

Inheritance: The Legacy of Ellie Sattler in the *Jurassic* Franchise

Lauren Chochinov*

University of New Brunswick Saint John (Canada)

Submitted: April 12, 2023 – Revised version: October 30, 2023

Accepted: November 19, 2023 – Published: December 20, 2023

Abstract

Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern), the heroine of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), has long been considered a feminist icon, notable for her assertion that in the wake of man's Icarian fall, women will inherit the earth. As the only woman in the film, I suggest that Sattler inhabits multiple archetypes common to female characters in genre films, especially the action heroine and the Final Girl, a popular trope in horror films. Like Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) from the *Alien* franchise (1979–1997) and Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) from *The Terminator* films (1984–2019), Sattler's intelligence, her strength, and her empathy situate her as *Jurassic Park*'s heroic heart. When the franchise next sees Ellie Sattler in *Jurassic Park III* (2001), however, she is a mother of two children and married, the centre of a nuclear, heterosexual family — a notable change from her earlier portrayal as a career-focused woman in a male dominated field. This essay examines how the *Jurassic Park* films and their sequels, *Jurassic World* (2015), *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (2018), *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022), increasingly move away from Sattler's feminism in the form of Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard), whose characterization is indicative of the franchise's celebration of maternal, heteronormative women and villainization of those who do not fit this mold.

Keywords: Jurassic Park; Jurassic World; Final Girl; Evolution; Maternity.

* ✉ umchochl@myumanitoba.ca

1 Introduction

Thirty years after its release, *Jurassic Park's* (1993) catchphrases, from Ian Malcolm's (Jeff Goldblum) "Life finds a way" to John Hammond's (Richard Attenborough) "Spared no expense," have become part of the cultural discourse. One quote in particular, however, sparked the delight and drew the admiration of feminist viewers — spoken by the film's only adult female protagonist, Dr. Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern). As Malcolm and Alan Grant (Sam Neill) debate the ethicise of scientifically engineering an extinct species back to life, Sattler quietly interrupts and says, "Dinosaur eats man. Woman inherits the earth" (Spielberg 1993, 45:15). It is a line that proved fundamental to shaping Sattler's character and presenting her as a feminist icon, according to Kathleen Kennedy, producer of the *Jurassic* franchise and current president of Lucasfilm (Jackson n.d.). The co-screenwriter of *Jurassic Park: Dominion*, Emily Carmichael describes that moment as a "bomb" Sattler drops "into the lap of the patriarchy" (Jackson n.d.). Or, in the words of entertainment writer Jenna Busch, the quote is "one of the best lines in cinema history" (Busch 2022).

Within the narrative world of *Jurassic Park*, men are very much responsible for the aberrant science and subsequent disaster that befalls the park's first visitors. Women, on the other hand, are barely visible, which makes Sattler's the only adult female voice other than the roar of the park's all-female dinosaurs, not least that of the *Tyrannosaurus Rex*. Yet, Sattler's position as a feminist icon is not without complexity and the treatment of women in the *Jurassic* franchise (1993-2022) shows that despite Sattler's belief that women will triumph in the face of men's folly, the films do not necessarily support or share her thesis.

Ellie Sattler would not exist without Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), the heroine of the *Aliens* series (1979-1997). Before Ripley, women in action films were mainly delegated to the role of damsel in distress or served as "motivation" for male action heroes and their missions (Brown 2011: 26). Like Sattler, Ripley can be considered both an action heroine and a "Final Girl", a phrase invented by Carol J. Clover to classify the role of women in slasher horror films (Clover 2015: 35). The *Aliens* series incorporates aspects of science fiction, horror, and action, making it multigenre, much like the *Jurassic Park* franchise. According to Clover, the Final Girl is a stock figure in slasher horror films who "Above all [...] is intelligent and resourceful in extreme situations" (39). As Clover explains, "[The Final Girl] is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again" (35). In *Alien* (1979), Ripley is quite literally the last person standing. In the film's final scene, she strips to her underwear and in what is now the Final Girl's iconic outfit, fights a xenomorph wearing only a tank top. *Aliens* (1986), the sequel to *Alien*, sees Ripley take on a leadership role, guiding a ragtag group of ill-prepared space marines in their battle against the xenomorphs.¹ The *Terminator* (1984-2019) franchise also sees its female protagonist transform from an accidental Final Girl in the first film to an action heroine and Final Girl in the film's sequel.² In *The Terminator* (1984), Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) is mostly a damsel in distress thrown into a dangerous world she does not recognize. In the sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), however, Connor has transformed into a muscled, ferocious warrior, obsessed with keeping her son safe from the liquid metal T-1000 Terminator (Robert Patrick). While Ripley and Sarah Connor have been likened to other action heroes of the era like Sylvester Stallone's Rambo (Brown 2011: 27) or Bruce Willis's John McClane, unlike their male counterparts, both women are also closely associated with motherhood. Ripley spends much of *Aliens* caring for Newt (Carrie Henn), an orphaned child she rescues who is a proxy for her own lost daughter while Sarah Connor's *raison-d'être* is her son John's (Edward Furlong) safety. Ripley's dual role as an action heroine and a mother continue in subsequent installments of the franchise. In *Alien*³(1992), Ripley becomes pregnant with an alien embryo and sacrifices herself in the end to destroy the deadly offspring. *Jurassic Park's* depiction of Ellie Sattler considers and adapts the action heroine archetype established by the blockbuster franchises of the 1980's and early 90's.

