

Originally written in 1989, the *Bromeliad* trilogy (consisting of the three novels, *Truckers*, *Diggers*, and *Wings*) is a reissue of some of Terry Pratchett's non-Discworld books in a single volume. It chronicles a key time in the existence of the nomes, small humanoid creatures that vaguely resemble gnomes. It is a critical time in the lives of the nomes because it covers their discovery that the world is not as they had always thought it to be and their eventual return home.

The first book, *Truckers*, focuses mainly on Masklin, a nome who lives with three other nomes outside, just trying to survive in a world full of things that eat nomes. They hitch a ride on a truck and eventually make their way to the Store, Arnold Bros (est. 1905), where they find that there are indeed other nomes in the world, nomes that have never been outside, nor even believe in it. They live by stealing things from the humans in the store, and it seems like a pretty good setup...until they learn that the Store is being demolished and they have to move. *Diggers* covers their experience in their new, temporary, home and *Wings* goes into Masklin's attempts to discover where their true home is and how to get them back to it.

The gimmick in these books is the speed of living. The example of the mayfly, which lives only for one day, versus trees, which live hundreds of years, is used. The nomes live much more quickly than humans and thus humans seem impossibly slow. But that merely plays into what this book is ultimately about, which is perception of the world around you and how you can always expand it. The trilogy is called the *Bromeliad* after a flower that, in the context of this book, grows in South America at the tops of trees and has a kind of frog that lives and dies in the water that collects in that flower. The frogs don't leave the flower and don't have any idea that there is anything beyond it. It's a short leap from there to the situation the nomes experience in the Store, but it goes much farther than that. The bromeliad symbolism is hammered into the reader's experience several times during the course of the three books, but it fits quite well into the plot so that it doesn't seem heavy-handed.

There are also several sub-themes in this book, such as the contention that sometimes arises between faith and science, belief and technology. In the Store the nomes have fragmented themselves into departments, or clans (Haberdasheri, Stationari, Ironmongeri) and there is a hint that there may be substantial physical combat involved as the clans vie for power and status. This, I think, is actually one of the few flaws in this writing. There is every indication that the nomes in the Store are quite warlike, but when the time comes for them to work together the debate is much more philosophical than physical. The work would have been quite different if that had not been the case, but for quite a while you're left waiting for the other shoe to drop and it never does. Plus, the political positioning that goes on amongst the clans is never really fleshed out. It's probably just as well since that would have involved whole new plot threads that would have had nothing to do with the central theme, thus diluting the books, but in some places it just seems like a needless complication.

This trilogy also bridges the gap nicely between fantasy and science fiction by virtue of the Thing, a small black cube that the nomes have carried for centuries. It is nearly left

behind at the beginning of the book, but tradition dictates that it must be retrieved and so Masklin goes back to pick it up. What the Thing is is revealed fairly early on, but I don't want to give it away here, so I'll just say that it's very important and leave it at that.

Written after Pratchett had gotten about 6 books into the Discworld series, this book has nothing whatever to do with Discworld. There are vestiges of certain character traits that crop up from time to time...a hint of Vimes, a splash of Granny Weatherwax, a tad of Vorbis, but each of these characters is clearly their own nome and not just rehashes (or precursors) to Discworld characters. Terry's overall style is, of course, in abundance, but if you like that style then it doesn't get in the way. It is a slightly more serious novel than some of the earlier Discworld books which were written about the same time, but the humor is very much in evidence.

Overall I would say that this is quite a fine collection. I have read where some people would like to read more about the nomes, and there are certainly more stories to tell, but I feel that the characters introduced here have played their leading roles and that if they were to resurface at any time in the future they would probably have to be relegated to supporting roles.

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