



Sinister Stones

Arthur W. Upfield

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Bony comes up against an aborigine tracker, the chief suspect in the murder of a policeman, in this battle of wits and wills in the outback. The mystery itself is as good as the bush scenes.

Sinister Stones Details

Date : Published November 1st 1983 by Collier Books (first published 1954)

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Author : Arthur W. Upfield

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From Reader Review Sinister Stones for online ebook

Karen Smith says

Once again, a really good read.

Glen U says

"Sinister Stones" is #19 in Arthur Upfield's "Bony" series and, for me, one of his best. Upfield's half caste detective returns to the Outback to snag his culprits and it is this return to the Australian wilderness that makes this book so enjoyable. I love the beautiful descriptions of the land that Upfield brings to his stories and I enjoy the back country ways of detection and justice that the Aboriginal people employ in bringing the offenders to their punishment. This story is a return of one of my favorite fictional characters back to an Australia of hard people and harsh conditions, back from the civilized cities which were the settings of some of the previous books. The plot was well paced and had the normal twists and turns of all detective novels and made for a very good read.

Veronique says

My first Arthur Upfield novel. Rather embarrassingly, the person who pointed me in his direction was a French friend, in Paris, 4 or so years ago. This rather showed me up as I had been living in Australia for over 10 years but had never come across him... so finally I have read a Bony novel and it was really a very enjoyable experience. The outback (in this instance the North West of the country, around the Kimberleys) is really well captured, good story which moved along fast and a gallery of excellent characters, who could only be Australian. Judging from this book, Upfield was very good at encapsulating 'Australian-ness' and has to be lauded for his extensive depiction and respect of Aboriginal lives and customs in a time when it was probably not that common. I'll definitely read more of his books.

Megan says

I grabbed this off the shelf at the library because the bizarre title caught my eye. I had no idea it was part of a series, and I thought it read just fine as a stand-alone. The descriptions and language were amazing-- I learned at least 4 new words, and even having never been to Australia, I got the feeling that now I could find my way around if I were suddenly teleported to that particular Middle of Nowhere.

The rampant, commonplace racism and misogyny made this book less of a pleasure-read than it would otherwise be. Even as someone who reads a lot of old books, I wasn't prepared for it. I'd had a rough couple of weeks and was hoping for something escapist, but this frequently made my heart hurt. It's not clear that the author was in favor of all the ugliness that he described, but many of the narrative descriptions of "Civilized" vs. "Uncivilized" people squicked me out. At the very least, it felt like a chillingly accurate portrayal of oppression.

John says

Having not read any Bony stories for a few years, I had forgotten how good they are and this one is very good indeed. Previously read under the title of "Cake in the Hat Box"

Upfield's descriptions of the outback are fabulous and according to many, very accurate. Not terribly politically correct by today's standards, I imagine that they might make uncomfortable reading for today's non-indigenous Australians.

Bony is a very engaging character and if you like pure detection with really entertaining description, complex plot and pure readability then Arthur Upfield is your man. Superb!!!

Peter Reeves says

great australian outback descriptions

Helen McCarthy says

Another great Australian mystery featuring Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte. He is able to solve the murder of a young policeman several months prior to Bony's arrival on the scene. He is able to connect evidence not previously understood to relate to the murder, and thus solve the mystery. These mysteries are always a fun read.

James Saunders says

Cake in the Hat Box

A fun book. These books are fun to read and relax me. I have always enjoyed these books. I am never too sure if what he says about the Australian first inhabitants is accurate. They are fun to read.

Aricia Gavriel says

Just finished a re-read of this one, for the first time in -- oh, a long time! I'd actually forgotten how much I liked the character of "Bony," or "Boney," if you're a fan of the 1973/74 TV show (as I was: it was rerun in something like 1984). During the 1970s, we managed to collect 19 of these slim mysteries, and I confess, I haven't read them in decades. Nice to know memory wasn't playing tricks on me, and this is a very good story indeed. I enjoyed it so much, I've just picked up another, *Bony Buys a Woman*.

These novels are set in "the Australia that was," and it's a whole 'nother world. People today tend to get upset about Upfield's attitudes to women and Aborigines, refusing to admit that these WERE the attitudes of the time (perhaps even the place). These books are not historicals, forced into political correctness by modern editors. They're time capsules. If you're going to read about Australia in 1950, in a book written back in the day, you have to accept it for what it was. No, it's not politically correct; yes, there was room for improvement -- in fact, there still is. Aus in 2018 is no garden of paradise for minority, marginalized groups ... then again, what country is? In fact, part of the value of Upfield's work is that it actually is a time capsule.

