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Swallow You Whole: The *Jurassic Park* Franchise, Eco-Horror and the Devouring Gothic

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Abstract

The *Jurassic Park* franchise is primarily thought of as an adventure series, yet the horror genre is invoked through themes of "mad science" and resurrected "monsters" alongside inevitable death and dismemberment. Although displaced genetically-altered dinosaurs are the primary antagonists, they are only agents for bigger threats of toxic Nature and environmental revolt. Much like the monsters of traditional horror films, Nature in *Jurassic Park* cannot be destroyed or bent to the will of civilisation. It is malicious, insidious and all-consuming; it cannot be denied or contained. Life, as Dr Malcolm infamously puts it, finds a way. This paper explores various ecohorror tropes present throughout the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* films (1993—2022), primarily *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (2018) and *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022). It argues that the films' engagement with the Gothic restores the dinosaurs' agency, moving them from marginalised Other to a species that humankind must respect and protect in order to survive in a shared world. Furthermore, it suggests that one of the biggest threats to the protagonists stems from the franchises' portrayal of Nature as a devouring entity, not only in the form of dinosaurs and animal horror, but in indifferent plant-life, hazardous weather and hostile landscapes. Despite its desperate attempts to create, contain and control Nature, humankind must be de-centred and the hierarchy of human and non-human destabilised in order to promote balance and co-existence. The *Jurassic* films show what happens when humans harmfully interfere with Nature, and Nature—quite literally—bites back.

Keywords: Dinosaurs; Consuming; Eco-horror; Gothic; Nature.

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Nature in the *Jurassic Park* universe redresses the imbalance of power between humans and the natural world; the ecohorror events of the films are framed as acts of revolt and revolution rather than environmental revenge. Katarina Gregersdotter et al. write that, within this framework, animals are "not simply revenging a wrong done to them; they can be understood as trying to reclaim their central position in this ecosystem and on earth" (Gregersdotter, Hållén and Höglund 2015: 33). Instead of punishing humans for their intrusion into or destruction of Nature, these texts de-centre the human, proving that humanity is not required for Nature to flourish. By *Jurassic World: Dominion* (Trevorrow 2022), dinosaurs have not only been brought back to life but escaped the confines of Isla Nublar to begin repopulating in the wild. The rewilding aspects of *Dominion* imply that—as Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) infamously states—life will find a way: Nature will inevitably rebalance itself after destruction and, therefore, when humankind interferes with Nature they must be prepared for the consequences.

There is a tension in the films between wonder and terror; the sublime awe inspired by the spectacle of living dinosaurs frequently interchanges with the fear inspired when the animals hunt their human prey. Elizabeth Parker argues:

> If we have indeed lost the ability to see the forest as strange, *monstrous*, and enchanting, then surely one of the most obvious ways to remedy this is to "rewild" this setting with monsters. In doing so, we combat the so-called "death of Nature" *and* "death of myth" (for monsters, of course, are themselves myths) as we *remythologise* this environment and imbue it with a new sense of life. (Parker 2020: 145).

The dinosaurs cannot be denied, either in terms of their impact on the world of the film, or their visual domination of the screen. The series is frequented by moments of simultaneous desire and horror, wonderous fascination and paralysing terror, such as Alan Grant (Sam Neill) realising that the infant he is enchanted by is in fact a *Velociraptor*. Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern) remains entranced by the creatures—despite her traumatic experiences—exclaiming that "You never get used to it" as she strokes a baby *Nasutoceratops* (*Dominion*). Similarly, Malcom's comment on his companions' excitement in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1997) ("Oh, yeah. Oooh, ahhh, that's how it always starts. Then later there's running and, um, screaming") illustrates the compulsive appeal of the dinosaurs despite the inherent danger they pose. At one time or another, Grant, Sattler and Malcolm all express disinterest or horror at the idea of going back to the parks, yet all eventually—inevitably—return, some more than once. The rewilding of the dinosaurs reignites an ingrained desire to explore the deep, dark woods, whatever uncanny threats may lie within.

