

Mathilda and the dragon

by Julian Burnside,
illus. by Bettina Guthridge
Little Ark Books, Nth Sydney, 1991. 32 pp
Reviewer: Iris Blythe

Here is a book that is certain to delight many children and often require the reader to 'read it again'. *Matilda and the Dragon* is a story told in rhyming verse. Most of the time the rhymes work well. There are just a few places where I found I had to re-read a line to keep the rhythm going or to maintain the sense. This is an imaginative story that begins,

A little girl, known as Matilda,
Took a trip that nearly killed her!

The scene is set for quite an amazing adventure. I am sure many children from the ages of four or five through to eight will debate with their parents and teachers whether these things really happened to Matilda or was she just dreaming.

The illustration accompanying these opening lines has Matilda, aged nine, sitting up in bed, wide eyed and surrounded by a variety of dolls and soft toys. The time is ten past twelve. We know how old Matilda is and the time, because Bettina Guthridge, the illustrator, has thoughtfully included on the chest of drawers beside Matilda's bed, a birthday card with a large figure nine on it and a clock with the hands showing ten past twelve.

Matilda can't sleep and so she gets out of bed and sets off down the street in her striped pyjamas. At the bus stop, she spies a brightly striped pole sticking out from a hole in the ground, just like one may see on the first floor of a fire station. Matilda goes down the pole. To her surprise, the pole ends and she finds she is falling, falling, falling. Fortunately, a trampoline breaks her fall and Matilda finds herself in a land where the fields are made of emeralds, and, what's more, there are toffee trees with chocolate leaves.

Matilda has tea with a dragon, visits his jewelled cave, has fun at Luna Park with her new found friend, and

plays with him in the wee small hours of the morning on St. Kilda beach (suggested by the inclusion of Luna Park in the background of the illustration). They then find themselves, having gone into a tunnel, deep beneath the sea. Adventures with large sea creatures follow.



On the second last page of the book, Matilda wakes to find her father beside her saying softly, 'Did you scream? You must have had a dreadful dream.' The clock on the chest of drawers now indicates that the time is twelve twenty-five. The concluding words of this delightful story are 'Matilda smiled, held out her hand, And guess what...' No, I'm not going to spoil the ending for you.

Bettina Guthridge has worked well with Julian Burnside, the author, to develop the implied aspects of the story and scene. There is clever use of light in a number of the illustrations. Because the story is set in the middle of the night, the illustrations may have been very dark. Bettina, however, has used various lights to highlight Matilda. There is the lamp over Matilda's bed on the opening page; the street lamp surrounds Matilda with light as she sets off down the street; another street light highlights the pole sticking up out of the hole in the ground; and the moon light shines over Luna Park.

Matilda and the Dragon is highly imaginative, fun to read and has illustrations that are a delight to study.

Captain Eco and the Fate of the Earth

by Jonathon Porritt
illus. by Ellis Nadler
Little Ark Books, Nth Sydney, 1991. 48 pp.
Reviewer: Iris Blythe

'Aha,' I thought as I picked up *Captain Eco and the Fate of the Earth*, 'a science fiction comic book.' On the front of this hard covered book, Captain Eco, whose head is a globe of the Earth and who wears red cape, is directing two children's attention to what is going on on planet Earth. A ship is going down, fish are gasping for breath, a forest is burning, a bomb has exploded and more. As Captain Eco and the children observe all that happening he says, 'Look Earthlings, together we must save our planet.'

The book is, in fact, non-fiction. It is not a storybook, but a book of facts about how, over history and at a quickening pace, humans have been and are continuing to destroy the Earth.

This large, 26 x 33cm book, uses alternate double pages to address different aspects of the problems of waste, destruction and pollution. For example **Cars, Cars, Cars** is followed by **Travelling Clean, travelling Green** and **Extinction is Forever by Going, Going ... Saved!**. The format of each page is comic book style with many small brightly coloured pictures, each one outlined by wiggly lines filling the page. Each picture is topped by a speech balloon. Most of the talk comes from Captain Eco as he preaches to the children about the problems on Earth. There are occasional comments and questions from each of the children.

Early in the book, Captain Eco's eco-computer chooses two more or less 'standard' Earthlings to help him with his mission to save the Earth. Michelle is aged 12, brain power - above average but lazy; distinguishing features - small round things growing out of her ears (the passport type illustration accompanying this portion of the text shows Michelle with headphones in her ears!). Clive is aged 9, interests - watching TV and reading comics; personality - easy going.