1. Ripley returned in *Alien*³(1992), one year before *Jurassic Park's* release.

2. Both Ripley and Sarah Connor begin the franchise as somewhat passive characters. They are ill prepared for their worlds to erupt in violence and survive thanks to instinct and, in the case of Connor, help from Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn), a soldier from the future. The sequel to both films, however, sees an evolution in Ripley and Connor. They are no longer naive or ill-equipped. They know their enemy and lead others towards its defeat.

2 Ellie Sattler

Ellie Sattler was born of this particular synthesis of action heroine, Final Girl, and mother figure. Unlike the *Alien* franchise or the *Terminator* franchise, however, Sattler does not undergo a transformative journey from helpless victim to muscled action star. Her first appearance in *Jurassic Park* establishes multiple aspects of her character that become central to how she is depicted and understood in the remainder of the film; she is independent, out-spoken, intelligent, and warm. Sattler's role in *Jurassic Park* is not one of personal growth. She begins the film equipped with all she needs to survive her upcoming ordeal.

In her first scene, she watches in amused horror as Alan Grant scares a child with a graphic description of *Velociraptors*, his obvious disdain for children foreshadowing his journey towards metaphorical parenthood that occurs later in the film. The brief sequence establishes Sattler and Grant as the film's central — and only — romantic relationship, but it also emphasizes the couple's dilemma too: Sattler someday wants children and Grant does not. The unexpected appearance of John Hammond quickly distracts from any further focus on Grant and Sattler's relationship and instead works to emphasize another important aspect of Sattler's characterization. According to Hammond, she is the world's preeminent paleobotanist, a role that makes her suitable to join Grant as they set off to Hammond's mysterious new nature park.

Sattler is the only woman in Hammond's group of experts, which immediately causes tensions between Grant and Ian Malcolm who takes a romantic interest in her. In Graeme Wilson's article "Women Inherits the Earth: Deconstructing *Jurassic Park* as an Early Text in Third-Wave Feminism", Wilson notes that "Sattler is never sexualized" (Wilson 2017: 75) despite Malcolm's open flirting. According to Wilson, it is Malcolm who experiences sexualization, as he spends much of the film injured, his chest exposed, lying prone as Sattler nurses him back to health (Wilson 2017: 75). Sattler inhabits many roles commonly attributed to women in multi-genre films: she is an object of possible romance, a nurturing figure who likes children and cares for the sick, an action heroine who risks her life to save others, and the Final Girl in light of the fact that there are literally no other adult women present to inhabit that persona.

Linda Williams has noted that in horror cinema, much of the terror occurs during instances when female characters are ill prepared to encounter the film's monster for the first time. As Williams writes, "Some of the most violent and terrifying moments of the horror film genre occur in moments when the female victim meets the psycho-killer-monster unexpectedly, before she is ready" (Williams 1999: 278-279). *Halloween* (1978), for example, opens with a young Michael Myers sneaking up on his unsuspecting sister, Judith (Sandy Johnson), only to stab her multiple times. *Scream* (1996) follows the same formula, beginning with Casey Becker (Drew Barrymore) unknowingly answering a phone call from Ghostface, the film's antagonist, which leads to her murder. *Jurassic Park* adopts this structure by opening the film with an early death. Unlike a classic slasher film, however, where evil is clearly identified in the form of knife-wielding serial killers or grotesque monsters, *Jurassic Park's* villain is more ambiguous. To apply Williams's argument to *Jurassic Park*, the *Velociraptor* capture that begins the movie is indicative of how dangerous and uncontrollable the dinosaurs are, despite assurances later in the film that they can be tamed and confined. But the dinosaurs are not the film's villains. Sattler's initial meeting with Hammond is notable because she immediately dislikes him.³ Hammond's ironic disregard for dinosaur bones foreshadows his disregard for the dangerous science he embraces. The science, in this case the paleographic evidence, means little to him and Sattler's anger serves as a warning to be suspicious of Hammond's intentions. In many ways, Hammond is an accidental villain, whose well-meaning ambition and passion lead to ruinous results, which makes *Jurassic Park's* dinosaurs serve as the film's equivalent of Frankenstein's creature. They are deadly and dangerous, but this is their nature. It is the naivety and ambition of their creators, Hammond, Dr. Wu (B.D. Wong), and the park's scientists that is ultimately to blame for the disaster that lies ahead.

