

Dinosaur Summer Short Guide

Dinosaur Summer by Greg Bear

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Overview

Many science fiction novels written for adults are crossover books that appeal to young readers who enjoy imaginative tales of exotic adventure.

Bear has written many such books, but *Dinosaur Summer* is written specifically for the same young adult market as the book that inspired it, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912; see separate entry, Vol. 4). Both novels appeal to adults as well as their intended young adult readers. In *Dinosaur Summer*, Bear treats *The Lost World* as if it were an historical document, with the characters in the earlier book being real people whose adventures on an isolated plateau in South America really happened.

In Bear's novel, the discovery of dinosaurs was sensational news in 1912, but by the late 1940s interest in them has waned almost to the point of public indifference. Lothar Gluck's *Dinosaur Circus*, one of the last remaining circuses with dinosaurs, has been losing money for years, and Lothar Gluck decides to close it down.

Gluck rejects a good offer by Ringling Brothers to purchase his dinosaurs, instead deciding to send them back to their original habitat, the plateau of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. National Geographic hires free-lance adventurer Anthony Belzoni to cover the return of the dinosaurs to their wild habitat.

Since Belzoni is primarily a photographer, he invites his bookish son Peter to come along to make a written record of their journey. The adventure of a lifetime obviously lies ahead. Not only are the dinosaurs unpredictable beasts bound to cause trouble, but the men whom the adventurers encounter possess their own ferocity and are equally dangerous.

About the Author

Greg Bear was born in San Diego, California on August 20, 1951. He grew up in many different areas of the world because his father was a Navy man who served assignments in Japan and the Philippines, as well as postings to naval bases on the Gulf Coast, East Coast, and West Coast of the mainland United States. His childhood experiences in diverse lands may account for the sensitivity to different cultures displayed in his fiction. It is difficult for young children to make friends when moving about frequently, and Bear's passion for reading may have its origin in lonely hours when he was young. He is an eclectic reader of science, history, and fiction.

His ambition to be a writer seems to have begun early, perhaps when he was eight years old, and Bear was writing in hopes of publication by the time he was a teenager. This precocious feat was achieved at fifteen when he sold a short story to Famous Science Fiction. Despite his early good fortune Bear, like many young writers, found it difficult to publish other works; his second professional publication did not appear until he was in his early twenties, but he attracted critical attention as one of science fiction's most promising young talents.

In the years since he has retained the respect of critics with his taut narratives and imaginative settings.

To supplement his income as a novelist, Bear worked as a journalist, contributing to Southern California newspapers during the 1970s and early 1980s. Bear is widely admired by his science fiction peers, and he has served in various posts for the Science Fiction Writers of America, including president from 1988 to 1990. The Science Fiction Writers of America have given Bear three Nebula awards: for best 1983 novella, *Hardfought* (1983; see separate entry, Vol. 9); for best novelette, "Blood Music" (1983; see separate entry, Vol. 9); and for best short story, "Tangents" (1986; see separate entry, Vol. 9). The World Science Fiction Convention has twice given Bear its annual Hugo award: for best 1984 novelette, "Blood Music" and for best 1987 short story, "Tangents."

In 1983 he married a second time to Astrid Anderson, daughter of science fiction author Poul Anderson, and they have a son Erik and a daughter Alexandra.



Characters

Peter's life is already complicated at the start of *Dinosaur Summer*. His father is a short-tempered alcoholic: "Anthony was often an angry man; it was one of the reasons Peter's mother had left him. Left them."

His mother has moved away and has many excuses for not having Peter live with her. It is no wonder that Peter feels abandoned and that he resents his father's wayward behavior: "there had been times when relying on Anthony was like leaning on the wind." Furthermore, his father, Anthony, leads a peripatetic life, moving his son and himself from place to place as freelance photography jobs arise; they are usually poor, living in run-down apartments.

Although "Alcohol was a puzzle" to Peter, it plays a significant part in his life; his father's alcoholism dooming many a promising venture.

