



Animal Tales

Books Reviewed:

[Animal Tales](#) [1]

Issue:

[188](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

It is some time since we had a new collection of stories from Terry Jones and Michael Foreman whose partnership goes back nearly 30 years. This collection has crept out as one of a three book publication by Pavilion, which also includes new editions of their **Incredible Stories** and **Fairy Tales**. It has 12 stories and almost as many separate miniature portraits of species of animals that you are never likely to meet and, in some cases, would decide to avoid, the saddest and most disgusting of which is the Bottom Feeding Warthog, who does his eating and defecating at the wrong ends. Mostly with a surreal edge, the stories vary in mood from those that are mainly for laughs, to the poignant and thought provoking. Yes, there are the reminders of Python. No-one who has seen the crowd scenes in the **Life of Brian** will fail to recognise the same imagination at work as the Golden Snail of Surbiton tries to galvanise the other snails for an attack on the Robber Ants, and snail after snail opts in preference for 'a bit of ignominy?'. But there are echoes, too, of Aesop, Kipling, and Brer Rabbit, and at least one story, whose hero is only incidentally a badger, that seems to belong in Jones's post-war childhood, as a shop-keeper's fear of heights is exploited by child customers for their own amusement, little realising that their gentle victim is a war hero. All these stories will read aloud well and will amaze, delight, occasionally disgust, and challenge children. Possibly, too, some of the jokes will go over their heads: what will they make of the Money Salamanders, whose discarded wriggling tails distract cheated investors and financial regulators while they escape to a tax haven? The production is not as glossy as Pavilion gave this partnership in the past. There are fewer illustrations to the page and, comparing them to **Fairy Tales**, Foreman here has gone for a style closer to a strip cartoon, in which his characters are rounder and his colours brighter, both less evocative and less disturbing. However, the three books together give an opportunity for a new generation of children to meet a storyteller and an illustrator whose best work deserves the accolade of modern classic.

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[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/animal-tales>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/188>

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