

mobilised up-to-date medical facilities.

He isn't sensationalist. Fascination comes from following the progress from conception to maturity in minute detail. From the first invasion of an egg cell by the sperm, the processes relate to human evolution—the defeat of the female's immune system, for example. A fertilised egg is a foreign body and ought to be attacked. It isn't. Armour, camouflage and artful dodging are all there.

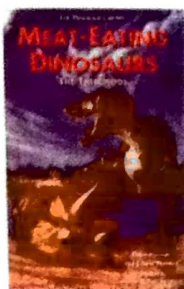
Later stages of life, such as the steady growth of childhood and the sudden burst of adolescence, bring Ellison to a wider range, including ecology and anthropology.

There is a particularly interesting section on body fat—why we have it and how it is used as emergency food rations. He also explores why we don't have much hair, except, he says, a "rather bizarre skullcap". And, of course, there's much about sex.

Now and then you might need a dictionary, but *On Fertile Ground* is enjoyable and Ellison has an individual voice.

Roy Herbert is a science writer

## GET YOUR TEETH INTO THIS



### Meat-Eating Dinosaurs:

The theropods by Thom Holmes and Laurie Holmes, illustrated by Michael William Skrepnick, Enslow \$20.95, ISBN 0766014525

EVERYONE knows *Tyrannosaurus rex*, the last of the giant meat-eating dinosaurs to roam the Earth. The beast is part of our fascination with the big and terrifying, and makes a logical starting point for a new series called The Dinosaur Library, aimed at young readers aged 11 and over.

*T. rex* may dominate the cover, but *Meat-Eating Dinosaurs* is really about the whole family of predators called theropods. All walked on two legs, and most had seriously fearsome teeth, but they occupied a range of niches in the dinosaurian world. The most common were small, swift runners that probably hunted in packs, like wolves.

A few evolved into lumbering giants like *T. rex*, which wasn't the largest of the family. Thom Holmes has seen the record-holder first hand, as part of a team of Argentines and Canadians who uncovered it in Patagonia. However, he can only hint at the nature of the find because the details have yet to be published.

Standard dinosaur books for younger children are full of pretty colour pictures and tongue-twisting names. This series aims higher: at children old enough to learn more about natural history and how dinosaurs lived. The text avoids off-putting anatomical terminology in favour of plain English. The chapters cover theropod types, physiology and feeding habits—the latter always a favourite for kids. Michael Skrepnick's black-and-white line drawings do a better job of illustrating ideas than gaudy colour.

*Meat-Eating Dinosaurs* is just the thing for an older child to sink his or her teeth into.

Jeff Hecht is a science writer based in Maryland

## A BRIEF, BUT PASSIONATE ENCOUNTER



**Wittgenstein's Poker** by David Edmunds and John Eidinow, Faber and Faber, £9.99, ISBN 057120547X

IT WAS the first and only time they came face to face—the legendary meeting of two of the 20th century's intellectual titans, philosophers Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Popper had been invited to speak on whether philosophical

problems exist. Popper held that they did. Induction is a real philosophical problem and, he said, so is the relationship between mind and body. Wittgenstein dismissed these as either mathematical or linguistic puzzles, not real philosophy.

Both were passionate crusaders, pulled no punches and were indefatigable in argument. According to some accounts of the heated exchange, Wittgenstein, brandishing a poker, challenged Popper to present an example of a moral rule. Popper riposted with: "Not to threaten visiting lecturers with a poker." Wittgenstein left the room. Such is the stuff of legends that some would even to this day say that he is only "alleged" to have left the room.

In *Wittgenstein's Poker*, David Edmunds and John Eidinow present a gripping account of the fiercely intellectual personalities and troubled histories of these profoundly influential men. But they touch only briefly on the philosophy the intellectual fight. Too much weight is placed on exactly when Wittgenstein left the room. The fact is that he did leave. Wittgenstein was used to reducing people to silence, but could he have been an intellectual coward on this occasion?

Ray Scott Percival founded and chairs the Popper Forum