Out of this unpromising situation arises the adventure of a lifetime, one that Peter will talk about for many years, just as his adult companions remember their one-time forays into El Grande's lost world. Peter begins the novel feeling helpless and like a loser; he believes his parents care little for him—and indeed his mother's painfully obvious neglect and his father's decision to put drinking and adventure ahead of Peter provide ample evidence to support his view.

An unlikely hero because of his tendency to pity himself, Peter will discover in himself resourcefulness he had not realized he was acquiring during all his years of wandering hither and yon with his father. He also discovers that by bearing his burdens quietly and by applying himself to work, the grownups around him will appreciate him and repay his hard work with respect and even friendship.

Among the figures is Ray Harryhausen, and he represents the risks Bear is willing to take in order to create a richly characterized novel with a completely coherent world, because Harryhausen is not only a real-life historical figure, but he is still alive. In fact, he has read *Dinosaur Summer*. Other historical figures appear in *Dinosaur Summer*, including Cooper, O'Brien, and Schoedsack, each a figure from the real-life production of motion pictures. But it is the character of Harryhausen, his prominence in Peter's adventures, and the potential for the real Ray Harryhausen to say, "That's not me. I wouldn't do that," that illustrates how willing Bear is to take chances. That the Harryhausen in *Dinosaur Summer* closely resembles the real-life man is remarkable; that Harryhausen himself says that he saw himself "taking a vicarious and wonderful adventure" is testimony to how well Bear captured the man in his prose.

Setting

Dinosaur Summer has four major settings: Gluck's circus, a freighter, a river in Venezuela, and El Grande—the plateau of the lost world. Much of the novel's suspense derives from the anticipation it generates in the reader for the delayed appearance of El Grande. Circus Lothar whets the appetite for adventure by presenting the dinosaurs and then depicting a frightening show in which the venator Dagger threatens to break out of its cage.

The danger and the suspense increase as the narrative leaves the circus for the long journey to El Grande. The dinosaur cages on the cramped freighter leave little room for people to move around them, and great care must be taken near the predators. One dinosaur dies from the unhealthy conditions, a foreshadowing of what is to come. Returning the animals to their original environment seems a good idea in theory but could actually harm or kill them in reality since they are long-removed from the unforgiving severities of life in the lost world.

The Orinoco River introduces additional elements of danger beyond the risks arising from the wild and inhospitable river itself; the greed and ambition of men now threaten the expedition. Venezuela's politics are in turmoil, with the army near El Grande ignoring orders from its government and basically operating as a law unto itself. Military leaders fear the possible reopening of El Grande because an Indian who braves the plateau and returns alive could become a unifying leader for local Indian tribes that resent the control asserted by the army.

Someone tries to burn the transport boats; men with guns are menacing figures at every turn; the dinosaurs fit very ill into human plans, doing what their wild instincts prompt them to; and death and catastrophe seem very close.

El Grande is the setting for the second Book of Dinosaur Summer. The plateau has been altered by earthquakes since Arthur Conan Doyle described it, allowing species to mix that had before been kept separated by impassable chasms, and competition among the species is now ravaging the wildlife. Peter and his companions are eyewitnesses to the inexorable forces of natural selection as they wreck havoc on the old order of El Grande, and they all become mere snacks and inconveniences for the beasts of the lost world. Throughout the adventure on the dinosaur-thronged plateau, Bear retains his telling mastery of fine detail, often calling attention to small elements of the vast lost world which not only give his depictions depth and subtlety but remind us that even the least-noticeable animals and plants are as important as the imposing giants that command attention.



Social Concerns

Throughout *Dinosaur Summer* is a consciousness of the importance of living things, and there is an environmentalist undercurrent to the novel's events: "Lots of plants and small animals here come from the tepuis, particularly from El Grande," the animal trainer Shellabarger said. "Bugs, flowers, orchids—hardwoods—nuts no white man's ever tasted. Worth a hell of a lot more than gold. Someday, somebody's going to see the value."

