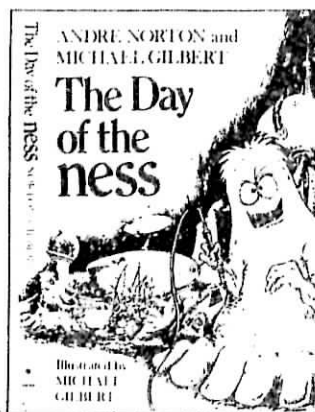


The story is skillfully developed. All three MacCubbins are memorable characters: stoical Pete, his commonsense resolute Granny, and his amiable but irresponsible dad. The family is given a reputation as shiftless and restless, which explains why their disappearance is barely noted by the community. It also justifies Pete's solitary nature. Since he's used to being rather socially unacceptable, he can adjust to his lonely fate without much emotion. The Reducer and its effects are described with a wealth of pseudoscientific detail that makes what the Disney Studios call "the plausible impossible," seem entirely believable. This plausibility is enhanced by Pete's adventures in the woodland among distinctly unanthropomorphized and untamable wild creatures.

The Lost Farm should be appreciated by readers up to at least a couple of years over the publisher's recommended age group. It falls so neatly between fantasy and science fiction the librarians might consider purchasing two copies, one for the XY shelf and one for the sf shelf.

—Frederick Patten



THE DAY OF THE NESS by Andre Norton and Michael Gilbert. Illus. by Michael Gilbert. New York: Walker & Co. 1975, \$5.95, 119 pp. ISBN: 0-8027-6195-X LC: 74-78111

Nine year-old Hal is the son of a government scientist investigating the wreck of a spaceship that crashed in the mountains a year earlier. Hal and his cat Susie are contacted by a timid, spidery outer-space creature, the Rav, who asks their help in freeing its people from the Ness. The Ness are horrid space slavers who have built a secret city in a hidden cave and have been preparing to conquer the world. The Rav and its companions — the Stalker, the Cluster, the Little Think Think — have been completely demoralized by the imprisonment of their leader, the Great Think Think, who the Ness have under guard in chains. Hal and Susie succeed in tricking the Ness jailers and freeing the Great Think Think. Together they turn the tables on the Ness in no time at all.

This mild adventure for the 8 to 10 age group is blurb-ed as "fast paced," though "brief" would be a better term. There's virtually no depth to it. It is most successful in its depiction (both verbal and visual) of the shy but friendly Rav and its associates, who are appealing without being cute and have a convincing aura of alienness. In contrast, the Ness are such bland caricatures of evil at its most cowardly and incompetent that even the youngest readers will be more contemptuous than frightened of them. In Mr. Gilbert's illustrations, they look rather like nasty relatives of *Sesame Street's* Cookie Monster, but not nearly so intelligent. The Rav's timidity—it contacts Hal because it's frightened by the larger adult humans—and the fear of the spaceship by the rural mountain folk are both used as a vehicle for a few words on self-reliance and on not distrusting strangers just because they look different.

The Day of the Ness should be enjoyed by the younger end of the recommended age spectrum.

—Frederick Patten

GRINNY by Nicholas Fisk.

Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc. 1974, \$4.95, 124 pp. ISBN: 0-8407-6409-X LC: 74-10274

The publisher does not list any recommended age group for this odd little novel. I suppose an eight year-old who can read adequately well would have little problem with it, but its subject matter at times seems directed more toward young teens. Of course, good fiction for young people should be enjoyable to any age group, for simple vocabulary and uncomplicated action cannot undermine a good story. Mr. Fisk's tale, however, is very much troubled by a rash of literary itches, all of various origin and purpose and all so bothersome that any reader of any age is going to have trouble settling down for a good read.

The story is told, in diary form, by Timothy Carpenter, who watches the security of his family and home breaking apart when Great Aunt Emma, who his younger sister nicknames 'Grinny' for her ever-smiling expression, comes to stay. Although none of the family has ever heard of Grinny before, the parents mysteriously accept and never question her after she stares at them intently and says "you remember me."

Only the children are suspicious of Grinny, and as time goes by they discover that the old lady is not only strange but probably not even human. Tim's sister, Beth, becomes intensely frightened after she witnesses Grinny fall and break her wrist, and Beth cries: "She's not a real person at all . . . there was no blood. The bones stuck out . . . they were made of shiny steel!" At last the children realize that it is up to them to save not only their family but the whole world, for Grinny is a scout for an alien invasion.

Now all this may seem like simple and entertaining fluff suitable for youngsters, since they can identify with the story's hero and heroine and enjoy the vicarious thrills of saving the world.

But Mr. Fisk is not content with a light fantasy. Like all too many children's books these days, it must be timely, meaningful, *relevant*. Therefore the author has seen fit to inject a number of ghastly dialogue-essays on how much better a family can get along when the parents provide a liberated type of home. To this end we are treated to a