

Book

Meant for adults only

The Difficulty of Living on Other Planets
by Dennis Lee
Macmillan of Canada

review by P. J. Groeneveldt

Dennis Lee is a familiar name to those who are called upon to read to children at bedtime. His *Alligator Pie* is a mainstay of many elementary-school libraries. *The Difficulty of Living on Other Planets* is intended for adults. Fortunately, this does not mean that the poems inside are full of sex or four-letter words. These poems merely have more complex images. They still have that lunacy one would expect.

In the poem "A Trip to the Hardware" we are offered one man's views on annoying sales clerks who insist on suggestive selling.

Ottawa. / I met a man who sang tra-la. / what did you do with the country today. / 'I gave it away to the U.S.A.'" That would be most interesting — free-trade discourse on the playground.

Although Lee intends this book for adults, he maintains his simple rhyme schemes and usual tambic pentameter. He even carries over a character from his children's books, the boy Nicholas Knock.

Some of the poems are very long and have little to offer beyond the expectation of a rhyming word every two lines. Often the length of these longer poems is a shock, as they often seem to be over by the end of the first page. Flip the page and — surprise! There's more to this!

The poem "Suzie Saw the Blue Balloon" is worth the entire purchase price of the book.

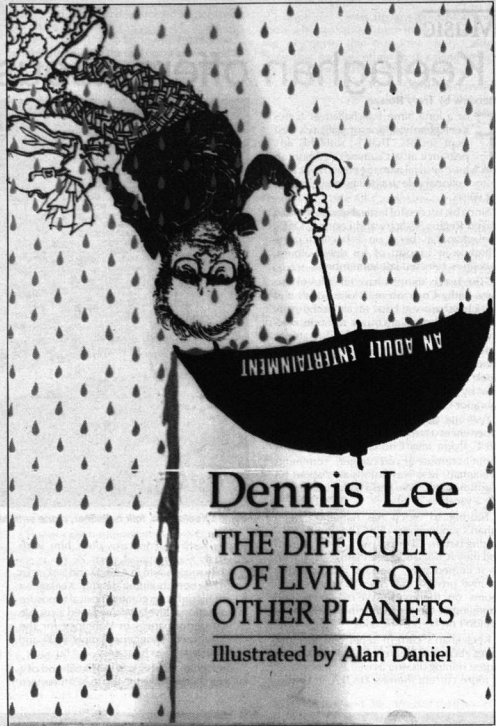
When I went up to Ottawa,
I met a man who sang tra-la.
"What did you do with the country
today?"
"I gave it away to the U.S.A."

("I only wanted one lightbulb...").

Many of the poems would be equally at home on your young nephew's bookshelf. The poem "Forty Mermaids", one of love, could easily be of love for a parent rather than a mate. The person in the poem is tempted by the offer of dining with forty mermaids. His answer — "I think I'd stay / An hour or two; / And then I'd swim / Back home to you."

One that I would like to see as a ten-year old's skipping rhyme is a political jab. "When I Went Up to Ottawa". "When I went up to

In it, a four-year old girl sees a balloon that has escaped its owner. This sight opens up an entire new world of feeling within the girl. Her first sense of loss (even though it isn't her balloon), of unfairness, and of leaving. Her only way to deal with this is to cry. Her parents assume she's crying out of covetousness for the unclaimed balloon and probably whack her one, although we don't see them doing this in the poem. No one understands kids as well as Dennis Lee does. And although this effort is commendable, perhaps he should go back to what he does best, which is to write poetry for children.



Dennis Lee
THE DIFFICULTY
OF LIVING ON
OTHER PLANETS
Illustrated by Alan Daniel

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