Although the plot of *Dinosaur Summer* emphasizes the doings of spectacularly large animals, Peter, the son of the man photographing the dinosaurs' release into the wild, pointedly notes the many interesting small creatures around him as he explores the rain forest of Venezuela: He had seen so many different kinds of insects since the journey began, and at least two dozen varieties of ants, enough for a whole university full of professors to study—yet to him, and the people who wrote about the plateau, El Grande had always been a land of dinosaurs and other big, ancient creatures suitable for newsreels and circuses. Trophies. How narrow a view! The little things were important, too—and perhaps just as strange and isolated as the dinosaurs.

It is fitting that a tale about trying to return captive animals to the wilderness from where they came should carry with it a message about the importance of all living things and of their potential value to humanity. The idea is not examined in detail in the novel, but it makes it plain that the forest is rich in life and that its preservation is important.

How humans treat animals is another social idea in *Dinosaur Summer*. The circus owner seems sorry for having used captive dinosaurs to entertain people, and he feels a moral obligation to return them to the place where he originally took them captive. Peter learns from an animal trainer that there are right ways and wrong ways to treat creatures. On the other hand, Bear strikes a pessimistic note with his depiction of how most people regard the dinosaurs; there is little concern for their welfare. Indeed, most people in the novel are bored with dinosaurs and do not care about their welfare.

Bear offers a hard edge to his view of endangered species. Certainly, human beings have contributed to the decline of many wild species, but he notes that nature is also ruthless in the way it treats creatures. The earthquakes common to El Grande have in recent years broken its surface, creating land bridges among previously separate areas of the plateau. This has allowed the death eagle to encroach into new territories where it is wiping out the other predators.

Extinction is at hand from the natural world, as well from humanity's mismanagement of the wildlife.



Social Sensitivity

"Lots of plants and small animals here come from the tepuis, particularly from El Grande," Shellabarger said. "Bugs, flowers, orchids —hardwoods—nuts no white man's ever tasted. Worth a hell of a lot more than gold. Someday, somebody's going to see the value."

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Techniques

Dinosaur Summer fleshes out the important characters, explains why the dinosaurs were captured and why they are to be returned to El Grande, and establishes how very dire the peril is for anyone trapped unarmed on El Grande. Book Two is the adventure that one has been anticipating from the moment Peter realizes that he is to accompany the dinosaurs back to Venezuela.

Book Two takes place on El Grande. The plateau has been broken up by earthquakes since Arthur Conan Doyle described it, mixing species that had before been kept separated by impassable chasms, and competition among the species is taking a terrible toll on the wildlife. Peter and his companions witness natural selection wreaking its inexorable logic on El Grande, and he and they become mere snacks and inconveniences for the beasts of the lost world.

Throughout their adventure, Bear retains his keen understanding of detail, often calling attention to the small elements of the vast lost world, not only giving his depiction depth, but reminding us that small animals and plants are as important as the imposing giants.

Bear outdoes himself with his vivid descriptions of his characters' experiences.

For instance, "The sun seemed to actively hate him; its brightness and heat lay on his head like a hot brick" is a sharply observed sentence that uses metaphorical language (the "hot brick") to capture the essence of Peter's experience during the unloading of the Libertad. In another striking sentence, Bear captures the frightful menace of the venator Dagger: "The sun caught the animal's eyes like twin arcs on a welding torch; he lowered his head and the eyes became pits of night." The description not only conveys the danger in the giant predator, it also generates suspense.

The descriptions of Dinosaur Summer are perhaps at their best when Bear lets his imagination loose on the plateau of El Grande. Numerous ancient animals are wonderfully presented, with the communisaurs, doglike reptiles, and other creatures made memorable by sharp, to-the-point descriptions. Indeed, the amazing creatures given life by Bear's words may be what lingers with readers after they have read Dinosaur Summer. Note how he presents a fearsome creature much talked about by the novel's characters before Peter actually sees one: The death eagle was beautiful. Its eyes and face seemed almost friendly, with that feathery sunburst focusing sound back to its flapless ears, its beady-eyed expression coldly quizzical. Its yellow legs were as big across as trees. The startling fan of feathers spread at least seven feet wide.

