

***Jurassic World: Dominion* - A Review**

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"I do not believe it possible at present to make restorations of any of the more important extinct animals of this country that will be of real value to science, or the public... the danger of error is of course much greater, and I would think it is very unwise to attempt restoration, as error in a case of this kind is very difficult to eradicate from the public mind..." - Othniel C. Marsh, 1875

Othniel C. Marsh, a palaeontologist of late 19th Century Bone Wars fame, had a rather harsh view of palaeoart and other reconstructions of prehistoric life. As evidenced in the quote above, Marsh's negative view of the art form was informed by his concern that once a certain depiction of a prehistoric life form was implanted in the public mind, the public would become attached to that depiction, regardless of what scientific discoveries were made in the



Two of the primary characters in *Jurassic World: Dominion* (from Universal Studios).

future. While it can be tempting to think of palaeontology and its most famous mascots, the dinosaurs, as strictly belonging to the realm of science, there exists an undeniable link, a cross-cutting influence, between dinosaurs as objects of scientific inquiry and dinosaurs as objects of cultural intrigue. Nowhere is this relationship and Marsh's concern for public education more plainly evident than in the *Jurassic Park* series. While the series has inspired many a young palaeontologist and awed the public with breath-taking depictions of living, breathing dinosaurs, it also almost certainly bares a large degree of responsibility for the survival of certain outdated dinosaurian tropes, such as the featherless dromaeosaur, well past the point of scientific acceptability. Like the dinosaurs themselves, the *Jurassic Park* franchise is big, loud, and unavoidable. The most recent entry to the franchise *Jurassic World: Dominion*, written by Emily Carmichael and Colin Trevorrow (based on a story by Derek Connolly and Trevorrow) and released by Universal Studios, explores a world in which the dinosaurs of the previous movies have escaped

the confines of the dinosaur park and now roam free throughout the world (thus *Jurassic World*).

First, it is important to establish that *Jurassic World: Dominion* is not *Jurassic Park*. It does not necessarily need to be to be an enjoyable film. *Jurassic World: Dominion* is a fun ride, but a reflective and nuanced exploration of genetic engineering and ecological consequences it is not. What the film lacks in wit, it makes up for with sheer spectacle. The dinosaurs look better than they ever have in a "Jurassic" film. The film also marks the long overdue entrance of feathered dinosaurs into the franchise.

Jurassic World: Dominion and the *Jurassic World* sequel trilogy, in general differ from *Jurassic Park* in that *Jurassic Park* is more grounded in the mundane while the *Jurassic World* series dips into the fantastical. One way this divide between the fantastical and the mundane is expressed is in the characters' and audiences' relationship with the technology featured in the respective movies. For being a film about resurrected dinosaurs wreaking havoc on a small island off the coast of Costa Rica, the original *Jurassic Park* is remarkably grounded.

The biggest suspension of disbelief comes from the resurrection of the dinosaurs themselves - the idea that scientists were able to extract complete enough DNA from amber and then use that DNA to clone real-life dinosaurs. Beyond this singular piece of future tech, the rest of the technology in the movie is right at home in the 1990s - corded telephones, desktop computers, and Barbosol shaving cream cans. Audiences have some sense of familiarity with these pieces of technology. By contrast, technology in *Jurassic World: Dominion* and the rest of the *Jurassic World* series is far more futuristic. Invisible sky barriers, mind-controlling dinosaur microchips, and military-engineered attack dinos are not particularly common facets of everyday life for most of the readers of this review (at least I would imagine). The filmmakers seemingly decided the needs of the plot and then invented technology to fill those needs (e.g., mind-controlling brain implants to coax all of the dinosaurs to move to a particular place for a climax-worthy dino fight). Relying on such high tech allows the film to get away with a lot more, but it also detracts from one's ability to put oneself in the shoes of the protagonists. I have been without phone service and had my power go out before. I can readily understand how adding rampaging dinosaurs to such a situation could make it even more terrifying. As of yet, however, I have not experienced the ordeal of my invisible sky fence failing because of a horde of flaming giant locusts. This is not to say that the fantastic technology of *Jurassic World: Dominion* makes it a worse or less enjoyable film, but it does mean that it is not the same kind of film as the original 1993 movie.

