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Rabbits on Mars

Jan Wahl
Kimberly Schamber, illustrator
Carolrhoda Books (January 2003)
Unknown $15.95 (32pp)
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These days it may seem like rabbits have a better chance than humans of ever landing on Mars, so perhaps the title of this fanciful children's book isn't all that preposterous. It's also just the kind of silly story destined to appeal to the target age group of four to seven.

The rabbits in the author's latest children's tale manage to build their own rocket to take them to the red planet in search of peace and carrots. The trio of bunnies is tired of dodging cars, trucks, and dogs on Earth as they search the countryside for food. Once on Mars, they find plenty of carrots, but also some very strange dogs that want to juggle them and use them as tennis balls. It's also very hot. Suddenly, Earth doesn't seem so bad after all. So the bunnies hatch a plan to teach the dogs how to dance the jitterbug, distracting the bizarre canines long enough for the rabbits to escape back to their rocket ship.

Wahl, the author of Elf Night, has more than 100 stories for children in his resume. He teams with first-time children's book illustrator Schamber, who combines her art with digital photography to create imaginative landscapes and characters. The cartoon bunnies appear in some scenes painted by Schamber, other scenes consisting mostly of photographed landscapes, and some painted scenes with photographed components, such as the can of noodle soup around which the bunnies hover before embarking on their space journey. Almost nightmarish, Mars is various shades of lava-red with cartoon green dogs and photographed lightning storms-and carrots.

With its combination of fantastic and real-life images, Schamber's art pairs well with Wahl's story. The vivid images and silly adventure are sure to excite fans of both bunnies and outer space.
SHARON FLESHER (June 15, 2003)

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