Okay, bypassing those customarily witty journalistic opening “pithy-isms”, let’s get right to it and say “No two ways ‘round it, JURASSIC WORLD is pretty dumb”. In fact the phrase “Effin’ stupid!” came to mind while sitting there in the theater slack jawed slogging through those first twenty or so minutes. Once upon a time when the world was young “And Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth” (couldn’t help it - you under 30 folks need to catch up with your cheesy dino flicks if you don’t get that reference!) we prided ourselves on the fact that actually walking out on a movie was something we limited ourselves to doing (at most) maybe once per year. A bit older now, we find ourselves, after committing to trekking to a theater and shelling out that hefty IMAX 3D ticket price, a bit more reluctant to do even the “one a year” thing - willing more nowadays to exercise the patience of say a Noah though you occasionally still feel like the cinema audience version of Job. Okay, maybe not bypassing all of those opening “pithy-isms”

But ohhh man!, if it wasn’t so warm out the morning we saw JURASSIC WORLD, ... and if that theater air conditioning, and those rocking high backed seats, hadn’t felt so good, we just might’a had to up and scramble the righteous hell outta there. Ultimately, we were pretty glad we didn’t, because (cue the sound of someone gulping - as in swallowing their pride) in the end JURASSIC WORLD ends up as a helluva lotta fun!

Perhaps the most gorgeously realized and stunningly well made bad movie since James Cameron’s TITANIC, JURASSIC WORLD also oddly emerges as simultaneously pretty bad-assed. Filled with the most (ehh hemm!) “original” characters since FREDDY VS. JASON (Bryce Dallas Howard’s park operation’s manager, Claire Dearing, isn’t gonna win over any feminists), … Oh yeah, and it’s hard to believe the husband / wife screenwriting team of Rick Jaffa & Amanda Silver - who gave us the intelligent and exciting narratives of RISE OF and DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES, would battle for Writer's Guild credit on this film. That said however, JURASSIC WORLD manages against all logic, and perhaps expectation, to
genuinely recapture a bit of the charm, wonderment and thrills of Steven Spielberg’s 1993 original. Go figure. Now, before you go and get that look on your face ...

A brief recap for those one or two out there who (yes, hard to imagine) may not be as familiar with the JURASSIC film series. It’s kind of necessary to explain the new film’s “dumb to fun ratio” scale. Anyway ...

Twenty-two years ago on Isla Nublar, a remote island 120 miles (190 km) off the west coast of Costa Rica, billionaire industrialist John Hammond commissions a cadre of geneticists to clone dinosaurs back to life using DNA strands from the ancient creatures’ blood - the samples of which were preserved over time within the parasitic mosquitoes which fed upon that dino blood, then became encased and preserved themselves within the since solidified tree amber sap of ancient foliage for 65 million years.

Intending to use the re-created dinosaurs to populate a “safari park” like no other on Isla Nublar, during a pre-opening incident a worker is killed by a Velociraptor, and an insurance company attempts to placate nervous investors by having a scientific team - consisting of a noted paleontologist, a mathematician and a paleobotanist, visit the still-in-development park to “sign off” on its security system. High tech industrial hubris in full swing, and Hammond, blissfully secure in his park’s appeal and security, invites his two grandchildren along for the dream weekend, which, at first wondrous, turns nightmarish when an act of commercial sabotage shuts down the parks security system, and the wild dinos escape their enclosure paddocks to hunt down and feed upon everything and everyONE in their path.

Based on the 1990 novel by Michael Crichton (THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, WESTWORLD, RISING SUN), Steven Spielberg’s JURASSIC PARK very quickly snatched up (or perhaps more accurately “chowed down” on and made mincemeat out of) that golden crown with the label “All Time Box Office Champ” written across it’s brow. Then in 1997 the director unleashed THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK - very loosely based on Crichton’s 1995 follow up novel. It too breaking a series of box office records, it was no surprise when a third film - JURASSIC PARK III, written directly for the screen (but containing elements from the two Crichton books), produced by Spielberg, and directed by his longtime friend and collaborator, Joe Johnston (THE ROCKETEER, CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER), stormed into theaters in 2001. Now, unfortunately, within the narratives of the first three films lay the inescapable “dumbness factor” of the new entry - JURASSIC WORLD.

With all of the death (no, carnage!) of the first three adventures, and the attendant fallout in the way of billion dollar law suits, and industrial, economic, scientific and international / political hot-potato-like controversy surrounding all of that destruction (in the second film a T-Rex is brought to mainland U.S.A., only to escape then rampage, Kong-like, through the streets of San Diego), there (caps lock time - thanks Mr. Hughes) IS JUST NO WAY IN HELL!!!, anyone would or could re-open that damned park ... regardless of how many years had passed!