Identifying *Jurassic Park's* monsters requires Sattler and Grant to strip away the shiny veneer of Hammond's creation. Just as the Wizard of Oz remained hidden behind his curtain, initially, the only visibly "monstrous" presence in the park are the dinosaurs themselves, not only because they are apex predators, but also because they are unnatural, a science experiment that situates them out of place and time. The film's opening *Velociraptor* attack provides ample evidence that the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* are lethal. Grant and Sattler are,

3. Ironically, Sattler's first words to Hammond are, "who's the jerk" (Spielberg 1993, 10:41).

of course, not aware of this incident and their naivete only emphasizes Hammond's moral ambiguity and his own well-meaning, but ultimately naïve belief that he can disrupt nature without consequence. In a moment of dramatic irony, as Sattler and Grant arrive at *Jurassic Park*, the audience is already aware that they are in danger. Despite the grandeur of Hammond's vision, tension exists, created by Sattler and Grant's understandable ignorance of how misguided Hammond's passion project truly is. The first person to see a dinosaur is Alan Grant who looks on in awe as a *Brachiosaurus* appears before him. Sattler, however, sits beside him in the car unaware of what he is seeing, concentrating instead on the prehistoric leaf she holds in her hand. The *Brachiosaurus* is awe-inspiring, but once more it is Hammond who inadvertently reveals the park's dangers. When he tells Grant and Sattler that the park has a T-Rex, Sattler reacts with amazement while Grant becomes dizzy and nearly faints. In this moment of joy, this moment of Hammond's triumph, the spectre of the T-Rex serves as the film's killer in a mask, unseen, unheard, for now. It is Grant who physically turns Sattler's head, forcing her gaze, Grant who first shows her the dinosaur, but like the Final Girl, Sattler's initial fixation on the prehistoric leaf leads to her early discovery that the scientists of Jurassic Park may have made a grave error in judgment. She is unknowingly prophetic in her focus.

Early in the film, while Malcolm and Grant express reservations about the park, Sattler is especially observant. When asked for her opinion after their initial tour of the compound, she tells Hammond,

You have plants right here in this building, for example, that are poisonous. You picked them because they look pretty, but these are aggressive living things that have no idea what century they're living in and will defend themselves. Violently, if necessary (Spielberg 1993, 37:04).

Williams explains that there is a traditional connection between flowers and femininity and argues that

Flowering plants are popularly regarded as feminine due to their beauty and perceived docility [...]. However, Sattler is asserting that femininity is not diametrically opposed to aggression or dangerous capability, which are culturally regarded as more masculine attributes [...]. [This] alludes to the legitimate danger posed by Jurassic Park's female dinosaur population (Williams 1999: 75).

Later while visiting the *Triceratops* enclosure, Sattler is immediately concerned when it becomes obvious that the animal is lethargic and ill. For Grant, the moment provides childlike wonder. For Sattler, the situation is indicative of her earlier warning to Hammond. She stalks the enclosure, examining faeces with single-minded focus, concerned that the *Triceratops* has eaten something toxic. Even at this early stage, the park's scientists have ignored the delicate ecosystem required to support the health and safety of its dinosaurs. Sattler recognizes this, her concern the first indication that, as Ian Malcolm so famously notes, "[the park's scientists] were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn't stop to think if they should" (Spielberg 1993, 36:11).

It is at this point in the film that Grant and Sattler go their separate ways, and their individual experiences emphasize Sattler's strengths and Grant's perceived weaknesses. Grant goes with the children, braving the park's dinosaurs as he tries to keep Tim (Joseph Mazzello) and Lex (Ariana Richards) safe. Sattler stays with Hammond as they attempt to restart the park's power grid and find a way to leave the island. Away from Grant, Sattler steps into the role of action heroine and Final Girl. DeTora notes that unlike Grant who struggles with technology, Sattler "is the only character that successfully bridges all of these scientific and technological spaces in the course of the film" (DeTora 2008: 12). The setting of Grant and Sattler's individual journey are starkly different. Grant spends his time outdoors, in nature, exposed to the park's dinosaurs with little means of protection. Sattler, however, is situated within Jurassic Park's command centre. Grant, whose dislike of children marks him as a character in need of transformation, is tasked with protecting Lex and Tim, risking his own life multiple times to bring them back to their grandfather. Sattler, alternatively, begins the film clearly stating that she would like children, meaning that her experience in the park has little to do with becoming maternal because she already is. This is further emphasized when she nurses an injured Malcolm and volunteers to restart the park's electrical system, as the elderly Hammond is not fit for such an arduous task (DeTora 2008: 12). In her analysis of slasher horror films, Clover explains that the setting for these films, which she calls "Terrible Place", "may at first seem a safe haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in" (Clover 2015: 31). As she leaves the

relative safety of an emergency bunker where Malcolm and Hammond wait for her, Sattler descends into a maintenance shed, its metallic walls and dark corners reminiscent of the internal architecture of the *Nostromo* in *Alien*. This sequence leans heavily on horror tropes as Sattler makes the horrible discovery that Ray Arnold (Samuel L. Jackson) is dead when his dismembered arm lands on her shoulder. She quickly realizes that the *Velociraptors* are inside the shed and sprints back to the bunker, her sleeveless shirt evocative of the many Final Girls who came before.