Standing erect, weighing in at four or five tons, its black crown towered twenty-five feet above the forest floor. The body feathers seemed black as smoke in the gloom, but in the sun they would glitter like jewels, like a peacock's fan. This was swift death wrapped in glory, hypnotic, the kind of death that could enjoy a bath in honey-colored ants, a loony lovely end to everything.



Beautiful and frightening all at once, this great creation by itself makes Dinosaur Summer worth reading. Yet the death eagle is but one of many wonders that Bear brings to life.

Much of the novel's suspense derives from the anticipation it generates for the lost world of El Grande. In Book One, the circus whets the appetite for adventure by presenting the animals and by depicting a frightening show in which the venator Dagger threatens to break out of its cage. As the narrative journeys from the circus to El Grande, the danger increases. On the cramped freighter, the dinosaur cages leave little room for people to move around them, and great care must be taken near the predators.

One dinosaur dies from the unhealthy conditions, a foreshadowing of what is to come.

Returning the animals to their original habitat sound like a good idea, but in reality it could kill them.

Literary Qualities

Dinosaur Summer is two adventure stories in one novel, with the first story in Book One being told in order to set up the second story in Book Two. Book One takes Peter and his father from their dreary apartment to the entry to El Grande. It fleshes out the important characters, explains why the dinosaurs were captured, why they are to be returned to El Grande, and establishes how dire the peril is for anyone trapped unarmed on El Grande. Book Two is the adventure that the reader has been anticipating from the moment Peter realizes that he is to accompany the dinosaurs back to Venezuela.

Bear provides vivid descriptions of his characters' experiences. For instance, "The sun seemed to actively hate him; its brightness and heat lay on his head like a hot brick" is a sharply observed sentence that uses metaphorical language (the "hot brick") to capture the essence of Peter's experience during the unloading of the Libertad. Bear, in another striking sentence, captures the frightful menace of the venator Dagger: "The sun caught the animal's eyes like twin arcs on a welding torch; he lowered his head and the eyes became pits of night." The description conveys the danger posed by the giant predator and generates a fearful suspense for the reader.

The descriptions in Dinosaur Summer are perhaps at their best when Bear lets his imagination loose on the plateau of El Grande. Numerous ancient animals are wonderfully presented, with the communisaurs, doglike reptiles, and other creatures made memorable by sharply pointed descriptions.

These word-pictures of amazing creatures are, indeed, what may linger longest in the memory of many readers of this book. Note how Bear presents a fearsome creature much talked about by the novel's characters before Peter actually sees one: The death eagle was beautiful. Its eyes and face seemed almost friendly, with that feathery sunburst focusing sound back to its Hapless ears, its beady-eyed expression coldly quizzical. Its yellow legs were as big across as trees, the startling fan of feathers spread at least seven feet wide.

Standing erect, weighing in at four or five tons, its black crown towered twenty-five feet above the forest floor. The body feathers seemed black as smoke in the gloom, but in the sun they would glitter like jewels, like a peacock's fan. This was swift death wrapped in glory, hypnotic, the kind of death that could enjoy a bath in honey-colored ants, a loony lovely end to everything.

This great creature, both beautiful and frightening, by itself justifies reading Dinosaur Summer, yet it is but one of many wonders that Bear brings to life.

Ray Harryhausen, one of these figures, represents the risks Bear is willing to take in order to people his coherent and consistent fictional world with truly three-dimensional characters. Harryhausen is actually a living person who has read Dinosaur Summer.



Cooper, O'Brien, and Schoedsack (each a figure from real-life moviemaking) also appear in the novel, but it is Bear's Harryhausen—with his prominence in Peter's adventures and the potential for the real Ray Harryhausen to say, "That's not me. I wouldn't do that"—who really illustrates how willing Bear is to take chances. That the Harryhausen in *Dinosaur Summer* closely resembles the real-life man is remarkable; that the flesh-and-blood Harryhausen says that he saw himself "taking a vicarious and wonderful adventure" is testimony to how well Bear has captured the man in his prose.

