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Whatever

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Billy (who seems to be about four) can be very difficult to please, his response to most things, however splendid, being 'Whatever'. His dad's attempts to engage him with 'the curliest trumpet', 'the bounciest castle' and so on elicit the well-worn teenage response. Until, that is, he is introduced to 'the hungriest tiger', which swallows him up. His father is seen leading the tiger off over the last few pages, Billy protesting from inside. 'Whatever' is his dad's response?

The book is self-consciously trying to be stylish. The bright yellow cover instantly attracts attention, with its Mr Bennish figure of Billy and its lower-case lettering. Inside, the stylised images use a limited colour palette on each page, the whole given a '70s feel with strong black outlines and some wonderfully exuberant graphics with some beautifully witty touches. Billy's dad maintains a cheerful front almost to the end, but Billy's expression is by turns anxious, mystified, cross, jangled, surprised, despite his seemingly nonchalant 'whatever'.

I found this book hard to fathom - it's the opposite of David McKee's *Not Now Bernard* in that Billy's father cheerfully carries on offering interesting things to see despite the uninterested response, but then tries to scare him in exasperation? What message would a young reader get about dads from this book? That they want to scare you? That you've got to enjoy what they want you to? Or is it really for parents, reminding us that many of the improving things we offer for children's entertainment are not within their grasp? Or that the cult of child-pleasing is a self-defeating one? Or that parents are in the end all-powerful, and can feed their children to the lions one way or another at will? To be used with care. I loved the end papers though. AG

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