



No Enemy But Time

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Joshua Kampa, the illegitimate son of a mute Spanish whore and a black serviceman, has always dreamed of Africa. But his dreams are of an Africa far in the past and are so vivid and in such hallucinatory detail that he is able to question the understanding of eminent palaeontologists. As a result, Joshua is invited to join a most unusual time travel project and is transported millions of years into the past of his dreams.

In early Pleistocene Africa, living among the prehuman species *Homo habilis*, experiencing the same hardships and the same intense pleasures, Joshua finds, for the first time in his troubled life, not only contentment but real love — a love that transcends almost everything.

Intelligent, thoughtful and deeply moving, *No Enemy But Time* brilliantly evokes the remote past and, at the same time, presents a powerful and convincing portrayal of a relationship surmounting even the most daunting barriers. It is a challenging and highly original novel exploring the nature and origins of humankind.

No Enemy But Time Details

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From Reader Review No Enemy But Time for online ebook

Nigel says

Joshua Kampa travels back in time, first in his dreams, then in a kind of reality, where his dreaming visions allow him to access a kind of perfect simulacra of the past, all the way back in Pleistocene Africa, where he befriends a small group of Homo habilis, studying them in an unprecedented exercise in field palaeoanthropology, learning their ways, finding a home for himself after a lifetime of not belonging, finding unexpected love, hardship, bliss and heartbreak, and something else he never could have imagined.

Beautifully imagined and magically evoked with Joshua's voice of repressed poetry and self-taught knowledge alternating with chapters about how his life lead him to this unlikely place, No Enemy But Time is a novel of dreams and reality, science and myth, family and belonging.

Xan says

Me siento frustrado. El título de esta novela me ha llamado la atención durante muchos años pero cada vez que me acercaba al libro, por un motivo u otro, acababa postergando su lectura. Ahora que la he leído lo lamento porque ha perdido su encanto.

La novela narra el viaje al pleistoceno de un observador, un crononauta que ha soñado toda su vida con viajar a ese "cuándo" pasado, y en realidad es una excusa para hablarnos de la evolución humana y de la importancia de los descubrimientos de los Lakey en los 70. Genial, instructivo, interesante...pero ya no es novedoso. Quién haya visto alguno de los últimos documentales sobre la evolución de la especie humana habrá visto lo que nos cuenta la novela desde un punto de vista muy parecido. Claro que la novela es de hace treinta años y los guionistas habrán leído la novela para ambientarse pero eso no disminuye la sensación de pérdida porque lo que hacía interesante la historia era la sensación de estar contando algo totalmente nuevo. Por lo demás es interesante, ágil y bien argumentada. La narración de la vida del crononauta antes del viaje es mucho más interesante que el viaje en si mismo. Lo único que quitaría es la coda final, un pegote que no tiene mucho sentido más allá de proporcionar una excusa para escribir una segunda parte.

En resumen: para aficionados a la paleontología y a seguidores de los Beatles (por lo de Lucy in the sky with diamonds...)

Lance Schonberg says

There's some weird stuff here. Time travel that isn't quite. The protagonist of the story is the illegitimate son of a nonverbal Spanish prostitute and an African American serviceman stationed nearby. Pleistocene central Africa and some hominids on the verge of making the transition to modern humans.

So there's some weird stuff here, and a weird blend, but I found the writing solid and the plot workable, and the illustrated racism, both personal and institutional, just as recognizable in American society today as it was when the book was written thirty-five years ago.

Has a bit of a rough start, perhaps a bit too much build up, but once we start getting into the true time travel aspects of the story and Joshua's survival in the Pleistocene, befriendng a tribe of early hominids and being

welcomed to the point where he actually takes a lover, whom he names Helen. She eventually turns out to be an early homo sapien, based on their offspring, but it's weird for a while, uncomfortable even, as it's meant to be, as we contemplate and observe a full romantic and sexual relationship between a human being and a hominid from a species that preceded us. That, aside from speech, he adapts more to her than she does to him, blurs the line but never quite removes it.