But, okay, let’s say we really REALLY do the suspension of disbelief thing, and tell ourselves someone could revive the park. And not only revive the old Jurassic Park drive-through safari idea, but expand it to a sprawling Disney World-like city unto itself, replete with hotels, a Sea-World-like amphitheater / aquarium (which is pretty cool, by the way!), night clubs and the works. One still has to span a credibility gap wider than Monument Valley, Utah to believe that hundreds of thousands of patrons annually could even afford to travel halfway across the globe to Costa Rica to visit this new “World”.

"JURASSIC PARK": 65 MILLION YEARS IN THE MAKING

"I wrote a screenplay about cloning a pterodactyl from fossil DNA in 1983, but the story wasn’t convincing. I worked on it for several years since, trying to make it more credible. Finally I decided on a theme park setting, and wrote a novel from the point of view of a young boy who was present when the dinosaurs escaped. I then sent the book to the usual people who read my first drafts.

Over the years, I’ve come to rely on five or six people who read my drafts; generally they have a range of responses. Not this time. They were all in agreement: they hated JURASSIC PARK.

I got angry reactions such as, ‘Why would you write a book like this?’ But when I asked them to explain exactly why they hated it, they couldn’t put their finger on anything in particular. They just hated it, that’s all. Hated every bit of it.
I wrote another draft. They hated that one, too. Just as strongly as the one before. Whatever I had done in the latest draft, it hadn’t helped.

I wrote another draft, but the result remained the same.

Finally one of the readers said that they were irritated with the story because they wanted it to be from an adult point of view, not a kid point of view. They said, 'I want this to be a story for me.' Meaning for an adult.

So I rewrote it as an adult story. And then everybody liked it.”

- Michael Crichton (1942 - 2008)

"JURASSIC WORLD": 65 MILLION (AND 22) YEARS IN THE MAKING

No spoilers here. The JURASSIC WORLD trailers and TV spots have too much of that as it is. But if you’ve seen any of them you know the events of the current film take place during a day when the park has over 20,000 patrons - most of them families with strollers and baby-carry pouches; and with teens in tow who’d much rather split off from mom and dad and little brother / little sis to go make goo goo eyes at other similarly disenchanted opposite sex members of their age group. Hmmm? For most families we know, it’s a financial investment to take an afternoon vacation to the movies to see a film like JURASSIC WORLD, let alone take a holiday season vacation to Costa Rica and Jurassic World.

Now, don’t get us wrong, we’re not making excuses for dumb movies. We’ve been accused of that more than once. But we’ve also been accused of at times being a little too hard on films. So in this go ‘round we think we’re being somewhat fair and level. Often what emerges to an audience and / or the individual as “good” or “bad” is a matter of expectations rather than actuality. For example, back in 1987, upon first seeing John McTiernan’s original PREDATOR in theaters, we despised it because of its dunderheaded cast of characters ordered (collect-on-delivery) right outta the “SGT. ROCK School Of Cliche”’ catalog.

Realized on a much more modest budget, three years earlier James Cameron’s THE TERMINATOR had considerably raised the bar in the sci-fi actioner finally being able to emerge from under the Rodney Dangerfield-like umbrella of no respect regardless of how good a film you actually were. A hit with action fans, fan boys, and even women (caught off guard by its rather heart moving “love story across time”), THE TERMINATOR (like LETHAL WEAPON in the buddy cop genre) had made the task of “measuring up” in its respective (and now respected) genre a bit more difficult for those who would follow. And, for our money at the time, PREDATOR was a giant leap backwards.

We felt that way, that is, until reading an article wherein one reviewer recounted how he at first watched PREDATOR in the same mindset. Then he caught sight of a man or woman (can’t recall which) entering the theater after the movie had already begun. Laden with heavy packages, sweating from the late June heat, and cussing up a bit of a storm under their breath, this was gonna be one tough customer for the movie to win over, … which one hour in, PREDATOR had managed to do, and then some! Caught up in the suspense of McTiernan’s near silent movie action finale, the person’s former cussing and bitching at and about life had turned into shouting and screaming at and about (and to) the characters on screen.

Suddenly (there’s that gulping sound again) the reviewer realized he was guilty of that most common of deadfall-like traps into which many a film fan unexpectedly falls, that of cinematic arrogance. That at times unreasonable expectation for EVERY film to be of such high “artiste”-esque intentions, that it becomes near impossible to enjoy the occasional flick which has nothing on its mind except to thrill and entertain. Oh
yeah, and sell lots of yummy popcorn. Sort of the cinematic equivalent of Paul McCartney's "Some people wanna fill the world with silly love songs, ... and what's wrong with that".