Despite Sattler's obvious bravery and scientific expertise, at times, *Jurassic Park* struggles with its depiction of Sattler as a feminist figure. She is a successful scientist, a voice of truth, and a nurturing figure who cares for children and the elderly alike. Cynthia A. Freeland argues that Sattler's role as a feminist icon is challenged, however, by the fact that while

[she] is shown enthusiastically identifying plant species in the park, [...] the plants themselves are not intrinsically interesting here but function only as fodder for the dinosaurs. Thus, even in her scientific role, the woman could be said to be chiefly concerned with nourishment and caregiving (Freeland 1996: 209).

Sattler's status as the only adult woman in the park also means that the film's moments of minor romantic tension are entirely centered on her because there are literally no other heteronormative options available for Malcolm or Grant. She is forced into this role with varying results.

The love triangle between Sattler, Malcolm, and Grant is designed to emphasize the primary conflict in Sattler and Grant's relationship. Ian Malcolm is a threat, not because Sattler shows any feelings towards him, but because Malcolm loves children. The two scenes that focus on this potential triangle undermine Sattler's autonomy and, by extension, her standing as a feminist icon. In the first, Malcolm explains "chaos theory" to a fascinated Sattler. According to Freeland, Sattler's pronounced ignorance about "chaos theory" and Malcolm's subsequent explanation is akin to "a teasing sex scene that treats her like a silly teenage bimbo" (Freeland 1996: 209). Rajani Sudan argues that the sole purpose of this scene is to setup "a sexual competition [between Grant and Malcolm] for the only available and suitable (that is, reproductive) woman on set" (Sudan 1997: 112). The second scene to tease a potential love triangle is between Malcolm and Grant who discuss whether or not Sattler is single. What makes this scene particularly troubling is the fact that Sattler is not present for the conversation. When Grant indicates that he and Sattler are involved, Malcolm immediately backs down, but Sattler's own feelings and desires are not considered here. These two moments undermine Sattler's autonomy because while she is certainly independent, exceedingly brave, and intelligent, she is also unknowingly forced into the role of romantic lead and potential romantic interest for Ian Malcolm despite never expressing her own desire save for a few brief exchanges with Grant and one flirtatious exchange with Malcolm.

The focus on Sattler's relationship status and her hope to someday become a parent is understandable given that *Jurassic Park* is a film consumed with reproduction anxiety. While most of this focuses on the dinosaurs, the fact that Grant does not want or like children remains a constant theme throughout the film. *Jurassic Park* is deeply concerned with the definition of "natural reproduction." How the dinosaurs are made, who makes them, and who will make them in the future becomes an obsessive series of concerns that permeate both Grant's journey to bring the children to safety and Sattler's attempt to escape Isla Nublar. The dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* are created by men: Dr. Wu is the park's chief scientist and Hammond is its architect. Hammond even insists on being present for each dinosaur's birth to ensure the newly born dinosaurs imprint on him. The dinosaurs, however, are all female, which according to Wilson suggests that "Jurassic Park can be viewed as a patriarchal society whose entire economy is based on the monetization of femininity" (Wilson 2017: 76). Just as Grant becomes a parental figure to Lex and Tim, Hammond is both mother and father to his dinosaurs though his attempt to inhabit these binary roles disrupts the natural order and results in what Freeland has called "a culturally coded threat centering upon a kind of uncontrolled, rampant female sexuality, as well as awesome reproductive abilities" (Freeland 1996: 210).

The hubris of male scientists attempting to unnaturally control a population of female animals and prohibit breeding is countered by nature righting a perceived wrong. In *Jurassic Park*, "the maternal is transformed into the paternal" (DeTora 2008: 8). Hammond wishes to be both mother and father by disallowing his dinosaurs to become mothers themselves. This is reflective of Sattler whose desire to have children is potentially thwarted

by Grant's disinterest. Unlike the dinosaurs whose genetic modifications allow them to naturally change their biological sex and reproduce, Sattler's prospective ability to become a mother is entirely reliant on whether or not Grant changes his feelings towards eventually having children with her. Arguably, according to Briggs and Kelber-Kaye, "The work of the film's narrative becomes getting Grant to care for children" (Briggs and Kelber-Kaye 2000: 105). The final scene depicts a rescued Grant and Sattler flying away from Jurassic Park in a helicopter, Tim and Lex safe in Grant's arms as Sattler sits across from them, the relieved smile on her face a clear sign that Grant has evolved. Through his great trial he emerges a hero, a hero interested in having children of his own.