Themes

In the novel the discovery of dinosaurs was sensational news in 1912, but by the late 1940s, dinosaurs no longer interest the public much. One of the few remaining dinosaur circuses, Circus Lothar: Lothar Gluck's Dinosaur Circus, has been losing money for years, and its owner, Lothar Gluck, decides to close it down. In spite of a good offer to purchase his dinosaurs by Ringling Brothers, Gluck chooses to send his dinosaurs back to where they came from, the plateau of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. National Geographic hires freelance adventurer Anthony Belzoni to cover the return of the dinosaurs to their wild habitat, and being primarily a photographer, he invites his bookish son Peter to come along to record in words their adventure. Dinosaurs are fickle beasts, and human beings can be very dangerous, too; between them, Peter has the adventure of a lifetime.

Dinosaur Summer is a coming-of-age story, a tale of a young person who makes the transition from adolescence to adulthood by overcoming a series of hardships. Peter's growth develops in three important ways: he learns how much hardship he can endure and learns not to fear hardship; he learns how to be a good friend by standing by his companions and sharing their burdens, lightening the load for all; and he discovers his father's humanity, in the process becoming more understanding of his own weaknesses. He becomes a manful companion to his father in part by realizing that his father loves him and in part by accepting his father's weaknesses in order to accept his father's strengths.

The process of Peter's coming-of-age gives *Dinosaur Summer* a human dimension that transcends the fanciful adventure of returning dinosaurs to their home, and it is responsible for the liveliness of the action; all the events become stories of human beings coping with tough lives, making all the events ones that derive their importance from how they affect people. Bear weaves a complex narrative that allows him to develop his characters.



Key Questions

Peter's coming-of-age is the center of *Dinosaur Summer* and most of the events in the novel are significant because of how they color and shape Peter's development.

Therefore, a good place to begin a discussion is with Peter himself. Is he a believable character? How does he change as events unfold? From Peter, a discussion could move to other characters, a few of whom are historical figures. How ethical are they?

How do their actions shape the plot? It is very likely that members of the discussion will wish to talk about the dinosaurs. It is worth noting that the dinosaurs are characters in the novel, with personalities and motivations of their own. How do they affect the other characters? Is the decision to return them to the wild a good one?

Through the dinosaurs, Bear makes observations on the ethics of keeping wild animals in captivity and on ecological matters such as the value of the rain forest to people. Thus, the discussion could evolve into one that examines the values and ethics expressed in *Dinosaur Summer*.

1. What does Peter learn about himself during the novel?
2. Why would Bear have Shellabarger seem to be killed off, then resurrect him, only to well and truly kill him at the end?
3. Why does Bear often call attention to ants and other small creatures?
4. Why do many people not care about dinosaurs in *Dinosaur Summer*? Are there real-life parallels to this?
5. How well does Bear make his case that the wildlife of the rain forest is valuable and should be preserved?
6. What are the best animals in *Dinosaur Summer*? What makes them good or interesting to read about?
7. Why do dinosaurs interest people as much as they do? How well does Bear tap into the aspects of dinosaurs that most interest people?
8. Does it take too long for *Dinosaur Summer* to get to El Grande, or is Book One entertaining enough by itself?
9. Does Book Two satisfy the anticipation whetted by Book One? Does it answer all your questions about the dinosaurs and El Grande?
10. Of the animals described in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, which show up in *Dinosaur Summer*? Which do not? In what ways does Bear present the animals as Conan Doyle does; in what ways do the authors differ in their presentations?



11. How well does Bear describe his animals? Are you able to picture them in your mind's eye? Did you need any of Tony DiTerlizzi's illustrations to help you visualize any of the animals?