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY ... AND FAUST!

Once again, don't get us wrong - we're not copping a plea for "crap projected at 24 frames per second". And yeah, we know, with digital projection nowadays, that phrase is something of an anachronism. But so deliberately also is the bonafied (and this isn't always a four letter word) "no brainer" Creature Feature, of which JURASSIC WORLD definitely is. Here's an example of "intentions" vs. "expectations"

During the production of the first three JURASSIC films, the creature creation crew under animator Phil Tippett (STAR WARS, DRAGONSAYER), Dennis Muren (CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK) and the late Stan Winston (THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MISS JANE PITTMAN, TERMINATOR 2), operated under the Spielberg mandated edict that "we are not creating monsters, but rather naturalistic animals". With JURASSIC WORLD the intent this time around was to create a monster in the form of the film's primary antagonist - dubbed "Indominous Rex", a hitherto unimaginable genetic crossbred dinosaur fashioned from the DNA of nine species including T-Rex, Abelisaurus, cuttlefish (imbuing it with bio-camouflage abilities) and more.

There's something refreshingly unpretentious in an old fashioned Saturday afternoon or late night "Creature Double Feature" kind of film, and that's what JURASSIC WORLD has on its mind. This isn't really a hybrid science fiction / adventure thriller, as were the original two (and maybe the third) films. No, at its core JURASSIC WORLD is a balls out monster movie. And if taken as such, a pretty damned good one. Now before you say what's on your tongue, be honest and keep in mind that we all, quite frequently, and usually for nostalgic reasons, sign a Faustian pact with some of our favorite films - selling our souls (so to speak) for 90 minutes to two hours, and forgiving the most egregious of dumb-assed movie making in exchange for the pleasure of the roller coaster ride.

There's the previously mentioned PREDATOR of course. And, you know, in actuality the sequel, PREDATOR 2, is a much better realized film. It's better written with more realistic and identifiable characters. And it's scenario, taking place within the "war zone" of high tech L.A. gangland, and with the "soldiers" this time around being a police unit lead by the always believably intense Danny Glover, it's the genuine cinematic goods. But most die hards still prefer John McTiernan's "G.I. Joe"-like original. Okay, fine. Speaking of "die hards" though, what about the film DIE HARD? There's one with an interesting "dumb to fun" ratio.

Another well-loved McTiernan classic, 1998's DIE HARD was considered by many to be the thinking man's action film, while in actuality the only two characters in the entire film who do any kind thinking are the main opposing characters - Bruce Willis' John McClane and Alan Rickman's "terrorist" Hans Gruber. Pretty much everyone else in the film, the TV media characters, the L.A. police, and definitely the FBI - yahooing it up in the helicopter, flying dangerously low over the city streets and yelling how "... This is just like f"king Saigon"", make the average graduate of Archie's Riverdale High look Jurassic Park genetic scientists in comparison.

Oh, and don't even get us started on DIE HARD's ridiculously dumb-I-fied FBI agents' names - "Johnson" and "Johnson". Y'know, as in big and little ones. C'mon, that vies for the prize of "Most Inane Filmic Phallic In-joke" since SMOKEY AND THE BANDIT's introduction of the characters "Big and Little Enos". Only in SMOKEY it's supposed to be silly. In the "thinking man's action film" it's just dumb. And let's not get too much into TITANIC, except maybe to say Billy Zane's character is perhaps the most clichéd villain since Dick Dastardy and Mutley went after Penelope Pitstop during the course of those "Wacky Races". There's probably deleted footage somewhere of Zane twirling his moustache Snidley Whiplash-like. And if there was a set of railroad tracks on that ship, he sure as hell would've tied Kate Winslet to them. But TITANIC is forgiven its lack of realistic and believable characters because of its romantic sensibilities and stunningly realized attention to historical detail.
Yeah, some movies we just can't forgive either. No matter how much we try, we can't get around IRON MAN 3, certain aspects of THE PHANTOM MENACE, and the empty-skulliness of ARAMAGEDDON (explosions, sparks and fire in the vacuum of space?), or how some films jump just belligerently “jump the shark”. Or is that “nuke the fridge”? Ouch! But admit it, we ALL now and then sign that contract in red ink, and forgive some pretty dumb-assed films because they’re a whale of a tale and a helluva ride otherwise. And that’s all we’re saying about JURASSIC WORLD. If you’re willing to sign the contract, we think you’ll dig it. So maybe make the gulping noise and just ease up a little, huh?

