The Veil Weavers (Veil of Magic Series: Book 3)
by Maureen Bush

Day of the Cyclone (Disaster Strikes Series: #7)
by Penny Draper

Outcasts of River Falls
by Jacqueline Guest

Reviewed by Donna Gamache

The Veil Weavers by Calgary author Maureen Bush is the third book in the Veil of Magic trilogy, a fantasy series aimed at young readers aged 8 to 11. In the first two books, Josh, “almost twelve,” and his sister Maddy, aged eight, obtained an unusual ring, which enabled them to pass through a magic veil into a co-existing magical world in the Rocky Mountains. The ring actually belonged to a friendly giant named Keeper who lived in Castle Mountain in Banff National Park, but it had been used by a villainous troll called Gronvald to steal gold from the human world. In doing so, Gronvald had caused tears in the veil that separated the magic world from the human one. After several adventures the children managed to return the ring to Keeper and hoped that all would be well in the kingdom.

But now, in The Veil Weavers, Keeper sends a message to the children’s Calgary home via the “otter people” saying that Josh and Maddy are desperately needed back at Castle Mountain. The torn veil is not healing as expected, and magic is escaping into the human world. With it goes the strength and perhaps the very life of the magic world’s inhabitants. The two children, who both have some magical powers of their own, set off to solve the problem, though they fear they may not succeed. First they must visit the powerful and evil Gronvald, but when that fails, their only hope is to search for descendants of “the Ancient Ones” who had woven the veil long ago. Perhaps they can learn from them how to protect the magical world’s creatures.

Once again Josh and Maddy must face Gronvald, as well as other creatures such as Aleena, an untrustworthy water spirit, and the frightful ochre monster, who lives in the region known as the Paint Pots (bubbling mineral springs in Kootenay National Park, adjacent to Banff.)

Children with a yen for fantasy will enjoy the Veil of Magic series. They can find the settings on a map or check out the author’s Internet site, which includes a map of places the children visit: http://www.maureenbush.com/_book_theveilweavers/map.php

As an adult, I am especially pleased to see a fantasy series with a Canadian setting, including such spots as Castle Mountain, Marble Canyon, and the Paint Pots. The books also include details promoting respect for wildlife and the environment.

The Veil Weavers outlines some background material, so it could be read on its own, but most young readers would probably find it easier to read the three books in order. The two previous books in the series are The Nexus Ring and Crow Boy.
Although the Coteau Books website calls this book the conclusion of a trilogy, there is a hint on the final page that more adventures could still be planned. Young readers will hope this is the case.

*Day of the Cyclone* is the seventh novel in the entertaining and educational Disaster Strikes series, an historical series intended for ages 8–12. It places young protagonists in the midst of disasters that have occurred in various parts of Canada. Author Penny Draper is a bookseller and storyteller from Victoria, BC.

The disaster in *Day of the Cyclone* is the tornado that struck Regina on June 30, 1912, the deadliest tornado in Canadian history. More than 2500 people were left homeless by the tornado, which is usually classed as an F4. Twenty-eight people died, more than 200 were injured, and about 500 buildings were destroyed. Draper’s main characters are fictional, but many actual people are mentioned, and incidents of the tornado are skilfully worked into the narrative.

The main character is Ella Barclay, the only child of a well-to-do banker and his wife. Ella is bored with her life and feels constrained by her mother’s high standards of what is appropriate behaviour and dress for a young girl. As the story begins, she celebrates her thirteenth birthday and her best present is a Brownie camera, which she immediately starts to use. When she snaps a photo of a new student at school, Billy Forsythe, her life begins to change in an exciting way.

Billy had immigrated to Canada as a “Barnardo orphan” but, abused and overworked at the farm he was sent to, he has run away and recently wound up in Regina, where he is befriended by another down-on-his-luck immigrant named Jock. At school Billy is at first shunned, then bullied, but before long becomes Ella’s friend, until her parents order her to stay away from him and accuse him of being a thief. However, when the tornado hits – while the schoolchildren are picnicking at Wascana Lake – some rules have to be ignored.

Besides specific details of the devastation caused by the tornado, Draper manages to include geographical information about the Saskatchewan prairie and historical facts and people such as Nellie McClung and the Barnardo orphans, and an explanation of Remittance Men. Details of clothing will intrigue young readers, especially the girls’ swimming costume – a navy blue, short-sleeved top with a sailor collar, puffy bloomers, and long, black swimming stockings.

Themes include an emphasis on loyalty, honesty, hard work, and volunteerism. The way people come together in an emergency is clearly emphasized, as is the eventual conclusion that it is not one’s past but one’s future that is important. Ella gradually realizes that people are not always what they seem to be, including her own parents.

I highly recommend this book for young readers. It seems appropriate that it is published on the 100th anniversary of the tornado, and notes at the end include additional factual information about the event.

Those who enjoy it might want to check out previous books in the series, six of which were written by Penny Draper. All the stories are stand-alone novels, and most of them have been nominated for or won various awards.

*Outcasts of River Falls* by Jacqueline Guest is classed as a sequel to *Belle of Batoche*, but this novel actually begins about 16 years later. The connection is the Métis characters and their ill-treatment at the hands of the European settlers.

The story begins in 1901 with 14-year-old Kathryn Tourond arriving in Alberta on a train from Toronto. Kathryn’s mother had died when Kathryn was young, and she has spent much of her life at a convent boarding school. Now her father has died of consumption and, being “without resources,”
she has been sent to live with her aunt, Miss Belle Tourond, who lives near the town of Hopeful. Blond-haired and fair-skinned, Kathryn had expected to be met by a rich woman with a prosperous ranch. Instead she discovers that Aunt Belle is a dark-skinned, Native-looking woman who lives in River Falls, a small community of Métis squatters, and that her house is a small log cabin with no running water and an outhouse for a toilet.

Kathryn had been brought up with no knowledge of her past or her ethnic heritage, and no culinary skills. Her father, Belle’s brother, had been one of those who took part in the Métis uprising at Batoche in 1885. Afterwards, he had fled east where he was able to pass for white. Kathryn is aghast when she learns the truth and she resolves to return to Toronto and become a lawyer working for women’s rights. Instead she must learn skills she has never expected to need, and she learns about her heritage and the mistreatment of the Métis squatters – called Road Allowance people by the whites. She is aghast to learn that Métis men cannot vote because they don’t own land, that they can be driven off their land at any time and their houses burned, and that she, herself, will not be allowed to attend school in town because of her race.

Kathryn, a romantic at heart who loves stories of knights and dragons, is excited to discover that the Métis have their own hero, the Highwayman, who acts as a sort of Robin Hood righting some of the wrongs against the Métis. She determines to learn his identity, and is excited about her own chance for romantic encounters, too.

I enjoyed reading this book; it’s both entertaining and informative, though I found the sections dealing with the Highwayman, and the conclusion, bordering on fantasy. This is an important part of Canadian history, and I’d have preferred a more realistic version of the Métis’ plight.

I was also dismayed by the number of proofreading errors that were overlooked, particularly in the punctuation. Young readers may not notice these, but adults and teachers will. (A study guide for teachers is included on the Coteau Books website.) The book is classed as being for ages 8–12, but I felt the reading level, given the vocabulary, long sentence structure, and themes was more appropriate for ages 10–14.

Jacqueline Guest is a Métis writer from Alberta with more than a dozen books for young readers.

Donna Firby Gamache is a writer/retired teacher from MacGregor, Manitoba. Her newest work is Sarah: A New Beginning, a novel for children, loosely based on the coming of her great-grandparents to Canada in 1891.

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