

meets this troll while looking for his Frisbee but rather than recoil in fear he asks the troll why he scares kids. The troll, he finds out, is stinky but harmless and homesick.

The unexpected prowls in every one of these stories. Any reader, boy or girl, between seven and eleven would enjoy this collection.

**Paul Lumsden** is the father of two boys. In his spare time he is teaching assistant and Ph.D. candidate writing his dissertation at the University of Alberta.

**Murphy the Rat: Tales of Tough City.** Paul Duggan. Illus. Daniel Sylvestre. Red Deer College Press, 1992. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-084-9.

*Murphy the Rat*, says the advertisement, is intended “to revive the spirit and fun of Halloween year-round.” Those who find that one night of Halloween a year is enough may have trouble warming up to this book. It is advertised for “ages four and up,” but both the poems and illustrations seem too sophisticated to make this a reasonable guideline. Older children and adults, however, might find a good deal to like here.

The poet, as a former high school teacher, may come by his knowledge of the “tough city” honestly. Those who can appreciate a leaner, meaner “Alligator Pie” will find Duggan’s black humour and clever word-play effective. Skeletons and ghouls rub shoulders with rats, sewers, and juvenile delinquents. Typical of his humour is “The reason skeletons don’t wear clothes”:

The reason skeletons don’t wear clothes?  
Socks won’t stay on bony toes,  
And underwear just sags and slumps  
When hanging from their bony rumps.  
Shirts slide off their bony backs,  
And pants drop like potato sacks;  
And since they can’t wear fancy stuff,  
Skeletons walk ‘round in the buff.

Our girls agreed that the book was “too scary for little kids”, although they laughed at a couple of the poems. The illustrations are strikingly gruesome and complement the darkly off-the-wall nature of the text.

**Kevin McCabe** teaches Classics at Brock University. With the help of daughters Cathy and Julie and wife Sue, he also reviews children’s books.