“LOTSA COOL KNOBS AND SH*T!” - NON MOVIE TECH GEEKS MAY WANT TO SKIP THIS PART

From the point-of-view of film making craft, JURASSIC WORLD is a technical tour de force. Watching the original JURASSIC PARK today, it’s amazing how well the visual effects in the realization of the dinosaurs still hold. And while that now famous “Welcome to Jurassic Park” sequence - where Sam Neill’s Dr. Grant is so overwhelmed (as is the film audience) upon first sight of the dinos grazing on the horizon, is still the most gorgeous realization of Spielberg’s “not monsters but naturalistic animals” dictum, from the very first opening shot of JURASSIC WORLD, one has to acknowledge that film technology has advanced over the years to the point where, “Good Lord! Look at the detail in those eyes!”, the new creatures are even more realistically / naturalistically realized than those of the original trilogy.

As with the previous JURASSIC entries, the actual stars of the film - those digitally realized dinosaurs, are the work of the George Lucas-founded visual effects company Industrial Light & Magic, this time under the supervision of Tim Alexander (STAR WARS EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE, SUPER 8) rather than Dennis Muren – although Muren is still ILM’s top dog. The full sized interactive on-set dinos are once again the product of Legacy Effects (formerly Stan Winston Studios). And as with the earlier three films the live action effects mayhem (everything from flying debris to upturned and imploding vehicles) is under the baton of Michael Lantieri (MINORITY REPORT, A.I.).

Matching the original films effects-wise is a tough bar to meet (let alone exceed), especially when now placed in the realm of 3D and IMAX digital theatrical exhibition, which can at times make things look less “You feel like you can reach out and touch them” and more el cheapo “View Master”-esque. Part of the reason things not only look but feel extremely naturalistic in JURASSIC WORLD is because, on this latest trip to Isla Nublar, the wizards at ILM use a motion-capture system in creating the animal movements and behavior. Essentially capture / recording the green or blue screen studio performance of an actor, then (for lack of a better term) laying and layering a computer generated creature atop that performance, it makes all the sense in the world to use such a process in the creation of KING KONG, LORD OF THE RINGS’ Gollum, DAWN OF THE APES’ Caesar, or an INCREDIBLE HULK, as they are all bi-pedal humanoid based characters.

It really isn’t even too far a stretch to imagine using Mo-Cap in the realization of JURASSIC’s Velociraptors, as they too are bi-pedal and fairly close to human sized. But Mo-Cap creating a 40ft. Indominus Rex is a truly daring “Rex of a different color” (ha! ha! - remembering its camouflage-like abilities!). The ILM techno-sorcerers pull it off in spades though. Miss I-Rex is a marvel to behold. And we’re fairly certain she’ll go down in movie lore as one of filmdom’s most “you love ‘em and hate ‘em at the same time” creations, right up there with Stan Winston’s PREDATOR and PUMPKINHEAD. A sweeping statement, we know. But check back in a couple’a years and see if it isn’t so. Audiences will probably remember her more than the film itself.

JURASSIC WORLD features stunning production design by frequent Spielberg / Robert Zemeckis collaborator Edward Verreaux (CONTACT, JURASSIC PARK III), and brilliant conceptual contributions by the legendary Mark “Crash” McCrery (THE RELIC, GALAXY QUEST) and Aaron McBride (of the PIRATES OF THE CARRIBEAN franchise and THE AVENGERS). The new tech kids on the block this time around (that’s “new” as in “new additions to the JURASSIC creative family” - but they’re all seasoned filmic vets) include Academy Award winning composer Michael Giacchino (LOST, UP, RATATOUILLE, STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS) and director Colin Treverrow (SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED).

Scoring over ten years of video games (including the Spielberg produced THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK and SMALL SOLDIERS: SQUAD COMMANDER) before becoming film maker J.J. Abrams’ go-to guy on
LOST, ALIAS, and films such as MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE III, SUPER 8 and STAR TREK, Giacchino is often a breath of fresh cine-melodic air, composing long and complex lines of rich orchestral score in an era when many producers shy away from the practice as too “old school”.

An accomplished music filmsman on par with the legendary Lalo Schifrin, Basil Poledouris and James Newton Howard, if there’s one minor quibble we’ve had with Giacchino’s (impressively prodigious) output over the years, it’s something which probably isn’t his fault. Namely a tendency for contemporary film makers to steer their composers away from those long melodic lines. As such, many Giacchino scores will feature some truly rich and memorable thematic content which really isn’t developed as much as (we feel) it should be during the course of said film.

