

More than dinomania

Euan Nisbet

Earth: The Science of Our Planet. Editor Tom Yulsman. *Kalmbach Publishing Co., Box 1612, Waukesha, Wisconsin 53187, USA. 6/yr. USA \$19.95, elsewhere \$26.*

FEARSOME predators sometimes make good magazine covers. There is one predator so fearsome that its offspring happily amuse themselves by counting the teeth of *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Unfortunately, magazines with the most dangerous of all species on the cover tend to be dismal affairs; interesting to weightlifters



Tyrannosaurus rex rehabilitated.

perhaps, but of no significant content. But a good dinosaur, though a less dreadful animal, makes a finely tempting invitation to a magazine.

Earth is about dinosaurs. What else but an article on "Cretaceous Park"? Yet there is much more in this magazine than simply yet more dinos. The offering is a well-balanced meal of Earth science, prettily presented and easily digested. It is not supermarket checkout fodder, nor yet does it have the exquisitely dry gourmet delicacy of the review journals. It lies somewhere in the middle, the solid fare of the respectable bookshops. Pitched somewhat below the level of *Scientific American*, this is a magazine that would do excellently on the shelf of a high-school library, or in the waiting room of an up-market dentist.

The coverage in the first few issues is wide. Of course, the dinosaurs are there to draw the readers in. But the coverage of the big teeth is not disproportionate. There are stories about volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis, the Himalayas and climate, the mapping of the ocean floor

and the carbon cycle. The mix between topics is well representative of the diversity of Earth science, and the general impression is that an attempt is being made to provide a wide picture of the complexity of the planet.

A journal at this level, firmly popular, is not perhaps quite what *Nature* readers are interested in, but *Earth* is exactly the sort of magazine that science needs if good students are to be tempted back into the classroom. The stories are well researched, carefully balanced and cover all aspects of Earth science, not just Mesozoic monsters. There is a sense of reliability about the journalism, that facts have for the most part been checked, that good opinion has been sought. On this good basis, the writing is clear and

the illustrations attractive. The writers, who include some distinguished scientists, are clearly interested in their subject, and are not just hacks dashing off another piece of copy.

Earth is a magazine that deserves to succeed. If it is lucky it will ride the wave of *Jurassic Park* and firmly establish itself before dinomania wanes. In the longer term, such magazines can do much to interest students again in the pleasure and challenge of science. Science is seen as difficult and demanding, but the discipline and rigour are far less than that demanded by a football team. A magazine like this can show students that there is real enjoyment in learning how things work. It is not just students who will read this magazine. Perhaps the copies in the dentist's waiting room will make some small contribution to a wider general knowledge of the planet, and will help regain the interest of a society that has for the most part turned away from nature. □

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Practical policy and principles

Andrew Jordan

Environmental Values. Editor Alan Holland. *White Horse, 10 High Street, Knapwell, Cambridge CB3 8NR, UK. 4/yr. £64, \$110 (institutional); £32, \$60 (personal).*

ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES is "concerned with the basis and justification of environmental policy". It aims to bring together "contributions which relate to the present and future environment of humans and other species". It seeks to "clarify the relationship between practical policy issues and more fundamental underlying principles and assumptions".

These underlying tenets and belief systems are often dealt with either implicitly by decision makers and policy analysts or not at all. Nevertheless, it is important to be clear about what is valued about the environment and why, because questions of value often lie at the root of environmental conflicts and public-policy dilemmas. One of the most contentious issues is how one goes about measuring the 'value' of the environment. Another is how best to integrate the different dimensions of value — the economic, the bioethical, the inter-generational — into the practical process of decision making and policy formulation.

In his first editorial, Alan Holland underlines the fact that no single disciplinary perspective can claim to hold the key to environmental wisdom. Many would

concur with this judgement. Accordingly, he states that one aim of *Environmental Values* should be to initiate a "conversation across the disciplines".

Each issue includes an editorial and between three and six articles. There have also been review articles (for example, an informative summary of the concept of sustainability is included in issue four) and policy reviews. The editors have yet to make use of the 'special issue' format to cover particular topics or themes in greater detail. One issue includes a useful discussion section in which themes raised in an earlier article are debated by a reviewer and the original writer. There is a selection of book reviews (normally six to eight books per issue) and an announcements section in every issue.

In terms of readership, *Environmental Values* slots into a niche between exclusively policy-based journals such as *European Environment*, publications such as *Environmental Ethics* and more theory-biased disciplinary volumes such as the *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*. *Environmental Values* will thrive if it plays to its undoubted strength, its interdisciplinary focus. But maintaining editorial direction for a cross-disciplinary journal with such a broad remit as *Environmental Values* is never going to be easy. Articles in the first volume have covered an interesting mélange of ethical, bioethical and economic concerns, but they have usually