This image of the nuclear family emphasizes *Jurassic Park's* fixation on what it deems 'natural' and 'unnatural' reproduction. The film positions Grant, Sattler, Tim, and Lex as an example of a 'natural' family who are white and heteronormative. Notably, Lex and Tim's parents are in the midst of a divorce, so Grant and Sattler double as both their rescuers and surrogate, functional parents. Hammond, Wu, and the dinosaurs represent the 'unnatural' family featuring offspring scientifically produced in a lab. DeTora argues that "Hammond makes the park into a family scene, and it is this action — this failed attempt to construct a nuclear family-friendly amusement park inhabited by voracious human-imprinted predators — that brings calamity" (DeTora 2008: 15).⁴

3 Sattler and the Franchise

To return to the action heroine/Final Girl model discussed earlier, according to the formula, Sattler would become an even more confident, commanding presence in any potential sequels to the film. She ends *Jurassic Park* similarly to the way Ripley and Sarah Connor end their individual first films; she is aware of the danger and through trial and error, is more prepared than ever to face it again if the need arises. This logical next step in her action heroine journey is disrupted because Sattler is not in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997). Instead, the film focuses on Malcolm's journey to Isla Sorna in an attempt to rescue his girlfriend, Sarah Harding (Julianne Moore). Harding is the female lead in the film and acts as a very obvious cypher for Ellie Sattler. Like Sattler, Harding is a scientist (she's a paleontologist). She's independent and stubborn, travelling to Isla Sorna by herself despite knowing Malcolm would disapprove. She also cares deeply for Malcolm's daughter Kelly Curtis (Vanessa Lee Chester) and serves as a surrogate mother figure. In terms of representation for women, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* shapes Harding in Sattler's image, right down to her sensible hiking boots and khakis, which provides the film with a strong female heroine, but does little to progress the action heroine/Final Girl trajectory that inspired Sattler's initial creation.

The next time Sattler appears in the franchise is in *Jurassic Park III* (2001). She is a mother to two small children, married to a man named Mark, and very much embodying the heteronormative nuclear family idealized in the first film. While she briefly discusses Grant's new work on *Velociraptors*, she does not join him on his ill-fated mission to Isla Sorna. There is a sense that Sattler has detached herself from the events of *Jurassic Park*. When Grant enthusiastically asks if she remembers the sounds of the raptors, Sattler says, "I try not to" (Johnston 2001, 5:47). She is not seen again in the franchise until *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022) where she is a divorced agronomist whose children are away at college. Sattler's ability to once more become an action heroine is tied to her role as a mother, as if her ability to face danger and outrun greedy scientists and vicious dinosaurs hinges on whether or not she is actively parenting. In *Jurassic Park*, she has no children, but is shown to be nurturing and maternal. In *Jurassic Park III*, she has children and distances herself from Grant who has regressed despite *Jurassic Park's* implication that he had transformed through his experiences with Lex and Tim. By *Jurassic World: Dominion*, Sattler's children are grown and do not require her attention, which allows her to once more join Grant on another adventure.

Inheritance connotes a passing of a legacy, but also the passing of genes through reproduction. For women to inherit the earth, as Sattler suggests, the film implies that only natural reproduction and heteronormative nuclear families are an acceptable path towards this feminist vision. The film depicts what occurs when reproduction is uncontrolled. It also depicts its lead heroine as a woman who desires children and is ready for

4. The end of *Jurassic Park* implies a failure in parenting: Hammond's 'children' cannot be controlled.

motherhood. As a stand-alone film, Ellie Sattler's depiction as both an action heroine and a nurturing, maternal figure is not unique in light of characters like Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor who also inhabit this dual, seemingly conflicting role. Yet considering how women are depicted in the following films of the *Jurassic* franchise, Sattler's duality takes on different meaning. The *Jurassic World* trilogy argues that not all women will inherit the earth, only those like Ellie Sattler.

4 The *Jurassic World* Franchise and Claire Dearing

In the films subsequent to *Jurassic Park*, the emphasis on mothering and maternity becomes obsessive. In her article "Eaten in Jurassic World: Antihumanism and Popular Culture," Dina Khapaeva traces the changing focus of the *Jurassic Park* franchise, a focus that shifts from humanism to animal rights activism. Khapaeva explains that "At its core, *Jurassic Park* of 1993 is a story about people and their different ways of responding to challenging situations" (Khapaeva 2020: 25). According to Khapaeva, this humanist focus shifts in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* when themes of animal conservation are introduced, a theme that appears in all subsequent *Jurassic* films (Khapaeva 2020: 26).

The dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* are depicted as animals behaving according to their natural instincts. *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, however, begins to humanize the dinosaurs with the introduction of a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* family. When the dinosaurs attack humans in *The Lost World*, they have a very clear motive: their baby has been stolen and they want it returned. This continues in *Jurassic Park III* with a *Velociraptor* trying to take back her stolen egg. Suddenly, by introducing dinosaurs as maternal creatures who nurture and protect their children, the underlying message of the films change from one warning against uncontrolled scientific experimentation to a treatise on the cruelty of humans towards animals. Once the dinosaurs become mothers, the audience's empathy immediately shifts from the human characters to the dinosaurs themselves. The violence dinosaurs inflict on humans is now justified. Unlike *Jurassic Park* where the dinosaurs are understood to be animals acting on instinct, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic Park III* depict the dinosaurs as mothers defending their young, which gives them motivation and justification for any attacks against humans. The second installment in the franchise, the *Jurassic World* trilogy (2015-2022), continues this trend, but also presents a new kind of female protagonist in Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard), one that challenges Ellie Sattler's inheritance theory.

Jurassic World (2015) faced controversy for its depiction of Claire Dearing before its theatrical release. In April 2015, a teaser trailer inspired Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), to call the preview "70's era sexist." Much of the concern came down to a single piece of clothing: the high heels Dearing wears throughout the film. According to Bryce Dallas Howard, Claire's impractical footwear was a calculated wardrobe decision and had her full support: "The thing that would have been considered the biggest handicap for her ultimately ends up being her strength. And that's those heels. I really liked that" (Yamato 2015). While Howard was enthusiastic about her character's fashion choices, critics were decidedly not. Jada Yuan writing for *Vulture* called the costume "a crime of lazy filmmaking — a patronizing shorthand for her cluelessness and stubborn need for control" (Yuan 2015). Megan Garber called the heels "intentional" (Garber 2015), arguing that despite the controversy, they, at the very least, forced a conversation about the film and its representation of women. Unlike Sattler's practical footwear and khakis, Claire's heels and silk blouse felt out of place in the *Jurassic* universe.⁵

Critics also took issue with Dearing's character arc. As the operating manager of the new park, Dearing is repeatedly depicted as a workaholic. She is cold towards her nephews and sister, obsessed with pleasing the park's investors, and apathetic towards the dinosaurs. Despite her high-ranking position within *Jurassic World*, Jada Yuan argues that

Claire is defined by her job, but we never learn about the smarts or hard work that got her to arguably the highest administrative position in the park or see her do anything but be brusque

5. As previously noted, Sarah Harding's costume shares much in common with Ellie Sattler's appearance, which makes Dearing's impractical, overtly feminine attire stand out comparatively. The costumes in *Jurassic Park* are also unobvious in their symbolic intentions. Grant, dressed in blue, and Sattler, dressed in pink, serve as a visual metaphor to the conflict at the heart of their relationship.

and make cold, terrible decisions, like not evacuating the island when it's under imminent danger because she's worried about the economics (Yuan 2015).

Alex Abad-Santo adds that

Jurassic World divides women into two categories, presenting the characteristics of those two categories as mutually exclusive; loving women with demanding jobs don't exist in this world, nor do tough moms. And by the time Dearing has been changed [...] she falls into the role that's been prescribed for her. She doesn't have a job, but she *does* have a new boyfriend and newfound appreciation for her nephews (Abad-Santo 2015).

Perhaps the backlash against Dearing is best summed up by Aly Semigran who begins her article by simply stating, "Dr. Ellie Sattler would be so disappointed" (Semigran 2015).

Jurassic World revisits many of the original film's themes, but continues to humanize and, in the case of the *Indominus Rex*, villainize its dinosaurs. Unlike *Jurassic Park*, however, *Jurassic World's* female protagonist is villainized, as well. In many ways, Claire Dearing is the antithesis of Ellie Sattler. Dearing, the park's operating director, is first shown in heels and silk, her clothing inappropriate for the park's environment. From her first moment onscreen, Dearing is depicted as cold and unfeeling. While the park's owner, Simon Masrani (Irrfan Khan), expresses concern about the mental health and wellbeing of the dinosaurs, Dearing sees them only in terms of how much revenue they can garner from tourists. She is also notably surrounded by men who in comparison to her own apathy, care deeply about the dinosaurs. From Masrani's empathy to Dr. Wu's continued use of imprinting, Dearing seems to be the only employee of *Jurassic World* who does not find the dinosaurs worthy of kindness, unlike Owen Grady (Chris Pratt), whose pack of *Velociraptors* behave more like loyal pets than the exceedingly clever predators from *Jurassic Park*.

As if to underline Dearing's lack of warmth, she is made responsible for her two nephews whom she has not seen in seven years. She immediately leaves them in the care of her assistant and is then repeatedly admonished for her lack of maternal skills. Her sister Karen Mitchell (Judy Greer) insists that Dearing will understand once she becomes a mother herself. Grady, on the other hand, is shown training his raptors, developing deep, personal bonds with the animals he has raised since infancy. *Jurassic World* is ultimately about Dearing's evolution from uncaring businesswoman to empathetic maternal figure, an inversion of Grant's journey in *Jurassic Park*. Where Grant's arc situates him as the film's protagonist, Dearing's journey is less triumphant and serves as a reflection of the park's most frightening dinosaur. The *Indominus Rex* is an unnatural hybrid, monstrous because it defies the laws of nature and science in that it should not exist at all and becomes emblematic of human greed. Dearing begins the film as a single, work-obsessed, childless woman in her thirties, features that *Jurassic World* implies are as unnatural as *Indominus Rex*.