It's become difficult (or even impossible) to find the Bony mysteries in Australia these days, because of the touchiness of modern readers, who can't accept that in our grandparents' day things were so different -- or, if they can accept this truth, they're uncomfortable with the realities, and prefer to ignore or forget them. Maybe this is a good thing? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

One problem that is insurmountable: the question of "cultural misappropriation," which has these stories literally binned at this time, because Bony is half Aborigine, and works with Aborigines, while a white man wrote the stories. What's sad is that, in the 1930s or 40s, Arthur Upfield was just about the only supportive voice these people had. He spoke up for them when few other people did ... he created a wonderful character and depicted the country, the culture and the era with great accuracy and no little sensitivity. Given this, it seems sad indeed that these writings should be all but forgotten in their own land.

Lucy says

"Down through the ages man has murdered man, and human society from cave dwellers to city inhabitants has banded together in execration of the crime. Modern society fights a killer with scientific aids in the hands of experts, and primitive men still depend on natural phenomena and methods of detection which appear ridiculously chancy. Primitive men must often err, resulting in the innocent being executed; but, strangely enough, the complex machinery of civilized justice, assisted by science, has also been known to execute a man for a crime he did not commit" (142).

Sue Law says

Another top Bony novel. This one was published slightly out of order. It was apparently started shortly after "The Widows of Broome" (Bony is on his way home after clearing up that mystery) but not published until after several more of the Bony novels were in print.

On his way home from Broome Bony is stranded in a remote Kimberley town by a broken down aircraft. In the hotel he meets the Breen brothers, one of whom is clearly not well but the town's doctor is dead drunk and unavailable. The next day the body of the Town policeman is found in his jeep north of the town when he was supposed to be south, and there are no tracks of the jeep on the road...

Joy says

A policeman is found dead in a desolate mountain range, and the scene is obviously faked. His tracker has been set up to be blamed. Bony's dual knowledge of Station families and aborigines is essential to bringing the innocent out with whole skins. So is his sympathetic understanding.

SINISTER STONES was renamed as THE CAKE IN THE HATBOX in one of the reissues.

Karen GoatKeeper says

I thought my gravel road was bad. It's a major highway compared to the tracks described up, over and through the stone ridges in this part of Australia where this Napoleon Bonaparte mystery is set. The town is so isolated, trash can't be gotten out so a ring of empty beer bottles surrounds the town growing bigger by the day. The people rarely see each other except in town occasionally but keep in touch by wireless. Then the town sheriff is found dead in his jeep. His tracker is missing. Unfortunately for those who would have the tracker blamed, Napoleon Bonaparte has been stranded in Agar's Lagoon. This entire series is easy reading, cozy murder mysteries. One of the great appeals for me is the introduction to the various parts of Australia. This book does not disappoint.

Marianne says

Cake in a Hat Box is the 19th in Arthur Upfield's Bony series. The story starts with the discovery by a long-distance truck driver of the body of Constable Stenhouse in his jeep on the road to Agar's Lagoon. Stenhouse, a competent policeman but not a well-liked man, has been shot, and his native tracker is missing. At first, it looks like, the tracker, Jackie Musgrove, has shot his Constable and cleared out with his swag and rifle. But the local blacks are making smoke signals and gathering purposefully. Bony happens to be in the town of Agar's Lagoon due to engine trouble in his flight home from Broome, and as the case gets more interesting, he relishes being asked to help with the investigation. This Bony book is filled with a collection of outback characters, some stoic, some downright bizarre. Despite Bony's occasional laconic attitude, Upfield gives us fast-paced novel with an original plot, a few twists, especially the motive and the murderer. Upfield's extensive knowledge of the outback and the aboriginal shines through all his Bony novels. Is there really a cake in a hat box? Does Bony actually get his murderer his time? No spoilers here! Another enjoyable Bony instalment.

John says

A copper is killed in the outback of Western Australia. Was it his tracker, or someone else who did the deed? Traditional and white methods are employed by the locals and Bony to track down the murderer. Another great story, interesting characters and plot twists keep the reader guessing.