The truly memorable exceptions to this occur when Giacchino is teamed with a film maker who appreciates, and isn’t afraid of, what music can bring (and can change in) a cinematic sequence. As such some of his most accomplished (and what we feel will be timeless) works include his Pixar collaborations (on RATATOUILLE and his Oscar winning UP), his team ups with Brad Bird (most impressively on THE INCREDIBLES and MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - GHOST PROTOCOL), the aforementioned J.J. Abrams films (his new STAR TREK theme is a wonder, is it not?), and on his many video game scores. Most recently a friend reminded us of a piece of music from one of Giacchino’s MEDAL OF HONOR game scores, and pointed out how apropos it might be tied to an action sequence from an INDIANA JONES or CAPTAIN AMERICA adventure.

Personally chosen by Spielberg to score THE LOST WORLD video game, Giacchino’s no stranger or slouch when it comes to the sights and sounds of an Isla Nublar based adventure. John Williams’ scores to the first two JURASSIC films are stunning masterworks. And while we love the grandeur and wonderment of JURASSIC PARK, the dark percussive nature of Williams’ THE LOST WORLD has a feral bad-ass-ed-ness tonally akin to the timbre of his second STAR WARS installment, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. This will always musically make Williams’ LOST WORLD our favorite of the series.

Don Davis’ musical contribution to JURASSIC PARK III is serviceable but not incredibly memorable; while with this new film Giacchino steps up to the plate and acquits himself nicely - his score only sparsingly using Williams’ original JURASSIC theme in a couple of key sequences, then going on to create its own entirely new musical identity.

Remaining faithful to Williams’ musical DNA imprint, Giacchino likewise goes the structural route of scoring each key filmic set piece with its own unique motif. In this respect the standouts are certainly the “raptor / motorcycle chase” and the climactic (we’ll call it) WWF dino “super slam” battle.

Oh, and we now arguably have perhaps our personal all time fave Giacchino piece in his new “Jurassic World Theme”. Alternately wondrous and thrilling (as during the film’s first tour sequence), heart achingly gorgeous (when our heroes come upon the dying Apatosaurus), and stirringly epic (the final fade out coda). We’re pretty certain it will get lots of play in the coming years from film score fans, pops orchestras and music aficionados in general.

INDEPENDENT’S DAY

Many were stunned when, after but one independently produced feature - the film festival hit SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED, writer / director Colin Trevorrow was selected by Steven Spielberg to helm JURASSIC WORLD. And even more where shocked when Trevorrow accepted. But this really shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone who’s paid attention to Spielberg’s lengthy career as not only a director but as a producer, and a proponent / fan of the independent cinema movement.

In some respects himself the most independent of the 70s era “Rat Pack” of film school bred cinema titans (that group including good friends George Lucas, Brian DePalma and Martin Scorcese), Spielberg was the one amongst them who actually never graduated from a film school. Making a series of homemade 8mm films as a child (THE LAST GUNFIGHT, ESCAPE TO NOWHERE and the feature length CLOSE ENCOUNTERS progenitor FIRELIGHT), he applied to the film school of the University of Southern California but was turned
down because of his subpar grade average. While majoring in English at California State University, Long Beach, he received an internship at Universal, which lead to the opportunity to film his 35 mm “road movie” AMBLIN’; it catching the attention of studio exec Sid Sheinberg, then leading to the young film maker being signed on as a studio TV series contract director - the youngest at the time.

Over the next decade he’d churn out episodes of NIGHT GALLERY, OWEN MARSHALL, MARCUS WELBY M.D. and more, until “hitting the bigs” with the TV movie thriller DUEL - so intense and well made as to be released theatrically outside the U.S. His first feature length film for Universal and producers Richard Zanuck & David Brown, THE SUGALAND EXPRESS, was a critical hit big enough for the studio and producing team (still basking in the success of THE STING) to hand Spielberg the reins on JAWS - the director’s chair of which had just been vacated. The rest, as they say, is history.

Never forgetting his roots, in the mid 1980s, while films he produced - such as BACK TO THE FUTURE, GREMLINS and THE GOONIES, became theatrical hits, he turned his attention towards television by spearheading the woefully short-lived, and now (though not at the time) much lauded anthology series AMAZING STORIES.

Intended as part creative “playground” for established film making friends such as Clint Eastwood, Scorcese, Joe Dante, Irvin Kershner, Burt Reynolds, Joan Darling and more, STORIES was also established to give many talented up-and-coming film makers their first at bat in “the bigs”. Some of these future industry movers and shakers, who received their first breaks helming episodes of the fantasy series, included Phil Joanou (later responsible for STATE OF GRACE), Ken Kwapis (who went on to SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS), Mick Garris (MASTERS OF HORROR), and actors-at-the-time-making-the-transition-to-directors Timothy Hutton and Danny DeVito.