The film continuously emphasizes Grady's expertise and Dearing's ignorance. Despite the fact that Dearing is the operating manager of the park, she is depicted as completely incapable of functioning outside the confines of the board room and the science lab. After Grady and Dearing rescue her two nephews, the youngest, Grey, asks "Can we stay with you?", Dearing responds "I am never leaving you as long as you live" to which the eldest nephew, Zach, corrects "No, him" and his brother adds "Yeah, definitely him" (Treverrow 2015, 1:25:22). Later, when the boys watch Grady ride his motorcycle alongside his raptor pack, Zach exclaims "Your boyfriend's a badass" which results in a somewhat love-sick smile from Dearing (Treverrow 2015, 1:32:00).

Dearing's growth is also dependent on her increasing empathy towards the park's dinosaurs. When Dearing and Grady discover a dying *Brontosaurus*, Dearing tears up — the first sign that she is evolving into a more empathetic, kind person. She cries as the *Brontosaurus* breathes its last breath and Grady remarks that the *Indominus Rex* that killed him did so without motive or justification. Unlike the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* of *Jurassic Park* whose rampage was seen as part of its nature, the dinosaurs of *Jurassic World* are given human traits. *Indominus Rex* is the most unnatural of creatures, a hybrid dinosaur manufactured to attract tourists. It is Claire Dearing's hubris made manifest.

Jurassic World is very clear in who it sees as its hero. Despite director Colin Treverrow's claim that "The real protagonist of the film is Claire" (Bedeschi 2015), it is Owen Grady who is responsible for saving Claire and her nephews and unifying their family. While Dearing develops throughout the film, Grady does not because

there are no lessons for him to learn. He is already prepared for what lies ahead — a proverbial Swiss Army knife of skills: former military, empathic animal trainer, outdoorsman, and motorcycle enthusiast. Dearing, on the other hand, has room to grow, much like Alan Grant required a series of trials to transform him into suitable husband and father material. The difference, however, is that the end of *Jurassic Park* casts Grant in a heroic light. He has not only saved Lex and Tim, but “the film concludes with the subtle message that reinforces the ‘heroic’ male scientist’s creative vision and theoretical achievement in hypothesizing correctly about the bird-like nature of dinosaurs” (Freeland 211). Grant is not only a potential father figure, but he is also a great scientist.

Claire Dearing is also a character who is initially uninterested in children. By the end of *Jurassic World*, however, she is unemployed and in her next screen appearance, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (2018), she leads a non-profit dinosaur rights advocacy group. The question of whether or not Dearing is ready for motherhood is also answered in the film. By the end of *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, Dearing and Grady adopt Masie Lockwood (Isabella Sermon), a clone created by Benjamin Lockwood (James Cromwell), John Hammond’s business partner, and by *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022), Claire, Owen, and Masie are depicted as a family. Masie’s kidnapping inspires Dearing’s return to the world of adventure, just as Sattler’s grown-up children enable her to reunite with Grant. Similarly, as *Jurassic Park* ends with a vision of the nuclear family, *Jurassic World* concludes by turning Claire Dearing into a mother who, together with Owen Grady, form an unconventional, but heteronormative family unit.

The franchise insists that its women heroes must show empathy, that they are parental in their relationships towards children and dinosaurs alike, and that while their intelligence is appreciated, their dedication to family is far more important. *Jurassic World* especially suggests that women who do not care for children should be punished, sometimes brutally. This is no clearer than in its treatment of Zara (Katie McGrath), Claire Dearing’s assistant in *Jurassic World*. Zara is tasked with watching Dearing’s nephews while Dearing herself is busy with investors. Openly frustrated by this role, Zara quickly loses Zach and Gray, but before she can find the boys again, she is killed in what James McConnaughey has called the franchise’s longest death sequence (McConnaughey 2016). Zara is grabbed by a *Pterodactyl*, dropped, grabbed once more, and finally she (and the *Pterodactyl*) are consumed whole by a *Mosasaur* who reappears at the end of the film to finish off *Indominus Rex*. In the words of Sam Neill, who does not appear in *Jurassic World*, “Boy, what did the English girl do wrong? She got eaten by like three dinosaurs at once. Was she on the phone too much? She did something really wrong” (Ryan 2016).