12. What is "biodiversity"? Why is it thought to be important? How does it figure in Dinosaur Summer?



Topics for Discussion

1. What does Peter learn about himself during the novel?
2. Why would Bear apparently first kill Shellabarger off, then resurrect him, and then really kill him at the end?
3. Why does Bear often call attention to ants and other small creatures?
4. Why do many people not care about dinosaurs in Dinosaur Summer? Are there real-life parallels to this?
5. How well does Bear make his case that the wildlife of the rain forest is valuable and should be preserved?
6. What are the best animals in Dinosaur Summer? What makes them good or interesting to read about?
7. Why do dinosaurs interest people as much as they do? How well does Bear tap into the aspects of dinosaurs that most interest people?
8. Does it take too long for Dinosaur Summer to get to El Grande, or is Book One entertaining enough by itself?
9. Does Book Two satisfy the anticipation whetted by Book One? Does it answer all your questions about the dinosaurs and El Grande?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Which animals in *Dinosaur Summer* are real ones? When did they live? What do scientists know about them?
2. Which of the animals described in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* show up in *Dinosaur Summer*? Which do not? In what ways does Bear present the animals as Conan Doyle does? In what ways do they differ in their presentations?
3. How well does Bear describe his animals? Are you able to picture them in your mind's eye? Did you need any of Tony DiTerlizzi's illustrations to help you visualize any of the animals?
4. The evolution of ancient birds and birdlike dinosaurs is a controversial topic in paleontology. What is known of their evolution? What were they like?
5. Bear provides detailed descriptions of dinosaurs such as the venator, creatures that have never been seen alive by humans. What is the process used by scientists to reconstruct an extinct animal's physiology, appearance, and behavior?
6. How much do rain forests have to offer people? Why are plants and animals in them important?
7. What is "biodiversity"? Why is it thought to be important? How does it figure in *Dinosaur Summer*?
8. What Native American tribes live in Venezuela today? Are they accurately represented by the Native Americans in *Dinosaur Summer*?
9. What is an animal trainer's job?

How does one learn to become a professional animal trainer? How would professional animal-training techniques be applied to the dinosaurs of *Dinosaur Summer*?



Literary Precedents

Many science fiction books written for adults are crossover books—they appeal to young readers who enjoy imaginative tales of exotic adventure, and Bear has written many such books. *Dinosaur Summer*, however, is written specifically for the young adult market, the same market that its inspiration, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), targets, and like *The Lost World*, it is a crossover book that appeals to grownups as well as young readers. In *Dinosaur Summer*, Bear treats *The Lost World* as if it were a historical document, rather than a novel. In *Dinosaur Summer*, all the characters in *The Lost World* were real people, and their adventures on an isolated plateau in South America really happened.

Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* is what was called a "boys' book," a subcategory of young adult literature that is now dead—in fact, *The Lost World* probably killed it. Boys' books were tales of adventure that were supposed to teach teen-age boys how to behave like men; a still-popular example of this is H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), a tale of a search for the diamond mines of King Solomon in southern Africa. Haggard's book set the standard for authentic detail in boys' books; the various African tribes he described were known to him from his experiences when exploring South Africa. In *The Lost World*, Conan Doyle satirizes boys' books: the fighting, quarreling, and derring-do of such books is ridiculed. The great Professor Challenger is primarily a bully who tends to introduce himself to people by beating them up. The explorers in the novel tend to be pigheaded.

The hero of the novel, Malone, learns an important lesson when he returns to England and discovers that his lady love has found another man: running off on adventures does not impress a woman nearly so much as providing her with companionship does. In essence, Conan Doyle made boys' books seem very silly.

In *Dinosaur Summer*, Bear creates a novel in the tradition of *The Lost World* and in the tradition of more serious boys' books like those by Haggard. As in Conan Doyle's novel, the characters in *Dinosaur Summer* are eccentric, and the novel is often comic as odd circus owners, Hollywood movie makers, and disreputable guides battle one another, as well as the forces of nature. On the other hand, *Dinosaur Summer* presents role models every bit as serious as those found in the works of Haggard. For instance, animal trainer Vince Shellabarger is tough, focused on his duties, hard-nosed, and compassionate—a man for the 1990s; he becomes Peter's mentor, teaching the teenager about how to care for animals, especially dinosaurs. Peter's father also serves as a role model; the seemingly devil-maycare man keeps a cool head when under stress—perhaps attributable to his service in the infantry in Italy during World War II—and he knows how to deal with pain as well as fear. Further, Peter's demanding, often frightening, adventures mature him, as is supposed to happen in the old boys' books of Haggard's day; the whiny boy at the start of the novel becomes self-reliant, tough, and better able to face the difficulties of his life. In addition, Peter learns to understand his father and why his father is a very difficult father to get along with—he is a boy for the 1990s. Bear's mixing of comedy with serious character growth, as well as a keen attention to

the details of the people and cultures involved in the narrative, make *Dinosaur Summer* a particularly satisfying book to read.