This creative all-points “keep on the lookout for up-and-coming talent” has remained an indelible part of Spielberg’s career as a producer, he over the last 20 years giving an “‘A’ List career profile boost” to burgeoning darlings of the independent movement including Vin Diesel, Edward Burns, Jeremy Davies and Adam Goldberg (all in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN), Samantha Morton and Tim Blake Nelson (both in MINORITY REPORT), and a relatively-unknown-at the-time Vince Vaughn in THE LOST WORLD.

In our current era, where the cinema trend dujour seems to be, after one film festival hit, a rising director is snagged for a mammoth production purportedly because of their “edginess” and “unique voice”, but in reality seems to be because they can be hired less expensively, and be controlled by a studio more than an established “A-lister” (we believe this was the case with THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE’s Scott Derrickson being assigned Fox’s 2008 remake of THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL), with Spielberg we kinda believe the claims of a desire for “edginess and uniqueness”.

In a recent SlashFilm interview (April 30, 2015), JURASSIC WORLD director Colin Trevorrow recalled his first meetings with Spielberg, and speculated as to why he felt he was personally approached to helm the blockbuster-in-planning by its cinematic papa.

“Steven saw the film (SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED), and Frank (Marshall) gave me a call and asked me to come out. We talked for about two hours and then they flew me to L.A. A couple days later Steven and I talked for a couple of hours and then he gave me JURASSIC PARK because it was a very strange week. You know, I don’t know exactly why he made that choice. Part of me feels like he wanted a child in the way that, like, Willy Wonka did - who, like, you know, wouldn’t screw up the chocolate factory.”

A graduate of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, Trevorrow met his to-this-day screenwriting partner, Derek Connolly, during the time both served as interns on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. The duo has been creatively inseparable ever since. In 2012 Trevorrow directed Connolly’s script SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED - its creation inspired by a true life classified ad (a joke) in the Sept. / Oct. 1997 issue of “Backwoods Magazine” which read …
Wanted: Somebody to go back in time with me. This is not a joke. P.O. Box 91 Ocean View, WA 99393. You'll get paid after we get back. Must bring your own weapons. Safety not guaranteed. I have only done this once before –

Ostensibly a comedy, SAFETY used its humor as a hook then diving board into a multi-layered narrative examining the faded dreams and lost loves of the once optimistic New Millennial generation of twenty and thirtysomethings. Trevorrow would say of Spielberg’s response to SAFETY’s thematic ...

“I know what he liked about SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED, which is that that movie posed a question throughout the film and he loved the answer on a very fundamental level. And I think that my instinct to be able to have something be funny and sad and thrillerly and weird and in this case, horrifying, you know, JURASSIC PARK doesn’t have a genre. Like, what is JURASSIC PARK? It’s a sci-fi, terror, family adventure thriller? It’s hard to define. And being able to bounce around from all these different tones, and do something that hits all the notes, I would hope it’s that. I didn’t win a contest or anything. So, I hope it’s that.”

ACTORS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

While the true stars of the JURASSIC PARK franchise have always been (and will always be) the dinosaurs (sorry SAG), the importance of characters - stand ins for the audience both collectively and individually if you will, who are relatable, likeable, clever, smart, and even at times a little smart-assed, cannot be underestimated. When entering an “alien world” cinematically depicted, the unfamiliar sights, sounds and customs of that environment can be so emotionally disconcerting to the average audience member / viewer, that they’ll just “tune out” emotionally - which is the LAST thing a film maker wants.

And these “alien” landscapes aren’t just limited to those of the sci fi / fantasy realm. A simple shift in time can similarly jolt an audience from its comfort zone. Y’know, as in with one look at an impossibly tight bustier or 18th century powdered wig, how our attention can suddenly shift to how uncomfortable it must be trudging up that cobblestone avenue in that attire on a warm day, rather than being focused on the fact that that character’s child has just died in battle. The canny film maker recognizes this and takes steps. And often the best of these is to create a “tour guide” in the form of a familiar character or characterization, a narrative device, trope, or even cleverly placed cliché, which will cause a comforting sense of subconscious déjà vu within the viewer to thus lead them through this alien world without feeling out of place.

For example, as much as we have problems with the Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet characters in TITANIC (they have no individual personal flaws to overcome in order to be together, like say Streisand and Redford in THE WAY WE WERE, or Roberts and Gere in PRETTY WOMAN), writer / director James Cameron does brilliantly use the age old ROMEO & JULIET / WEST SIDE STORY paradigm / structure of a love bridging social / political / economic conventions as the “hook of subconscious audience familiarity” which functions as “tour guide” into this “alien” landscape of 1912 - specifically aboard this ship (a microcosm for society at large) wherein the rich and privileged occupy the upper levels, and the poor are relegated to steerage.