If there's one thing that bothers me structurally about the story it's the value of the project itself. I can see things as an intellectual and exploratory exercise, with the amount of knowledge to be gained about the particular period in history almost incalculable, but I'm more than a bit confused on why the not-exactly-time travel is worthwhile as a military project and warrants the huge resource expenditure involved from the military. Politically, it makes complete sense for an African country struggling to bring itself up to the standards of the developed world, but the possibilities are so limited in time frame due to the nature of how the travel is managed in the first place, the military applications seem non-existent until a hint is dropped near the end of the story.

Overall rating: 3.5 stars, pushing towards 4. The imagination, the concept, and the almost completely realistic portrayal of the main character all blend together to produce an enjoyable read. That the book makes me uncomfortable at times and tries to make me think or re-evaluate things I think I know both add to my enjoyment of the story. There are some strange language choices at times, occasionally even stepping over the border into flowery or excessive, but mainly the writing is engaging and draws you through the story.

Joshua says

The less said the better.

Samadhii says

Me ha sorprendido gratamente. Pasa a mi lista de libros favoritos.
Brillante la ejecución de la antropología. Los detalles finos, agradables.
¡Merecidísimo Premio Nebula! (no como otros...).

En mi opinión, es ciencia novelada o antropología novelada, porque meterlo dentro de la ciencia ficción no se le beneficia (es un género con muchas carencias). Me parece que está muy por encima del género, porque el estilo tiene mucha calidad, es personal y funciona. La ciencia es "de verdad" no fantochadas sin sentido. Y la historia es creíble, cercana y entretenida.

Hay varias escenas muy emotivas que lograron conmoverme (en mi caso no es fácil: o se hace bien con muy buena ejecución... o me da grima, por lo fracasado del intento).

Es el primer libro en el que se explica con acierto por qué es en realidad imposible viajar en el tiempo. Cosa que siempre oímos, pero nunca la explican. Y a su vez es el claro ejemplo de que sí podemos comunicarnos con el pasado y el futuro.

Me ha encantado de principio a fin. Ni un sólo defecto.

Como comentan el final es un tanto extraño, pero creo que ha estado a la altura y es satisfactorio.

PD. Descubrí este libro como recomendación de GoodReads (¡gracias! Desarrolladores, algoritmos, newsletters y demás), al terminar de leer Los Desposeídos (que no me gustó nada, de hecho).

John Loyd says

No Enemy But Time (1982) 397 pages by Michael Bishop.

The story jumped back & forth in the life of John-John Monegal/Joshua Kampa, and for good reason. If it had been a straight chronological telling of his life, the reader would have long since given up on the story. Instead there are snippets from his childhood and on up to his time traveling. Interspersed with this are the chapters that Joshua spent doing the time traveling.

All his life John-John has spirit traveled to the beginnings of human evolution two million years ago. Now Dr. Kaprow has invented a way for a spirit traveler such as Joshua to visit those times.

Joshua goes back and immediately finds that his transcordian, the device that is to keep him in contact with the present day, doesn't work. Not only that but the appearance of the time machine scaffold which is supposed to come out three times a day isn't there at the prescribed times. Joshua takes this in stride and continues his mission of finding a hominid tribe and studying them. He ends up joining a band and living with them.

There's a blurb on the back cover that says "'Prehistoric detail is marvelous...crackingly funny.' - The Times" Certainly not the way I would describe it. Maybe some subtle humor, but nothing outlandish. I thought it was a straight up tale of how he interacted with this troop, faced dangers, foraged for food. One of the Minids died and they put him high in a tree so that a leopard would eat his flesh and not a hyena or vulture. That just seems like an ordinary detail.

After the first couple of chapters I was prepared to say this was bad, but once Joshua went into the past the story was really good.

Don says

Lots of flaws in this story. For one, it was hard to see why such a heavy investment would be made in sending a person back to what was effectively a simulacrum of a period of past time, not matter how elaborately constructed. The concept of 'objectified dreams' was intriguing,... but as a US military project....?

Nevertheless the life of a habiline (homo habilis) band 2 million years ago is portrayed with sympathy and humanity, and the sense of what it must have been like to live with a consciousness on the verge of developed abstract thought is well evoked. The parallel tale of the 'time-travelling' Okampo's real life in the 20th century drags in part and doesn't always add a whole lot to the central theme, and the end chapter, with its hint of the possibilities of future travelling, is a bit of an anti-climax. But the story is well told and it is such a bold theme it was able to keep me going right the way through to the end.

