

Mini Reviews

We Don't Have To Be Friends. Grant Nolin. Tree Frog Press, 1995. 158 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88967-071-4.

In this fast-paced novel a teenaged girl, Bonnie, lands what sounds like a peach of a summer job, working as a housekeeper for a movie star of about her own age, while a film is being shot in Canmore, her own town. But the young star, Ashleigh, is moody and difficult and a disappointment to Bonnie, who had hoped to become her friend, or at least to rub shoulders with her Hollywood glamour. Nolin is a fairly graceful writer, and shows a certain amount of perceptiveness in his characterization. But the plot of this novel is predictable from beginning to end and reads like a movie-of-the-week: you don't mind it so much at the time but afterwards you wish you'd gone for a long walk instead. Yes, the two girls dislike each other intensely at first. Yes, they slowly learn about each others' lives and problems. Yes, they both grow up somewhat, and yes, they end up fast friends. Yawn. Time to turn off the TV.

Stars. Eric Walters. Stoddart, 1996. 315 pp. \$6.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7447-0.

I have one really big question to ask about this book: where is the sex? Quite seriously, in a book about eight teenaged boys and two grown men on an adventure/survival trip in the wilderness, no one even mentions sex, or girls, or even the female half of the race? Not even once? It just ain't natural.

The book is not *about* sex, of course. And it doesn't have to be. It is about a young car thief, Joseph, who with seven other young offenders is sent off on a wilderness trip with two social workers, Gord and Stan. The program that sends them on this journey is called S.T.A.R.S.: Striving Through Adventure to develop Responsibility and Success. The acronym basically summarizes the book. That is exactly what happens. Troubled boy Joseph, through portages and teamwork and the support of father-figure Gord, survives the wilderness and decides he will mend his ways and survive in life, too. But the writing in this book is so wooden and its characters, especially Gord and Stan, so much like cardboard-cutouts of real people, that I'm afraid I didn't believe a word of it. Of course difficult kids can grow into reasonably sane and successful people; I'm sure it happens all the time. But I'm also sure it doesn't happen like this. Just as real boys have sex, if not in their lives, at least on their minds, almost all the time, so genuine fictional characters are individuals who muddle through, not die-cast paper people who move unerringly from problem to solution in a two-dimensional world.

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