In the original JURASSIC PARK trilogy, the film narratives are considerably “stripped down” versions of those in the novels, but the movie versions of the characters are more three-dimensionally interesting than their Crichton-penned literary counterparts. For example, in the first novel, JURASSIC PARK, John Hammond comes across more as a rich and arrogant bastard who receives his karmic just deserts when the park goes haywire. Whereas in the film he’s a lifelong showman, and maybe even a lifelong high tech huckster / hack (shades of KING KONG’s Carl Denham) desirous of finally leaving something REAL to posterity. The park becomes that, and we empathize with him considerably more than we do with the original Crichton version.

Another filmic character addition / arc not in the novels is that of Allan Grant (Sam Neill)’s discomfort around (and possible dislike of) children. This feeling is supplanted when he, against all desire, becomes protector / surrogate parent (a frequent Spielberg theme, by the way) to Hammond’s grandchildren Lex and
Tim. Is that one of the oldest narrative arcs in the universe? Yup! It’s probably been around for close to 65 million years. BUT IT WORKS! Without this human element JURASSIC PARK would be far too intense (as many felt JAWS was) for family viewing. All of this “tour guide” and “tropism” is nothing however if the characters don't live and breathe. And one of the sterling things all of the JURASSIC films have done thus far is to populate themselves with actors who actually make the (admittedly at times thin dialog and interpersonal relationships) much more warm and believable.

In this respect we recall seeing the second film, THE LOST WORLD, on opening weekend in a huge theater jam packed with over 700 people. And how, when Jeff Goldblum’s Ian Malcomb visits an ailing John Hammond, and upon Malcolm’s first sight of the older and now much taller Lex and Tim, how the audience burst into a 700 strong smiling wave of warm feelings and verbal “Ooos” “Ahhs” and “Hey, it’s the kids from the first movie!” comments for these characters. They wanted to hug them just as much as Malcomb did. And the same thing four years later in JURASSIC PARK III when Allan Grant turns up at the home of Laura Dern’s Ellie Sattler (well, actually now a married “Ellie Degler”).

Maybe not the same theater. But another 700 people, and the same warm reaction and similar verbal responses, because the actors in the JURASSIC series (which over the years have also come to include Julianne Moore, Pete Postlethwaite, Vanessa Lee Chester, William H. Macy, Tea Leoni, the aforementioned Vince Vaughn, the late Micheal Jeter and more) have brought not only sterling acting chops, but a depth making them arguably more human, likeable and relatable than the characters on the script pages. Some have speculated that this quality is what separates a good actor from a star. And for this reason any audience enjoyability within JURASSIC WORLD (and it is very enjoyable) is considerably indebted in no small part to Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard and Vincent D’Onofrio.

Perhaps the most likable actor working today, Chris Pratt had already charmingly enraptured TV audiences with his portrayal of ne’er-do-well Andy Dwyer on NBC’s PARKS AND RECREATION. But he won the hearts of women and smart-assed men around the world as Peter (“Starlord”) Quill, intergalactic merc turned hero in Marvel’s epic 2014 adventure / satire GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY. Carrying the weight of the entire film on his shoulders, we at first felt Pratt was trying just a tad too hard to be “lovably roguish”. But over time his easy-going demeanor won us over as well. And it’s the same kind of earthy and casual “Guy next door” aplomb he bring to his JURASSIC WORLD role of former Navy man Owen Grady, who now works for the InGen corporation training Velociraptors (hence that earlier WWII “dolphins used for military purposes” reference). And oh yes, Grady is necessarily considerably more intelligent than Quill.

Here’s a nifty bit of trivia. Many recognize the ethereally beautiful Bryce Dallas Howard as the daughter of actor / director Ron Howard. But did you know she was also the primary inspiration for his 1989 film PARENTHOOD? One day, in the midst of a hectic film promotional tour, the young Ms. Howard, being carried by her father through a crowded airport, upchucked, in the best Reagan McNeill / EXORCIST-style, all over daddy’s shirt and chest, an incident which triggered (what some might consider) a minor “life crisis crossroads” in the mind of the film maker - he wondering for a short time along the lines of, “Good Lord, what did I get myself into in trying to balance both a family and a career, and thinking I could justice to either?”. This became the central thematic mid-life conundrum of PARENTHOOD’s Steve Martin character, Gil Buckman - who similarly receives a Pazu-like dousing of not-completely-digested peas and carrots from his child. Anyway ...