Francesco says

Idea originale, storia perfetta, linguaggio eccellente in forma e lessico (almeno venti parole che non conoscevo). Una storia che trabocca di umanità in una vicenda che tratta (anche) l'umanità primordiale. Finalmente un'immagine di un'umanità preverbale (in quanto preistorica pleistocenica) naturalmente non-violenta, naturalmente sana, fatta di rapporti fra gli individui. Magico, incredibile, stupefacente. Alla faccia di chi vorrebbe che l'uomo senza la civiltà della parola fosse un animale. Imperdibile!
Leggete anche qui: <http://lettrefantascienzaedintorni.b...>

Carter says

No Enemy But Time by Michael Bishop won the Nebula after its 1982 publication, and has become a neglected, important novel. It could still strike a chord in any reader through the quality of the prose and because, like any great fiction, it delves into timeless themes of a painful past affecting a person's alienated present life. The novel's illustration of the psychological costs of U.S. racism is by itself one of the strong aspects, and prove the talent of Michael Bishop, a (white) professor living in Pine Mountain, GA (and a nicer guy than almost anyone you could meet in the SF field).

The novel's protagonist is a disaffected young baby-boom era African-American man, who, as an Army brat, grew up rootless. He dreams of prehistoric Africa. Air Force scientists carrying out a secret government experiment in Africa are able to send John Monegal, a.k.a. Joshua Kampa back in time to the Early Pleistocene era in Central Africa. Once there, he actually adapts and finds family and love. Was time his barrier to finding the good life, was he simply "a man out of time," as Elvis Costello put it in song around that time?

Flying_Monkey says

It is really hard to know what to say about this book, other than that I didn't enjoy it, but forced myself to read it until the end, something I rarely have to do.

There is no point in treating this as hard SF, because the central technology is almost entirely ludicrous and pretty much irrelevant to the story. This, instead, is SF on the fringes of magic realism and the fantasy of dreams, usually my favourite kind of reading. Such SF stands or falls on its literary qualities.

'No Enemy But Time' doesn't so much fall as collapse.

The problem with Bishop's writing is that it appears oh-so-self-consciously literary in a kind of know-it-all university English Literature graduate way. In describing Joshua Kampa's adventures in the Pleistocene, the narration attempts to be jaunty and witty and light in the manner of the classic picaresque - think Cervantes here - but this not only jars horribly with the character of Joshua (or John-John) as established in the parallel, and much more engaging, story of his difficult earlier life, but also appears almost entirely inappropriate to the events described and the emotional development of the novel. It is the kind of SF praised by mainstream critics who claim not to like SF, and is exactly the kind of thing that the Cyberpunk movement - which appeared on the scene not long after this was published - understandably aimed to eradicate. It also compares very badly with other 'is it time-travel or is it a dream?' novels, in particular Marge Piercy's moving 'Woman on the Edge of Time'.

Style is at least partly a matter of personal taste, so in giving a book such a poor review almost entirely based on style - although the story is pretty weak too - I do not want to put others off reading 'No Enemy But Time'. But don't say I didn't warn you.

Carolina Varela says

Es un 4.5 en realidad. La única queja que tengo de este libro es el lento ritmo que adopta casi para el final, después de un inicio y un desarrollo vertiginosos.

Bishop ganó un premio Nébulas por este libro, de hecho por eso me interesó. Desde que pasé un año leyendo ciencia ficción con un grupo de amigos, estos temas me interesan cada vez más :P

Y la verdad Bishop también se ganó un lugar en mi corazón.

Aquí no hay grandes adelantos científicos, salvo la máquina del tiempo que le permite al protagonista, Joshua Kampa, que por cierto sale del estereotipo blanco de héroe literario al ser un hombre de color y de baja estatura, viajar a este pasado tan lejano como es el pleistoceno africano.

Me dice Wikipedia que el Pleistoceno terminó hace 10.000 años atrás. Se ubica dentro de la Era Cenozoica, en su periodo cuaternario.

Aquí no hay dinosaurios como en Jurassic Park. En relación al desarrollo humano, este corresponde al Paleolítico, donde se manifiestan las primeras participaciones del Homo Sapiens.