The original 1993 *Jurassic Park* filmed marked a turning point in the depiction of dinosaurs in film. Although the Dinosaur Renaissance had revolutionized paleontology and the science-interested public's understanding of dinosaurs from slow, dim-witted, swamp-dwelling behemoths into complex, bird-like animals with complex social lives, the general public had yet to update the popular image of dinosaurs. Not only were the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* far more anatomically correct than dinosaurs from previous films, they also looked more realistic than ever. Before *Jurassic Park*, *Velociraptor* was not necessarily an A-list dinosaur. After the film, "raptor" entered the English lexicon. Indeed, the Toronto "Raptors" took their name in part from the film (Elliot, J.K., 2019). In addition, while I do not know for sure, I suspect that if one were to chart out the numbers, the sail-

backed *Spinosaurus* surged in popularity after its appearance in *Jurassic Park III* in 2001.

This is to say that a film as popular and well-established as the *Jurassic Park/World* series can have a tremendous influence on the public's imagination concerning prehistoric life. Thankfully then, *Jurassic World: Dominion* does not waste the opportunity to introduce the public to dozens of new dinosaurs including two stand-out stars, the giant carnivore *Giganotosaurus* and the over-sized murder turkey *Therizinosaurus*.

Therizinosaurus in particular is a feast for the eyes. When we first meet *Therizinosaurus* we are greeted with an unearthly bird-like trill - a sound that stands apart from the familiar growls and roars of previous dinosaur villains. While the characters and the local deer population are menaced by *Therizinosaurus*, the film makes it clear that this is a plant eater with a bad attitude. The dinosaur purposefully and visibly to the audience browses on leafy greens shortly after tossing a deer across the forest with its huge claws. Finally, the dinosaur is covered in downy feathers. These are not the sprig of *Velociraptor* feathers present in *Jurassic Park III*, but honest-to-goodness feathers on a main dinosaur character.

If there is a criticism to be made of *Therizinosaurus* and the other new dinosaurs the film introduces, it is that they fall victim to the decision to include "hybrid" dinosaurs in the prior films. A personal anecdote of mine is that I went to see the film with several family members, one of whom voiced his confusion as to whether *Therizinosaurus* was indeed a real dinosaur or a "hybrid". The film, of course, is under no obligation to engage in science outreach, but this confusion is unfortunate in that the otherwise excellent presentation of a wholly new dinosaur to the big screen is left with a bit of a question mark. In my view, monsters grounded in reality are much more captivating than those born out of fantasy.

On the subject of animals, *Jurassic World: Dominion* also takes the unique step forward of including a number of non-dinosaurs. The giant azhdarchid pterosaur *Quetzacoatlus* makes an appearance as does the mammal-like reptile *Dimetrodon*. One unusual but interesting creature featured is the giant locust, which play a central role in the film as a threat to the environmental stability of the whole world.

In terms of storytelling, *Jurassic World: Dominion* is not a spectacular movie, but it is passable enough to take away from one's ability to enjoy the film. Some relationships between charac-

ters seem rushed and arbitrary. The middle of the film, featuring the Malta chase scene, is fun, but it does make the film drag on for quite a while before we ever get to see the dinosaur park. Finally, the movie also unwittingly undermines its own message of being wary of the unintended consequences of genetic engineering at the very end when one of the main characters releases a genetically engineered pathogen into the world to solve the problem posed by the previously engineered giant locusts.

So where does this all leave *Jurassic World: Dominion*? It's a very enjoyable film, especially if

one can set aside hang-ups about plot or character motivation and consistency. When one approaches the film, not as well-developed commentary on anthropogenic climate change, but instead as a two-hour long excuse to put as many dinosaurs on the screen as possible, the film is quite a fun ride. The dinosaurs themselves look gorgeous - not only on the big screen, but also in the assortment of colorful toys and the film's advertising campaign. It would not be at all surprising if these dinosaurs were, as Marsh lamented, "difficult to eradicate from the public mind".

REFERENCES

- Elliott, J.K. (2019, June 2). *How the Toronto Raptors chose their name and the infamous 'Barney Jersey' look - national*. Global News. Retrieved June 28, 2022, from <https://globalnews.ca/news/5325010/toronto-raptors-throwback-jersey-name/>