

Matilda, the Algonquin Cat

Leslie Martini

Massimo Mongiardo, Illustrator

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This children's book is imbued with enough sassy depictions of cat mischief and historical details to also interest an adult audience.

What the beloved Eloise books are to the Plaza Hotel, *Matilda, the Algonquin Cat* is to the Algonquin Hotel, a legendary Manhattan landmark. Leslie Martini's winsome text encapsulates the world of the real-life felines that have lived at this posh address since 1917. As the book notes in a short history of the literary landmark appended to Matilda's fictionalized tale, there have been eleven cats in residence—the males all named Hamlet and the females all named Matilda—the lot of which have been as tenderly pampered as the hotel's guests and visitors.

This witty children's book relates the world of the regal, fluffy, and somewhat lazy cat heroine, the current Matilda. She is frequently seen hard at work napping in various corners of the hotel, sprawled on computer keyboards, luggage carts, baskets of fresh laundry—in short, wherever she pleases. As any cat lover knows full well, cats are independent and self-indulgent creatures who rule their domains and owners, and Matilda is feline royalty in a city that does not lack in its own self-adulation:

I am Matilda. I live in the Algonquin Hotel, which is in the center of New York City, which is in the center of the world, which means that I am in the center of it all.

The author successfully employs clever and simple vocabulary to make this book appealing for young people, but it is also imbued with enough sassy depictions of cat mischief and historical details to interest an adult audience.

Illustrator Massimo Mongiardo perfectly captures Matilda's grandiosity and humor with his elegant pen-and-ink illustrations, overlaid with tan wash and delicate pink accents. It is a hoot to see Matilda being slightly naughty, whether it's lapping up champagne when hotel manager Francine turns her back, or interrupting concierge Sam when he recommends New York City attractions to hotel guests (Matilda favors the aquarium).

There are short references to the storied hotel's many famous guests, including actor John Barrymore and the many writers and editors who formed the influential Algonquin Round Table and who helped found *New Yorker* magazine, but the book is primarily a vehicle for Matilda's daily antics and her duties at her annual birthday party and feline fashion parade, a fund raiser for local animal shelters.

This book is a great souvenir from any stay at the Algonquin, and would also be a pleasing addition to any collection of books about cats, New York City, or historical and literary landmarks.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January 30, 2017)

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