An actress almost supernaturally capable of pulling a sense of empathy from an audience (this quality making her M. Night Shyamalan’s cinematic muse of sorts in both 2004’s THE VILLAGE, and more impressively in 2006’s LADY IN THE WATER) she’d be one of the shining elements within Sam Raimi’s overly busy SPIDER-MAN 3 as Gwen Stacy. As written in the third Spidey film, it would’ve been very easy for the Stacy character to come off as a vapid, sexy blonde “other woman” cliché. But Howard brought to her an almost childlike open tenderness which made it easy for audiences to understand how Peter Parker (when not under the influence of that personality altering “symbiote”) might just fall for her, ... because we did too!

This natural sense of empathy and likability is soooo important to her role as Jurassic World park director, Claire Dearing, because in lesser hands the character could come off as little more than the proverbially cold ice queen bitch. The manner in which Howard breathes life into the (somewhat thinly written) part however makes Claire more understandably “misguided” and caught up in the heat of success, rather than being a bean counting corporate lackey. ALTHOUGH (and we couldn’t get around this one), is it just us, or did anyone else notice how the film kinda sorta seems to paint the concept of the driven
unmarried career woman as perhaps more sexually repressed, “ethically challenged” and all around less complete than their child-rearing counterparts? Hmmm? Very uncool guys. Very!

And hey, if you can get Vincent D’Onofrio in your movie, you’d damned well better, because … well, because he’s Vincent D’Onofrio. Perhaps the most underrated of American acting treasures, everyone seems to forget that the same actor who memorably portrayed Pvt. Lawrence (“Pyle”) in FULL METAL JACKET, is the same fellow who created one of the most hilarious villains in cinema history as Edgar in MEN IN BLACK, and is also currently tearing up Marvel / Netflix’s DAREDEVIL as “The Kingpin” - Wilson Fiske. All of this notwithstanding, we think D’Onofrio will never have a role as juicy as that of (emotionally troubled?) CONAN THE BARBARIAN creator Robert E. Howard in the 1996 doomed-love story THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD, opposite Renee’ Zellweger. Not unlike Bryce Dallas Howard, in JURASSIC WORLD, D’Onofrio brings to his role of InGen security chief Vic Hoskins a little more than we believe was maybe on the script page.

You don’t have to be Sherlock Holmes to see, at the beginning of the film, where the Hoskins character will take things by the third act. As Chevy Chase’s Fletch once said, “Larry Holmes can figure that one out”. And Hoskins doesn’t disappoint. Midway through however there’s a brief scene where Hoskins relates his past experience of “connecting on a personal level” with a (so-called) wild animal. And for a split second he’s a sympathetic human with a past, and not just the barrel-chested, mustache twirling bad guy. That is, if the Hoskins character had a ‘stache, … which he doesn’t.

This is so important, because by the time we get to Hoskins’ third act rationale “soliloquy”, we for all the world couldn’t help but be reminded of Joe Seneca as Dr. Meddows in that 1988 remake of THE BLOB, where he starts spouting about “the balance of power” and all the other. Back then we laughed our asses off, that speech was sooo hammy. But with D’Onofrio’s rendition we don’t. We still recognize it as the worst of Creature Double Feature character cliché, and maybe we knowingly grin. But we don’t laugh. And sometimes it takes more acting chops to prevent an audience response than it does to incite one. We’d give anything to have been a fly on the wall at the first JURASSIC WORLD cast table read when that part came up for the first time. At any rate …

When all is said and done, Colin Trevorrow (and Steven Spielberg)’s JURASSIC WORLD is a whale of good time at the movies. Perhaps we would’ve preferred a bit more witty commentary on today’s rush to immediately slap corporate sponsorship on the latest craze. Kind of like Jeff Goldblum’s pointed observation in the original JURASSIC PARK about how Hammond, as soon as his scientist had a breakthrough, “… Slapped it on a plastic lunch box, and now you’re selling it”.

There are kernels of that in JURASSIC WORLD. That little joke about “The Verizon / Indominus Rex Paddock” was a nugget of a satirical idea far too good to not similarly pursue elsewhere. But the film makers chose not to. Oh well.

In the end, a true film fan (oh hell, straight-up film geeks) know some movies can be worth seeing for not only one good scene, but sometimes just for one great freakin’ shot which will be forever burned onto your mental photo-card. And in JURASSIC WORLD, as a good friend emailed us the other night …

“And not even Steve McQueen, the King of Cool, came close to riding a motorcycle with a gang of f**king velociraptors.”

It’s more than a few faults notwithstanding, for that alone the phrases “JURASSIC WORLD” and “enjoyably bad-assed” deserve to be mentioned in the same sentence. Nuff said, huh?

CEJ