Luego de esa aclaración, puedo proseguir. Joshua se embarca en este proyecto hacia el pasado después de revelarles a los del gobierno del ficticio Zarakal (África oriental) que tiene, desde muy pequeño, unos sueños demasiado vívidos que lo llevan a la prehistoria.

Narrado tanto en primera como en tercera persona, la vida de Joshua va desde su nacimiento en España, hijo de una prostituta muda, hasta su adopción por una familia norteamericana, su adolescencia rebelde y su posterior vida como hombre importante en Zarakal. Su vida en el pleistoceno es relatada por él mismo, donde debe compartir con un grupo de "habilinos" (el puente entre los monos y los hombres actuales, más o menos) y adoptar su estilo de vida, por dos largos años.

Como dije, el inicio y el desarrollo son bastante rápidos y vertiginosos. La relación que mantiene Joshua con el grupo de homínidos le da a una la curiosidad esencial para continuar el relato. Aunque al principio resulte confuso porque pareciera que se habla de dos personas distintas, en mitad de estas ambas historias se unen y dan paso al actual Joshua y a su situación en el presente.

Ya para el final la cosa se pone más lenta, quizá como una forma de asimilar todo lo que ha ocurrido antes. Sin embargo, Bishop me ha dejado sin palabras. Realmente es mi descubrimiento del año y planeo recomendarlo a quien desee leer un gran escritor.

Jon says

One of the great things about the Kindle is that I can highlight passages I want to use in my reviews. The first such passage from No Enemy but time was:

Alfie had almost certainly plucked from her the fresh gardenia of her maidenhood, for his chieftaincy of the Minids gave him carnal access to almost every female who had attained menarche.

The problem with highlighting this sentence is that it was so awful that it opened my eyes to how awful the rest of the prose was. So that leaves the plot and the characters.

The plot can be summarized as a guy traveling back in time to observe hominids. Something about the way the author wrote about a female hominid early in the book made me sure that they'd end up doing it later in the book...I'm not quite sure how icky that is, but it definitely is at least a little bit icky. The chapters about the time-traveling alternate with chapters about the protagonist's life which lead up to the time-traveling. Oh, and the time-traveling happens via dreams, which just makes things feel less science-fictiony.

The non-time-travel chapters actually tell a more compelling story. The time travel part features the standard question of getting stuck in the past, but by late in the book neither the protagonist nor the reader cares.

There are a few interesting ideas in this book. So it is saved from the 1-star designation, if barely. I don't know whether 1982 was a weak year for Nebula, or after 30 years not everything ages well. (The LeGuin books from the 1970s continue to be fantastic, however.) Hmm. Now I see Bishop beat out Asimov, Heinlein and Dick to win the award. Foundation's Edge wasn't as strong as earlier Asimov, Friday had its own icky parts, and I haven't read the Philip K. Dick work. But I think I'd recommend any of them over No Enemy But Time.

Albert Myburgh says

It is a very difficult book to rate, I must admit. The rationality surrounding travelling through time is unique, suspension of disbelief is quite effortless and I did find it fascinating. Interesting protagonist and the novel is well structured with Joshua's experiences in Pleistocene Africa interspersed with chapters on his earlier life before becoming a chrononaut.

However, although the writing in some parts were poetic and had a sublime feel to it, a lot of it felt like preachy and self-congratulatory writing, almost as if the author wanted to let the reader know what a smart academic he is. It becomes really irritating and sacrifices the potential of the narrative speaking for itself. I would have given it 3 stars, but decided to give it the benefit of the doubt because all and all it still feels to be an important and unique contributor to science fiction and specifically to time travelling fiction.

FatPresident says

I enjoyed this book. Bishop's writing is engaging and frequently punctuated by hilarious turns of phrase, which carries it above the dangers of exposition/world exploration that are all around the narrative. his riff on time-travel is pleasantly non-technical, and sidesteps a lot of my most frequent eye-rolling objections in time-travel stories. In many ways this book is firmly rooted in the eighties, but the narrator's demand for engagement and compassion when confronted with power disparities is timeless.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

It wasn't good and I didn't like any of it.
