ten, an experimental community under the ocean. He learns to scuba dive from his cousin’s friend Hilary, a red-headed beauty with an attitude problem, and off they go while his father negotiates, on the corrupt and polluted earth, for full partner status for Moon at the United Nations.

Earthdark is a more evenly-developed story. Kepler finds it hard to re-enter Moon’s rather Zen environment of highly-focused work and simple living after his adventures on earth. He now finds his pre-selected betrothed, Ann, as controlled and uninteresting as the plastic alloy buildings—and he looks for a