

your soup, naughty boy"). Armed with a watering can and drapery cords, Victor's mother rides to his rescue ("Hold on, . . . my lovely boy, my bunny, my chick). After Prince Victor and his Queen are reunited beside a chocolate pool and rewarded with two large pieces of cake, Victor is amazed to find that the soup now "tasted better than any soup he had ever eaten."

At first viewing, the illustrations may appear confusing, for the large solid blocks of saturated reds and greens, as well as the lack of pictorial depth, create an impression of clutter. However, closer scrutiny yields details and associations not mentioned in the text. The two red goldfish in the bowl are analogous to Victor and his mother in the soup world; Zoop's castle is a transmutation of the castle in the goldfish bowl; and the dragon originates from the design on Victor's T-shirt. If Zoop is intended to represent the dark side of Victor's mother, the link between the two is implied by color, for the blues of the mother's dress and tea towel are repeated in Zoop's apron and headdress.

Except for two doublespreads depicting the encounters with the dragon, half-page close-ups alternate with full-page action scenes. Such formatting is effective in portraying Victor and his mother as normal-sized humans in the ordinary world, then as small, vulnerable figures in the soup world. Any sense of threat is modified by the comical rounded figures and circular shapes that are characteristic of Levert's art. The penultimate Madonna-like portrait of mother and son, as well as the final picture in which the mother hovers protectively like a guardian angel, reinforces the overall impression of safety and harmony.

It is somewhat disappointing that Victor, unlike Sendak's Max or Levert's own Rose (in *Rose by Night*), does nothing himself to confound his fears or his darker feelings; he has to be protected and rescued by his mother. Nevertheless, a young child will find both the story and pictures of *An Island in the Soup* reassuring and rewarding — even if the book is unlikely, I suspect, to engender a love of fish soup.

---

---

*Diana Shklanka teaches English at the Williams Lake Campus of the University College of the Cariboo.*

### Novels Show Facts about Dinosaur Life

*Time-Travel Runaway*. Jan Lister Caldwell. Menagerie, 2000. 72 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55212-493-2. *Cousin Clash*. Jan Lister Caldwell. Menagerie, 2001. 87 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55212-716-8.

The first two books in the *Time Tripper* series, *Time-Travel Runaway* and *Cousin Clash*, are adventures set primarily in the Cretaceous period, about seventy-five million years ago. In the first book, Billy, new to country life and missing the excitement and friendships of his former life in town, tries to escape his boredom and frustration by trying out the time machine belonging to a mysterious neighbour and finding himself back in the Cretaceous period. In *Cousin Clash*, Bill's troubled cousin Donny comes to stay and both find themselves in the time of the dinosaurs after taking an inadvertent ride in the time machine.

The plots of both books are exciting enough to keep the interest of most young-

sters, while the stories are filled with basic survival information. First Bill, then Bill and Donny, dodge raptors, an Albertasaurus, and other predators, while Bill befriends a baby Corythosaurus in the first book. Caldwell has made sure that she keeps the action moving while giving the reader a lot of information. It is a good combination of instruction and delight.

The characters are engaging, especially for boy readers. When the boys are in the present, there are fights and problems and "attitude" that are very realistic. These parts of the stories would get very tedious if dwelt on, but Caldwell just uses them to set up the reason for the time travel. Both boys are quite believable, although Donny's petulance and stupidity that almost get him killed repeatedly in the Cretaceous period become a little tiresome.

The only problem with the books is the actual writing itself. Caldwell's style is fine, but her use of tenses and punctuation is unpredictable at best, which becomes quite distracting. Also, as books are often the primary way that children learn basic grammar, it is unfortunate that Caldwell does not have a stronger grasp of the grammatical foundations of both verb and punctuation use.

For the most part, however, these books are enjoyable; they present worthy information in a palatable way.

---

*Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek teaches at Malaspina University College in Nanimo, BC, where she specializes in children's literature.*

### Fantasy Packed with Excitement and Poignancy

*The Castle Key*. Karen Krossing. Napoleon, 2000. 170 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-929141-76-8.

Krossing's first novel for young people, *The Castle Key*, is spellbinding from start to finish. The story of twelve-year old Moon (whose mother left on the girl's twelfth birthday), the novel traces Moon's search for answers about where her mother is and why she left through Moon's experiments with magic. Together, Moon and her long-suffering computer-geek friend, Duncan, find more magic and answers than either of them ever expected, after finding a key that leads Moon to thirteenth-century Britain and Moon's kinswoman, Nora.

Moon is not your typical twelve-year-old. She not only believes in magic, she works at it. Her family is not typical either. Since her mother left, her father appears to be in a trance, seemingly incapable of even the slightest effort of will or emotion. Moon, in desperate need of some emotional support, turns to the supportive Duncan, who good-naturedly goes along with her experiments in magic until it becomes all too obvious that the magic is very, very real. Moon also finds an unexpected ally in Ms. Tanglemoth, the fearsome school librarian, who gives her one of the tools to achieve her quest.

Perhaps one of the most engaging aspects of the story is that it is about an otherwise normal teen who believes in magic, and that belief enables her to discover some very real magical power within herself. Moon is also likeable as her battles with what has happened to herself and her family are very normal and