Adrian Ivakhiv questions the validity of sublime Nature as a force for identification and change within the series, wondering whether it is in fact "anything more than an extended plea for visual spectacle and feel-good endings" (2008: 10). Conversely, Pat Brereton's speaks of *Jurassic Park*'s ability for affirmative ecological impact through experiences of spectacular Nature, with the protagonists' initial awe-struck and "innocent gaze" transformed by the time of their escape in the helicopter as they register "first-hand experience and ethical knowledge of the primary laws of nature" (Brereton 2005: 77-8). The utopic capabilities of spectacular and sublime Nature awaken all surviving characters to the danger of interference or attempting to subvert Natural laws — an undertaking that can release powerful destructive forces. Ivakhiv, however, disputes this reading, arguing that Spielberg's films "celebrate not so much the power of nature as the power of cinema with its sounds, lights, and spectacular effects, and its godlike creator as an indulgent puppet-master behind the screen" (2008: 11). However, Ivakhiv and Brereton situate the *Jurassic Park* films within melodrama. When re-examined within a primarily Gothic framework (a genre which, of course, incorporates melodramatic tropes and themes), the "revolutionary changes in ecological consciousness" (Ibidem) sought by Brereton are cancelled out by the hubris of so-called 'mad scientists' and ethically-devoid authorities who never seem to learn their lesson. Furthermore, Ivakhiv's assertion that "[s]pectacle on its own, even a spectacle ostensibly celebrating the power of nature, is hardly guaranteed to generate social mobilization" (Ibidem) is undermined. The Gothic spectacle may not ultimately alter social constructs, but it does fundamentally change the individual's outlook as well as the ecology of the landscape itself. Both the dinosaurs themselves and their Gothic ancestor Frankenstein's Creature bring physical, emotional and psychological transgressions with them, permanently destabilising everyone and everything they encounter.

The existence of the dinosaurs therefore revitalises Nature by remythologising it, simultaneously reminding

humanity of its place; to be humbled, overwhelmed and awed. The later films in the franchise, notably *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (Bayona 2018) and *Dominion*, both exacerbate and counter de-extinction anxieties by re-wilding the dinosaur population away from the boundaries of the isolated islands the dinosaurs inhabit. Instead of the trope of a displaced, violent monster rampaging through a city (as seen in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*), the dinosaurs are released into a rural environment, and while there are scenes of conflict and horror when the dinosaurs come into contact with humans, there are also those that are peaceful, even wonderous.

In order to establish the ecological and mythological balance required for this rewilding, the human must be removed from hierarchical power and hegemonical control. The environmental message of the films advocates rebalancing Nature after human intervention. Nature therefore becomes monstrous to draw attention to the need for balance and rewilding: if humans refuse to correct their mistake, then Nature will. Gothic advocation of the decentring of human power combines with the sublime spectacle of Nature to destabilise the pedestal of humanity. These films thrive on Gothic reversal: all-powerful humans capable of creating life at will are reduced to pests (or worse, food), subject to the whims of uncontrollable forces or their all-consuming creations. As Simon Masrani (Irrfan Khan) owner of the titular *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow 2015) tells his employees: "Jurassic World exists to show us how very small we are. Very new. You can't put a price on that".

1 Gothic Themes

The *Jurassic* films themselves are rife with Gothic iconography and themes: monstrous embodiments of the violent past; the dark and dangerous wilderness; a deep distrust of those in authority or power; fears of loss and corruption; anxieties about reproduction and, of course, an unstable and tense atmosphere. The very notion of de-extinction has its roots in the Gothic; the reanimation of life long gone, of resurrected bodies and excessive, uncontrollable, unpredictable, uncanny life. To use the parlance of *Jurassic Park*, the genetic blueprint of this narrative is extracted from the seminal Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (Mary Shelley, 1818) and the franchise itself actively employs this DNA discourse, particularly in the films' criticisms of reanimation. As Susan Squier explains, "Frankenstein's monster, that icon of scientific hubris, remains an absent presence lurking behind the various public culture representations of assisted reproduction as unnatural conception with potentially hazardous results" (Squier 1999: 173). During one scene in *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993), John Hammond (Richard Attenborough) and his guests discuss the implications of de-extinction. Malcolm talks about the danger of genetic power, comparing the "lack of humility before nature" to a child wielding a gun. When Hammond questions "how can we stand in the light of discovery and not act?" Malcolm retorts "your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn't stop to think if they should", later comparing the process to rape. Hammond himself is a Frankensteinian figure; like the titular character he finds nature wonderous (Frankenstein speaks of his delight watching a "violent and terrible" thunderstorm as a child [Shelley 1818: 33]), yet desires to bend it to his will with little thought for the consequences beyond his own ego. Frankenstein's proclamations "It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn" (Ivi: 30) and "I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation," (Ibidem) echo Hammond's insistence that scientific discovery must be acted upon, underlining the hubris of characters who desire to suture together new life from pieces of the dead.

