

poteau téléphonique. Une lutte s'engage entre Virmaboul et la compagnie Dynamique Téléphone, au cours de laquelle les branches du sapin repoussent par magie, sont coupées, repoussent, sont recoupées... Pour se venger, Virmaboul emmêle les fils téléphoniques et les communications s'embrouillent.

Après cette lutte contre le progrès, Virmaboul et la compagnie de téléphone arrivent à une solution. La compagnie promet de laisser le sapin de Virmaboul comme il est, et offre au lutin un emploi au service des renseignements. Avec sa bosse des maths, Virmaboul apprend donc tous les numéros de téléphone du monde, qu'il donne aux clients. "Un employé modèle!" sauf les jours où il joue des tours: faux numéros à deux heures du matin, communications coupées, publicités enregistrées, etc.

Virmaboul a réussi à sauver son arbre à lui, en devenant un agent du progrès, donc dans ce contexte de la destruction des autres arbres des forêts. On pense au slogan anglais NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard : pas chez moi!): chacun pour soi, et tant pis pour les autres. Faut-il lui en vouloir d'être ainsi séduit par le monde moderne avec tout ce que cela implique de dégâts pour l'environnement? En cela, hélas, il est notre semblable, notre frère.

Les nombreux dessins, amusants et pleins de vie, conviennent parfaitement au texte, à une exception près. Un jeune lecteur a signalé une certaine incohérence en ce qui concerne la taille de Virmaboul: elle ne correspond pas toujours à celle indiquée dans le texte (à peine trente centimètres), et change d'un dessin à l'autre. Est-ce un défaut? Il est vrai que Rabelais se moque de la cohérence quand il parle de la taille de ses géants; mais beaucoup de lecteurs et de lectrices d'aujourd'hui – surtout les enfants – aiment pouvoir se faire une image mentale des personnages, valable pour tout le récit.

Bref, malgré quelques questions qu'on peut se poser, c'est un petit livre très agréable.

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## ECOLOGICAL INROADS

**The magical earth secrets.** Della Burford. Western Canada Wilderness Committee, 1990. 32 pp., \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895123-01-1; **Archibald and the crunch machine.** Jenny Nelson. Illus. Sarah Battersby. Annick Press, 1990. 39 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-114-2; **My first nature book.** Angela Wilkes. Stoddart, 1990. 48 pp., \$12.94 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2387-0.

Unanimity is difficult to attain in these troubled times; but if there is one issue on which all must agree (even those who pay lip service and little else to the cause), it is that of the urgent necessity of protecting our threatened world

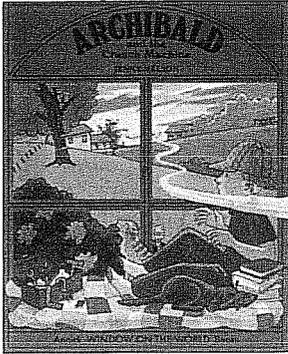
from its worst enemy: ourselves. It is one of the sadder phenomena of the 1990s that children relentlessly besieged on every side with predictions of doom and destruction all too often see the future as irremediably bleak and themselves as helpless victims in the midst of polluted earth, air and water, and of unstoppable avalanches of garbage. But children can readily understand the more obvious aspects of the world-wide crisis caused by human greed and carelessness. Most current curricula places the previously neglected study of the environment in its proper place: uppermost in emphasis. It follows that students of all ages and reading ability need materials to support new and intensive Environmental Studies.

One recent entry in the important vein of consciousness-raising is *My first nature book*, a brilliantly colourful, oversized picture introduction to some of the innumerable wonders of nature. The intention of this handsome work is to promote intelligent observation of what lies all around (but is so often and so easily taken for granted), with the proviso that investigation should not entail destruction. The strong suggestion is that the student should look at these buds, these plants, these small creatures, even at their own well-loved pets, that they should learn from them, but that they should *not* bring tiny captives home to languish and die in pickle jars. Easily-followed, detailed instruction for junior museum-makers and gardeners, with accompanying meticulous step-by-step illustrations, should inspire all kinds of nature study and collection.

*The magical earth secrets*, another bright picture book, also suggests practical ways in which children can and should help to protect the environment, but this treatment of the "green" message is couched in story form, with mythical hero, Rainbow Wings, the eagle child. The intention is golden, but the message, no doubt heartfelt, is delivered in somewhat leaden prose. The story line is simple: Rainbow Birds wants everyone to be one with the earth, to recycle garbage, to use alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power, to use products that are friendly to plants and animals, to use fewer cars and to share rides. Although of undeniable importance, this message is awkwardly expressed in semi-mythic style, a style ill-suited to ultramundane content dealing with garbage and pesticides. It does not require the presence of a magic bird to explain the inadvisability of pouring poisons into drains that empty into the common water supply.

The book is brilliantly, almost psychedelically colourful, but certain pages in which the text is superimposed on vivid colour are rather difficult to read. Furthermore, the message is clumsily and often ungrammatically expressed. The threat to the planet is no fairy-tale ogre, and a straightforward approach to problems about which there is no mystery, let alone magic, would surely be more appropriate.

*Archibald and the crunch machine*, an easy-to-read story that early independent readers will enjoy, falls into the category of feet-on-the-ground over-



simplification. Archibald Egbert Binkle, nine years old, notices a noxious smell and tracks in to a brown, sludgy slime oozing from the town dump. He scoops up some of the horrible gunk, and forces it upon the attention of the Mayor and Councilors, but, in convincingly lifelike fashion, they insist, holding their noses, that "We cannot be disturbed." The problem can't wait. Inventive Archibald constructs a fierce-faced Crunch Machine, "Like a very fat elephant with ferocious teeth," and sets it to work eating up the garbage at the dump. No sooner is the dump cleaned up, however, than the garbage

problem, again in lifelike fashion, creeps back bag by bag.

It isn't a Crunch Machine, however clever, that will solve the problem. Cure of the garbage dilemma will require sorting, reusing, recycling and composting, and this will have to be done by people. Prodded by Archibald, the community as one, joyfully gets into the act, and all is well again. If only it were really that simple.

These three books, in their disparate ways, work with others like them toward the same necessary end: that of helping to change the ways in which all of us, and children in particular, look at and treat our irreplaceable big blue marble in space.

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## ANIMALS ON THE MOVE

**Wolf Island.** Celia Godkin. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1989. Unpag., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88902-753-6; **The flying ark.** Carolyn Jackson. Illus. Graham Bardell. Oxford University Press, 1990. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-54037-7.

Parents and teachers looking for a book to explain graphically but simply why people should be concerned about disturbing the balance of nature will find *Wolf Island*, written and illustrated by Celia Godkin, an excellent choice.

Basing her story on an actual happening in Northern Ontario, the author relates the ecological damage that occurs when a family of wolves, at the top of the food chain, deserts an island and moves across to the mainland. At first it appears the wolves' leaving ensures the safety and well-being of the deer, but as time passes and the story develops, it becomes clear that all the animals on the island are interdependent, and once the chief predator has gone, all other living things, including the plants, suffers. The island wolves fare no bet-