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Juvenile Fiction

The Barefoot Book of Giants, Ghosts and Goblins
John Matthews, editor
Giovanni Manna, illustrator
Barefoot Books
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Once upon a time many of today's adults enjoyed listening to bedtime stories involving magic and unusual creatures such as giants and ghosts. The tales often allowed a smaller or weaker being to outwit or overcome its larger, stronger rival—a theme children love. In this new collection, Matthews retells traditional, but often unfamiliar, stories that are guaranteed to keep bedroom lights burning.

In stories around the globe good triumphs over evil, right over might, and wit over brute force. There is the Siberian tale of Little Oonyani, a baby who survives a raid on his village by Korendo, a demon from the Far North. Korendo has snatched everyone but an old woman and the infant. When Oonyani is a young man, he makes a set of wings and flies off saying, "Come out, come out, Korendo, I've come to take revenge on you." Korendo is willing to fight the "mere boy," but not until after he has finished his breakfast.

From Ireland comes a story of a time when the country was filled with giants who pummeled and punched each other whenever they met. One, Fionn mac Cool, "had the ability to see what was going on anywhere in the world. All he had to do was put his left thumb into his mouth it and suck it—and at once he knew what had happened, what was happening and what would happen."

A West African tale begins "There was once a man who had a very good opinion of himself." He meets a real rival—a giant "so big that his shadow was at least a mile long. He could eat ten elephants at a time and his voice sounded like a tornado."

Matthews, who lives in Oxford, England, is a former librarian, teacher, and author of books on Arthurian legends and Celtic mythology. This collection includes stories from Australia, Ireland, China, West Africa, the Eskimos, the Cheyenne, Scotland and Scandinavia.

The book's charm is also due to its illustrations. Manna, of Italy, has twelve picture

books to his credit and has won prizes in international exhibitions. His folksy, often humorous watercolor and china ink illustrations are rich in color and often humorous. Each double page has a clever and decorative border design that relates to the story's origin.

This is a collection that deserves to live "happily ever after" among the classics.

Linda Salisbury