For Further Reference

Clute, John. "Bear, Greg." In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, et al. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995, pp. 99-100. An overview of Bear's career, emphasizing the relationship of his writings to the period in which they were written, mostly in the 1980s.

Easton, Tom. *Analog Science Fiction & Fact* 118 (July-August 1998): 227.

Admires *Dinosaur Summer*.

Perlberg, Marilyn A. "Greg Bear."

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction, Vol. 1: Biography and Resources. Edited by Kirk H. Beetz.

Osprey, FL: Beacham Publishing, 1996, pp. 114-117. Perlberg summarizes Bear's life, career, and critical reception, and she provides a heavily annotated bibliography of resources for learning about Bear.

Publisher's Weekly 244 (December 8, 1997): 59. Likes *Dinosaur Summer*, but thinks it drags a bit.



Related Titles

Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* belongs to a now defunct subcategory of young adult literature called "boys' books," a genre that may well, in fact, have been ended by the publication and popular reception of *The Lost World*. "Boys' books" were tales of adventure that were supposed to teach teenage boys the "manly virtues" and how to behave like men in times of crisis. H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885; see separate entry, Vol. 4), a tale of a search for the diamond mines of King Solomon in southern Africa, is a still popular example of this kind of book. Haggard's novel set the standard for authentic detail in "boys' books"; the various African tribes he describes were known to him from his experiences exploring in South Africa. *The Lost World* satirized the manly bluster, fighting, quarreling, and compulsive adventure-seeking of the heroes in these "boys' books," and through ridicule it demolished what had been a respected type of story-telling. The great Professor Challenger is primarily a bully who tends to introduce himself to people by beating them up.

The explorers in the novel tend to be pigheaded. Malone, the hero of the novel, learns an important lesson of "non-heroic" life when he returns to England and discovers that his lady love has found another man—pursuing distant adventures does not impress a woman nearly as much as providing her with personal companionship. Conan Doyle essentially made "boys' books" seem very silly, and nothing obliterates being taken seriously faster or more completely than perceived silliness.

In *Dinosaur Summer*, Bear creates a novel that combines traits of *The Lost World* with characteristics of the traditional serious "boys' books" as exemplified by the best of Haggard. As in Conan Doyle's novel, the characters in *Dinosaur Summer* are eccentric, and the novel is often comic as odd circus owners, Hollywood moviemakers, and disreputable guides battle one another, as well as the forces of nature.

On the other hand, *Dinosaur Summer* presents role models every bit as serious as those found in the works of Haggard. Animal trainer Vince Shellabarger is tough, focused on his duties, hard nosed, and compassionate. He shows he is truly a man for the 1990s as he becomes Peter's mentor by teaching the teenager how to care for animals, especially dinosaurs. Peter's father also serves as a role model. This seemingly devil-may-care man keeps a cool head when under stress, perhaps attributable to his service in the infantry in Italy during World War II, and he knows how to deal with pain as well as fear. Furthermore, Peter's demanding and often frightening adventures mature him, as is supposed to happen in the "boys' books" of Haggard's day; the whiny boy at the start of the novel becomes self-reliant, tough, and better able to face the difficulties of his life. He also learns to understand his father and why he can be so difficult to get along with in his role as parent. Peter, with his rapidly maturing collection of strong character traits, is also a person fit for our times. Bear's mixing of comedy with serious character growth, as well as a keen attention to the details of the people and cultures involved in the narrative, make *Dinosaur Summer* a particularly satisfying book to read.



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