

The Book of Beasts, Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh

[NEIL COOPER](#)

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Star rating: ****

"Where's the beast?" murmured the little voice from the front stalls as the Prime Minister knocked on young Lionel's door to anoint him with a kingdom far bigger than the toy-box which already fires the little boy's imagination. With great power, though, comes even greater responsibility, as Lionel learns when he unwittingly unleashes a red dragon into his empire.

This comes from curiosity as he flips through the pages of a dusty old library book, where the most exotic breeds lie in wait. What at first appears cute, however, soon gobbles up the local football team, the politicians debating how to deal with the national crisis - and even the occupants of the local orphanage. Only the allure of the Book itself can save the nation.

Catherine Wheels' fun-size adaptation of Railway Children author Edith Nesbit's charming rites-of-passage yarn takes what could be potentially unwieldy material and lets flights of fancy run wild. Without recourse to any of the big-screen special effects of Jumanji, a film which similarly unleashed a big-city jungle into the world, all this is achieved through subliminal hints made flesh out of bits of material, lighting changes and the sheer story-telling charm of the trio of performers.

As Ian Cameron and Gill Robertson double up as narrators, nurses and uncharacteristically cowardly creatures in Jo Timmins's bright-eyed production, Scott Turnbull makes for a heroic man-boy as Lionel. With the whole shebang pulsed along by David Trouton's jaunty piano processions, the power of the show comes through its non-literal interpretation of the story. "That's magic," sums up a voice from behind. And it was.

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