

faced her greatest demons and won, even as she gives up the one thing most important to her.

The only place where the characterization of Marwen seems inconsistent is in the ending when, rather than live with the Prince and husband she loves, she stays in her Oldwife cottage to serve the people of her village. Yet, such a sacrifice is in line with the strong, independent character Bates has developed, who can indeed love both passionately and selflessly.

This trilogy is not to be missed by young adult *or* adult lovers of fantasy.

### ***Weet's Quest: An Exciting Dinosaur Adventure***

*Weet's Quest*. John Wilson. Napoleon, 1997. 161 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-929141-52-0.

John Wilson's first children's novel, *Weet*, is geared for youngsters who love stories about dinosaurs. However, it is also an exciting adventure that most preteens will enjoy. Like *Weet*, *Weet's Quest* will entrance the same varied group of readers.

*Weet's Quest* is set some months after the protagonists, Eric and Rose, with their dog Sally, have returned to modern times after travelling to the Late Cretaceous period in the previous adventure. They returned to their own time *prior* to their adventure in Weet's world. In *Weet's Quest*, the three return to Weet's world, this time after a terrifying car accident. This transitional device, which transports the protagonists to Weet's world, is initially effective. However, there are problems with this device. The question of how the protagonists could have survived the horrendous car accident that flung them into Weet's world is problematic. Another problem is that they always arrive back in our time *before* the accidents that propel them into Weet's time so they can avoid those accidents the second time, which just seems too neat.

However, the novel is an exciting read. The children meet Weet as he is on a quest to find his ancestors who live over the mountains, and go through many adventures with him. Eric and Rose are somewhat flat as characters, not developing at all. Eric's tendency to take control of every situation, even in a world where he is a visitor, is annoying at times. But Weet is an interesting character, and Wilson obviously had fun creating him and making him convincing. He is a dinosaur with human shape, but without the ability to change facial expressions or laugh, as his lizard-like exterior is not flexible enough. He is, however, similar enough in his interests and emotions to be likeable, so that the reader can really engage with this alien yet familiar youngster from another species.

Wilson's portrayal of the other dinosaurs is extremely accurate, using the most up-to-date facts about dinosaurs, and even bringing in convincing evidence that dinosaurs were, in fact, warm-blooded, a theory which is

beginning to be credited by serious scientists in the field. The setting is also very realistic for the time, and shows a very different landscape than what we know as Alberta and BC, including the gentle range of hills that would one day become the Rockies.

Overall, *Weet's Quest* is a fun read, based on good scholarship. It has some flaws, but none that seriously spoil this wonderful adventure set 65 million years ago.

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*Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek teaches English at Malaspina University College in BC. Her specialties include children's literature, particularly science fiction and fantasy.*

### A Scientific *Jeu d'Esprit*

*Life on Mars*. Donn Kushner. Illus. D.J. Knight. Childe Thursday, 1998. 103 pp. \$14.50 paper. ISBN 0-920459-45-5. May be ordered through Childe Thursday, 29 Sussex Ave., Toronto ON M5S 1J6, (416) 979-2544.

A scientist and author of several children's books, Donn Kushner has produced in *Life on Mars* a novel that is simultaneously a scientific *jeu d'esprit*, a social satire, and an anthropological allegory.

As a scientific game, *Life on Mars* explains how the Viking Landers sent from Earth failed to detect life on the Red Planet. Extrapolating from scientific evidence about harsh conditions on Mars, Kushner describes a hardy, hand-sized, mushroom-shaped race of intelligent beings whose heads contain algae that photosynthesizes oxygen. Hosting parasites that eat all biological traces they leave on the soil, Martians managed to evade detection and its consequent problems by simply staying out of range of the lander's cameras.

As a satire, the novel presents Martian culture as an amusing distortion of Earth's. After receiving television signals from Earth for two hours, the Martians developed games that re-enact a news broadcast, a football game, a cowboy movie, and a commercial. Not understanding what they saw, however, the Martians made their games peaceful mathematical contests, thus implicitly criticizing Earth's pervasive violence. Individual Martians, who adopt the identities of figures from the television broadcasts, are also vehicles for social satire. For example, the Martian adopting the identity of Washington, the former slave in the cowboy movie, is honoured by the Martians, who considered Washington to be the most accomplished and important soldier. Similarly, Sister Sarah, inspired by the movie's missionary, satirizes religious zealots: against all reason, she insists that the lander contains the Martian ruler, a godlike being whom his subjects have heard but never seen.