

## *Jurassic World*, summer blockbuster

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*Directed by Colin Trevorrow; written by Trevorrow, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver and Derek Connolly*

Twenty-two years after the events in the original *Jurassic Park* (1993), the dreams of that film's dinosaur-resurrecting scientist John Hammond (the late Richard Attenborough) have been fulfilled with the establishment of *Jurassic World* in the new film of the same name.

The island (fictionally located off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica) on which the original, failed park was built is now the home of the wildly popular dinosaur theme park, laboratory, hotels and shopping complex. In order to keep customers returning, increase profits and thereby satisfy corporate backers, new attractions in the form of different—and bigger—dinosaurs have to be constantly introduced.

This leads to the splicing of genes from various extinct specimens and the introduction of elements of reptiles from the present era. In typical Hollywood fashion, despite the most advanced laboratories and equipment, scientists fail to look far enough ahead and predictably “unpredictable” side effects take hold making the new creatures smarter and more deadly than their component parts ... and the chase is on.

Though largely formulaic, *Jurassic World* is not without its charms and does touch on some interesting questions.

The film centers on two brothers, Zach (Nick Robinson) and Gray (Ty Simpkins), as well as on the relationship between their aunt, a driven businesswoman, Claire (Bryce Dallas Howard), and Owen (Chris Pratt), an expert on Velociraptors.

The latter pair have dated, fought and parted company, deciding they were “too different.” Owen, an ex-Navy war veteran, has been training some of the raptors, becoming in essence their “alpha.” His acquaintance and nominal boss, Hoskins (Vincent D’Onofrio), sees a military application for the raptors,

and indeed for all the dinosaurs (“Imagine if we’d had them in Tora Bora”). He is determined to find a way to adapt them to this end. Owen disagrees with the plan.

When the inevitable escape of a new, smart, enormous dinosaur occurs, Hoskins’ company, InGen Security, sends in its private troops alongside Owen’s raptors. The classified “contents” of the rogue lizard, *Indominus rex*, are revealed to include some raptor, which poses problems. Questions of loyalty on the part of Owen’s raptors come into the picture and the struggle between nature and nurture/training plays out. The troops are largely killed off, and the saving of the island and the 20,000 park guests is then down to Owen, Claire, and the “good” dinosaurs.

The machinations of Hoskins, presented in a very straightforward—one might say simplistic—manner as the villain here, include working with the top scientist to develop dinosaurs especially for use in warfare. More time could have been spent on this, to be sure, but the fact that this element is even presented in a negative light in a blockbuster summer release bears noting.

One would like to consider this a let-up in the relentless drumbeat for war that Hollywood has been only too glad to take part in. That might be premature, though the failure of the mercenaries and their firepower to contain (or survive) their fight against the rogue *Indominus*, who succumbs to the mighty bites of other resurrected/created creatures instead, seems a step in the right direction.

Co-produced by Steven Spielberg (who directed the first two *Jurassic* films), *Jurassic World* seems to want to make some metaphorical points about the dog-eat-dog character of present-day social and corporate life. Director Colin Trevorrow, for example, told *Entertainment Weekly*: “The *Indominus* was meant to embody our worst tendencies. We’re surrounded by wonder and yet we want more. And we want it bigger, faster, louder, better. And in the world of the movie the

animal is designed based on a series of corporate focus groups.”

And Trevorrow commented to News.co.au, “There’s something in the film about our greed and our desire for profit ... The Indominus Rex, to me, is very much that desire, that need to be satisfied.” Bryce Dallas Howard, the daughter of Ron Howard, told the same news outlet about her character: “The quest for profit has compromised her own humanity.”

Of course, all of this, as sincere as it may be, has to be taken with a large grain of salt. The mild criticisms occur in a film that is very much an integral part of the Hollywood blockbuster phenomenon, which largely obstructs reflecting seriously on anything.

Throughout the film, which is well on its way to raking in a billion dollars in its first two weeks, one is struck by both the simultaneous gratuitous and near constant product placements (everything from Starbucks to Coca-Cola) and the questions raised directly about the ethics of putting science in the service of the “shareholders.” Formulaic as the subplots may be, to its credit the film does come down against the practice. However, unlike recent films such as *Chappie* or *Ex Machina*, humanity’s scientific abilities themselves are less of a focus, and so the ethical questions are not terribly developed—instead the emphasis is on the chase, escape and the happy ending.

All in all, unfortunately, *Jurassic World* does what it was designed to do: entertain without demanding too much of the audience.



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