

Treasure of the Magical Mine Moppets

K.J. Blocker

Ron Oden, Illustrator

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Treasure of the Magical Mine Moppets by K. J. Blocker is a creative and entertaining story about Pappy, Tom, and Jimmy, three generations of one family who must band together to defeat an evil banker who is determined to take away their properties.

Tom is a farmer. He has worked to create a giant corn hybrid that will feed the world. He is behind on his loan payments, however, and Mr. Withers, the bank president, is determined to foreclose. Tom's father, Pappy, owned a salt mine, but Tom's never had a real relationship with him as he was often gone for long periods of time. After Tom's mother passed away when Tom was eighteen, his father disappeared for good. Now Pappy has returned, only to tell Tom that Mr. Withers is trying to have Pappy declared incompetent so that he can seize Pappy's salt mine, which is not only full of valuable rainbow-hued salt but also home to the Magical Mine Moppets.

The book has a clear plot and lovely descriptions of place. The history between Pappy and Mr. Withers sets the stage for the conflict. Tom, who resents his father for being absent from his childhood, struggles to find a better balance with his own son, Jimmy. However, he seems to fail to be there for his son more often than he succeeds, missing games and yelling at the child only to vent his own stress. The issues the characters have with one another are relatable, and the resolutions they come to are full of hope. The fantastical mine moppets serve as a wonderfully fun balance to the more serious issues, making the story one that is appealing, entertaining, and still meaningful.

The illustrations by Ron Oden are highly detailed black-and-white cartoon images that add a great deal to the characters, both human and moppet. The figures are full of personality and movement and bring the story to life.

The themes are somewhat adult for a book that appears to be intended more for children. The idea of magical creatures that live in a salt mine could certainly appeal to kids, but romantic jealousy, child abandonment, and the struggle to succeed are not issues that most young children have had to face. Jimmy is the only child in the book and he plays a small, though highly significant, role. The story does not share much of his perspective or his inner thoughts and feelings, which would have made the book far more relatable for young audiences.

Treasure of the Magical Mine Moppets is creative, well told, and beautifully illustrated. The plot is clear and easy to follow and the characters are memorable. The book is great for silly, imaginary fun and may be very helpful for families that struggle with their own relationships.

CATHERINE THURESON (August 31, 2017)

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