The death of Zara and Dearing’s subsequent journey towards motherhood undermines Ellie Sattler’s assertion that women will inherit the earth in the wake of men’s folly. Women who are maternal and who show empathy are worthy of survival. Women who are ill prepared for parenthood or focused on their careers instead of their family are not. As discussed previously, maternal instinct is a hallmark of the late 80’s action heroine, but characters like Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor incorporate this instinct as one aspect of their character, not as its entire definition. They divest themselves of men and romantic entanglements in pursuit of survival. For Sattler, whose first appearance firmly establishes her as part of this action heroine/Final Girl tradition, her subsequent roles in the *Jurassic* franchise are almost entirely predicated on her status as a mother. Claire Dearing is an even clearer departure from the action heroine/Final Girl of the 1980s, her reliance on Grady and her complete lack of survival skills recall earlier iterations of women in action films, especially Joan Wilder (Kathleen Turner) from *Romancing the Stone* (1984) or Willie Scott (Kate Capshaw) in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984).⁶

6. This is not an indication of a collective departure from the action heroine popularized by Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor. If anything, Claire Dearing is a very purposeful rejection of this type. Throughout the 1990s, Strong Female Characters appeared often in film and television, most notably Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar) from *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and Xena (Lucy Lawless) from *Xena Warrior Princess* (1995-2001). Onscreen, characters like Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) from *The Matrix* (1999) and Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie) from *Tomb Raider* (2001) maintained many of the popular characteristics of action heroines and Final Girls like Ellie Sattler. In 2015, the year of *Jurassic World*’s release, two of the most popular action films featured female protagonists. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) followed the journey of Rey (Daisy Ridley), a young Force sensitive orphan and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), wherein Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron) frees a dystopian society from its patriarchal overlord.

5 Conclusion

In a promotional interview for *Jurassic World: Dominion*, Laura Dern explained that in order to return to Ellie Sattler, she had specific requirements for director Colin Trevorrow. She felt passionately about the film's focus on climate change and global warming, explaining that in her opinion, Sattler had “evolved in her area of science that she had studied as a paleontologist, our former extinction, and would have evolved as a soil scientist whose focus would be climate change to avoid another extinction... And she wouldn't not be an activist. It's Dr. Ellie Sattler, come on” (Drum 2022). In reference to how the returning Grant and Malcolm may react to Sattler's activism and new career path, Dern added, “And if boys want to join her and use their voice, they might have an amazing experience. But they better abandon dig sites and get with the program and start saving the world” (Drum 2022). For Dern, Sattler is still a feminist figure, an outspoken woman who uses her intelligence and expertise to forge new pathways and uncover corruption. The “boys” she refers to evoke Sattler's words from *Jurassic Park*, her assertion that while men corrupt nature and pay the price for their hubris, women will inherit the world they leave behind.

Sattler's humorous vision of a matriarchy serves as a gendered commentary about who is most likely to cause the end of the world and who will benefit from this apocalypse. In a franchise about dinosaurs, Dern's wish to see Sattler evolve is not out of place. She understands Sattler as a person who moves forward, who learns and grows, who is able to recognize danger and strives to protect the innocent — be it children, the elderly, a semi-naked chaos theoretician, or the planet itself. These hallmarks of the action heroine/Final Girl, both the adaptability of character and the survival skills, match well with Sattler's first appearance in the *Jurassic* franchise. In subsequent films, however, this vision of inheritance is complicated by how women characters are depicted and treated, forcing the question who exactly are the women who will inherit Sattler's imagined earth?

Claire Dearing actively participates in what has previously been the male-dominated sphere of dinosaur creation and capitalist enterprise. In her first appearance in *Jurassic World*, she is one of the “boys” that Dern references. Her ambition is linked to apathy, her dedication to her work seen as a distraction from what is truly important in life, which according to the *Jurassic* franchise is a heteronormative family structure including a spouse and children. It is only once Dearing divests herself of her job and allows Grady to take command that she becomes the heir apparent to Sattler's vision. There is a rigidity to this equation, an exclusion that purposefully rejects and, to a point, villainizes women who do not adhere to its strict guidelines.

Ultimately, however, Sattler's quote may be a product of its time, no longer relevant considering changing environmental factors. Just as Claire Dearing becomes an animal-rights activist and Ellie Sattler speaks up against soil pollution, the focus of the *Jurassic* franchise has undoubtedly shifted. While it still views science as something both miraculous and threatening, the horror elements in the films no longer reflect the popular tropes of the 1980's and 90's. Despite dinosaurs still running rampant, the true concern moves far beyond the ethics of reviving an extinct species and has irrevocably turned to more pertinent, topical questions. By the end of *Jurassic World: Dominion*, it is clear that the events of Isla Nublar are quaint in comparison to the potential global disaster at hand. It is no longer a matter of who will inherit the earth, but whether there will be an earth left to inherit.

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Lauren Chochinov – University of New Brunswick Saint John (Canada)

✉ umchochl@myumanitoba.ca

Lauren Chochinov holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Edinburgh. She has taught at many post-secondary institutions across Canada including University of Winnipeg, Sir Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, and most recently, University of New Brunswick Saint John. She is currently further pursuing her career in education at the University of Manitoba.