

spent discovering the secrets on each page is well rewarded with delight. The pale sepia backgrounds and watercolour illustrations suggest the enchanted, affectionate setting which Mrs. Ming's and Jeremiah's friendship creates.

The fourth book, *Mrs. Mortifee's mouse*, again presents an interesting, eccentric woman, this time in an unusual relationship with the mouse in her house. On each day of the week she finds the mouse in yet another spot and after ingenious attempts to trap him, brings home a lion who prefers to play with rather than to catch the mouse. Mrs. Mortifee capitulates, and the three become a happy household. I liked Mrs. Mortifee, her bizarre and comfortable wardrobe, and her well-equipped workbench, but I couldn't help feeling that the illustrations pushed the book over the edge into the "cute" category, or what adults think children like. The busyness and the pretty pastels of the illustrations remind me of a certain kind of greeting card, designed to inspire feelings of hazy warmth and nostalgia of a child's world much improved by memory—again, geared to adults, as are Mrs. Mortifee's obvious independence and abilities. This book is all directed outward. *When Jeremiah found Mrs. Ming and Effie*, on the other hand, seem almost to forget their audience in the concentration on the book's internal integrity, just as the relationships of the two pairs succeed because each pays genuine and generous attention to the other—the ideal of any relationship in a child's world. This concentrated attention is, of course, what captures both reader and listener; the charm lies in its happening seemingly accidentally.

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INVENTIVE THEMES USING ANIMALS AS MAIN PROTAGONISTS

Cyril the seagull. Patricia Lines. Illus. Kim LaFave. Harbour Publishing, Nightwood Editions, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88971-1;
Rockanimals. Vlasta van Kampen. Illus. Irene C. Eugen. Scholastic, 1991, 40 pp., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-73660-4; **The Hippos' wedding.** Lindsay Grater, Lester Publishing, 1991, 32 pp., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-89555-12-4.

The striking feature about these picture books is just how well the main protagonists work as animals faced with human situations. Children five to eight years of age should enjoy them.

Cyril the seagull, a first picture book for Patricia Lines, is a well-paced story written in a traditional way about a seagull who discovers, to his horror, that he suffers from sea-sickness. Not only does he endure teasings from his relatives, but also he endures pangs of hunger when, because of high waves, he is unable to scavenge for food, or receive scraps from the fisherman Joe in his ferry boat. One day, however, a fog engulfs the ocean and the land, and Joe's ferry threatens to crash on the rocks. The foghorn on the lighthouse fails to sound out the

warning. Cyril's problem becomes clear, as he battles his sea-sicknesses for the higher purpose of saving his friend. He flies to the lighthouse, and with incredible strength pushes away a piece of driftwood responsible for blocking the foghorn. Cyril becomes a hero, and he never gets seasick again.

The message of mind over matter prevails in this story. It has all the elements of a coming-of-age story—a youngster's reckoning with the world full of peril and danger. Children will relate to the growth of confidence Cyril musters when he is put to the test. But the text rather too pointedly describes a character who finds his own solution to a problem: "Without stopping to think of his own fear, he decided he must do something to help his friend." The text could have demonstrated its theme in a more subtle way, allowing children to draw conclusions for themselves. Also, Cyril's excessive physical strength when he wrenches free the driftwood from the foghorn becomes problematic. Embellished with human traits and emotions, Cyril, for most of the text, is convincing as a bird, and his weak stomach is touchingly plausible. His ability to become super-bird is not objectionable in his attempts to rescue Joe, but surprisingly, Cyril seems to become super-human. His heroic actions fail in the end to characterize him as a bird, which he is, after all.

Though the climax is flawed, the plot is strong and engaging. The language is gentle and fast-paced in the right places. The illustrations by award-winning Kim LaFave are whimsical and captivating, complementing the gentle mood and spirit of the text in a delightful way.

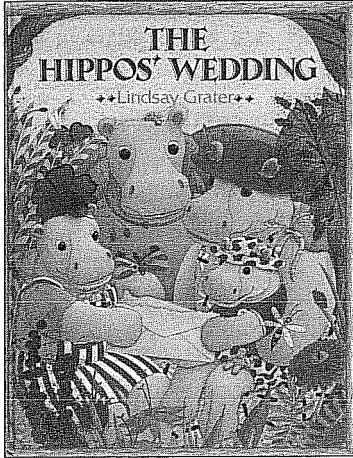
The Orchestranimals reappear in another episode of whacky adventure, this time involving the group as rock musicians. Flashy and zany, *Rockanimals*, by Vlasta van Kampen and Irene C. Eugen, is vibrant with dialogue and action that follows a plot involving resourceful musicians. When rock instruments are delivered to their hotel in London, instead of their classical instruments, panic ensues. They will have to cancel the show. Their disappointment is captured humorously by short, snappy sentences that characterize the style of the text: "The pig sobbed. The hippo blubbered. The beaver fainted.



The orchestra was in *big* trouble. No one slept very well that night." After a good night's rest, however, the animals decide that the show must go on; to their surprise, they win over the audience and triumph as the "all new Rockanimals." The animals are shown playing instruments that suit their form and personality. The octopus plays a synthesizer and keyboards, an elephant a "mean horn," a pig a trombone in which he can play "dirty." The illustrations by Vlasta van Kampen

are colourful, crammed with detail and confusion children will delight in for hours. The large print and layout invite reading aloud for youngsters, and draw attention to key words and phrases.

The style and tone of the text are completely different from *Cyril the seagull* with its quiet, lilting sentences, and traditional sentence structure. *Rockanimals* is loud. Verbs dominate the text: "Feet started tapping. Wings started flapping. Tails started wagging. Frowns changed to smiles." Although not a poem,



Rockanimals contains rhythm which is strong and jazzy—in perfect keeping with its theme of rock music. On occasion, however, the transitions are so quick and hectic, with its sparing of words, that the text tends to leave its reader behind. On the whole, however, *Rockanimals* treats its subject with great hilarity and fun.

The Hippos' wedding, written and illustrated by Lindsay Grater, may be the lengthiest of the three, but it is also the most gratifying and challenging for young readers. The theme is also about the use of one's inner resources in finding a solution to a problem. In *The Hippos' wedding*, an entire

family encounters difficulties when they travel through the jungle to reach the wedding of their cousin Flo. The Hippo family set out on their journey with beautiful store-bought presents for the newly-wed couple. But, one by one the presents are destroyed by the jungle. Their ill-fortune soon turns to joy, however, when they collect gifts anew from the jungle's bounty—acquisitions which charmingly reflect the presents they originally lost. The Hippos discover not only a jungle full of adventure and peril, but also a jungle that is full of beauty and co-operation.

The story is neatly polished, conveying much feeling, warmth, and gentle humour. Although characters do not develop exactly, they do continue to come to life. Grater tells readers what the hippos feel at appropriate times, and not just what happens to them. Vivid and exotic water-colour illustrations comprise one full page, while the handsomely bordered text comprises the other side of the page. Although it is a jungle setting that is illustrated, children will also recognize elements found in their own gardens: roses, caterpillars, and ants, for instance.

Though not a book about or even specifically for the environment, it, nevertheless, brings forth the beauties of nature and the surprises it holds.

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