

## Journey to the Dawn of Time

John Long

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### Synopsis

Following on from *Mystery of Devil's Roost*, Sarah and Peter Wells are now adults who are called back to the cave for another time-travelling adventure. They are joined by 12 year-old Madeleine, the old Aboriginal painter Djarringa and his 14 year-old grandson, Ben. They learn through the dreams of Djarringa that they seek three crystals, one of gold, one of fire and one of ice to fulfil their mission, which is crucial to saving the world from a future disaster. They do not know why or how this will occur.

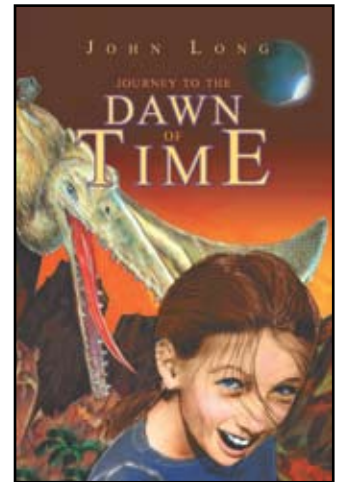
Lunar eclipses activate the magic time-travelling cave. It transports them back first to the Cambrian Period, some 520 million years ago, when no life had appeared on the land, but bizarre creatures inhabited the primeval seas. While in the search for the crystal of gold, they find danger lurking in unexpected places.

The next day the cave has transported them to the Jurassic Period (180 million years ago), when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. Walking through the unexpectedly cold polar ancient Australian forests, they seek the crystal of fire on the slopes of an irritable volcano. On the way they battle with flying terosaurs and encounter ferocious dinosaurs.

On their way back to the cave they are cornered by a hungry meat-eating Allosaurus and have to use all their wits to get out of becoming a dinosaur dinner. The cave then takes them back to the Australian Pleistocene ice age, about one million years ago, when huge mammals, giant kangaroos, and monstrous flightless birds inhabited the land. They seek the crystal of ice. In a cave with walls lined by ice, Djarringa finds the crystal, but is trapped as the cave's guardian, a hideous seven metre long goanna, Megalania, returns home. A battle ensues outside the cave as the goanna attacks the time travellers.

The next day, expecting to return home to their modern time, the cave unexpectedly catapults them far into the future, where they see that humans now live in underground cities while the Earth's ecosystems have time to rehabilitate themselves after centuries of overuse. They ponder the wonders of futuristic science, but head back to the cave on the eve of an approaching eclipse.

Using all three crystals of gold, fire and ice, the cave now has increased powers. Joined by



two scientists from the future, the cave transports them all not only through time, but also through space. They emerge on a strange planet with three moons – one gold, one white and one orange. Above them in the sky is the giant asteroid, Nemesis, which is destined to destroy the Earth. They must now investigate this strange new world in order to survive, and think about how they can stop Nemesis and get home again.

## Author Inspiration

Dr John Long is a palaeontologist who has worked at the Western Australian Museum for the past 13 years. In writing the *Devil's Roost* series he wanted to take children back to Australia's prehistoric times with scientific accuracy built into the storyline. He also wanted to make them aware of current environmental issues by looking at a futuristic world where the natural habitats of the planet need to be rehabilitated. Finally to make children think about evolution and adaptation, and how everything changes with time: lands, environments, life, and people.

John Long describes this as a “stealth science” book where state of the art scientific information has been woven into a rip-snorting adventure story.

## Author Information

Dr John Long is a palaeontologist at the Western Australian Museum, and is well known for his many popular science books, the latest of which include *The Dinosaur Dealers* (Allen & Unwin 2002), and *Prehistoric Mammals of Australia and New Guinea* (UNSW Press, 2002). He has also written three children's novels, including *The Mystery of Devil's Roost* (FP, 1997) and *The Hermit of Hyde Park* (Gogo Press, 1999). In 2001 he was awarded the prestigious Eureka Prize for the Promotion of Science, based, amongst other things, on his ability to communicate science in an enjoyable manner to young readers.

## Educational Adaptability

In both its simplistic narrative style and explosive action adventures, *Journey to the Dawn of Time* is written to excite and educate upper primary audiences, and will be particularly well received by male readers (as the first book was). The book could also be used in lower secondary school for children that face issues of change and transformation.

The book will be appreciated by students who enjoy reading fantasy and like some factual information hidden within the story settings. It will also be enjoyed with those who simply love dinosaurs and all things prehistoric.

## Topics and Issues for Classroom Discussion

### AUSTRALIA IN PAST TIMES

Australia has undergone many changes to its landscape through time. From ice ages to tropical jungles, its climates have fluctuated as the continent itself has drifted around from polar to equatorial latitudes.

- How do we actually know the age of the Earth, and of fossils?
- How has Australia's environments changed with time?
- What was life on Earth like 520 million years ago?

In the Jurassic Period, 180 million years ago, when dinosaurs were living here, southern Australia was within the Antarctic Circle, so it was very, very cold.

- How did dinosaurs live in such climates?
- What kinds of trees were living then?
- How can scientists reconstruct dinosaurs as living creatures?
  
- What was Australia like in the Pleistocene epoch, about 1 million years ago?
- What was the megafauna?
- When did the first humans come to Australia?

### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

When the time travellers reach the future they find the land is in serious rehabilitation mode. People are living underground so as not to interfere with the regeneration of our natural environments.

- Why?
- What could have happened that requires humans to move underground for a long length of time?
- Will people still have happy lives in underground cities 1000 years from now?
- How much has science advanced in the book in 1000 years?
- Do you think the things listed here are attainable by scientists or fantasy?
- Do you think the futuristic world is a better place? If not, why?

### ABORIGINAL STUDIES

- How does Djarringa relate his Aboriginal background to the journeys through time?
- Why do you think Djarringa and Ben are more at home in an ancient landscape than our modern time travellers?
- How do Aboriginal survival skills help the travellers on their mission?

## ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

- How does the writer paint a picture with words for each of the prehistoric settings?
- Use your senses to write a paragraph imagining what it would be like to walk through a prehistoric jungle – incorporate your sense of smell, sights, sounds, the dangers and beautiful unexpected things.
- Some of the characters used in the story are based on the writer’s own children. Which ones would these be and why would he do this?
- Put yourself in the picture of being holed up in a cave with a hungry dinosaur outside. Think of ways you could devise to get out of this tricky situation.
- Ignore the last chapter and write an alternative ending for the book.
- In order to make story believable a writer has to do research to get the basic facts right. Find out more about one of the prehistoric creatures in the book by using your library or internet, then write down some facts about it that isn’t mentioned in the story (eg. Anomalocaris, Allosaurus, Megalania etc).

## POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Just how old is the Earth, and when did life first appear on the land?
- Climates have been constantly changing in the past, as continents drift into different latitudes and sea levels change.
- These factors are the main driving forces of evolution, the reasons why living communities have to adapt to changes in their environment.
- How do people deal with dangerous situations? Does courage appear magically? How would you confront a lifethreatening situation?
- The Earth has been hit by giant meteorites many times in the past, and maybe responsible for extinctions, like the demise of the dinosaurs. Scientists say that one day it will certainly happen again. What can we do about this problem?
- What will the future hold for us? Are we adequately managing our natural environments today, so that in 1000 years from now we will still have jungles and rain forests left on the Earth?
- If you found yourself on a new planet, how would you survive? How would you go about finding water, food and shelter? Why would it be important to study that new environment and its life forms?