Aside from the original *Jurassic Park*, the sequel *Fallen Kingdom* is the most prevalently Gothic in the franchise. Whilst the four previous films pit their human characters against the wild nature of Isla Nublar and the neighbouring Isla Sorna, *Fallen Kingdom* moves the action to the human world. When an active volcano threatens to destroy Isla Nublar, the heroes (primarily made up of conservationists and an animal behaviourist) try to rescue them, although they are betrayed and the dinosaurs instead transported to an isolated mansion in America to be sold to the highest bidder. Therefore, while *Fallen Kingdom* also utilises specifically Frankensteinian themes, the third act of the film is inherently Gothic, employing a wealth of imagery and tropes from Gothic horror, including lightning storms, rooftops chases, creaking isolated mansions, monsters in the basement and creeping in the windows, not to mention the bones, fossils and taxidermy animals in the museum section of the house. The main antagonistic dinosaur in this film is the genetically modified hybrid *Indoraptor*. The *Indoraptor* is a palpably Gothic monster; a new species made from splicing the genes of the last *Veloci-*

raptor (named Blue) with the DNA extracted from the bones of the deceased lone *Indominous Rex* from the previous film (itself a laboratory created genetic hybrid). The *Indoraptor* has not been fully completed, however, lacking the behavioural modifications and cognitive bonding that will allow it to be controlled. Without this—or, as the creator Henry Wu (BD Wong) puts it, without a "mother"—the *Indoraptor* has no empathy or obedience, remaining a psychopathic, monstrous killing machine. The *Indoraptor* inevitably escapes, clambering across twisted turrets and balconies, sending tiles plummeting below with its giant claws. It reaches the roof, accompanied by a theatrical operatic score and dramatic crashes of lightning, sniffing the air for its prey before roaring triumphantly in front of a full moon, echoing countless Gothic monster movies.

As with the castles and crumbling old houses of Gothic texts, the architecture of the building is permeable, "symbolizing the inadequate protection of rationality" and allowing supernatural beings (especially those returned from the dead) to "pass through 'solid' walls or infinitesimal cracks to prey on their victims" (Yang and Healey 2016: 6). Indeed, the formidable mansion is riddled with the secret passages and hiding places of these traditional haunted spaces; shadowy corners that hold strange secrets and forbidden knowledge. It even contains a museum filled with skeletons and fossils as well as a basement laboratory where both science and monsters reside. Furthermore, the architecture of the isolated mansion and the powerful storm is reminiscent of the so-called *female Gothic* text, where intimidating, dangerous and haunting wild nature reflects disturbing domestic and gender dynamics (see Biesen 2016). The *Indoraptor* stalks towards its target—a child, Maisie (Isabella Sermon)—who hides terrified in her bed. The creature slowly opens the door and creeps out of the rain through billowing curtains towards the child. Its shadow slides across the wall and the blank stare of a rocking horse as the creature passes stained glass windows and a roaring fire, sniffing until it reaches the wooden frame of the four-poster bed. In an image straight out of Gothic horror films from *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (Murnau 1922) to *Crimson Peak* (del Toro 2015) its claws unfurl as it reaches across the covers towards the girl's face, the camera closing in on its blood-stained teeth as the girl muffles a terrified high-pitched scream. Traditional Gothic tropes of monstrous intruders into the troubled domestic realm underline the uncanny sight of the ancient (albeit augmented) creature in the (albeit old-fashioned) child's bedroom. The sequence mirrors the encroachment of Nature into the domestic, but also speaks to Maisie's troubled status within the house. Pursued by the man who killed her grandfather as well as the vicious *Indoraptor* (who was developed by the same technology that created Maisie herself [see below]), the scene sutures the violence within the house with the contentious binary status of both child and creature. Boundaries become dangerously permeable, leaving both personal identity and power dynamics vulnerable.

Of course, the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* are simultaneously natural and decidedly unnatural creatures, (re)made from pieces of ancient DNA, sometimes even from more than one species. In *Jurassic Park* it is explained that holes in the creatures' genetic sequences were patched with frog DNA (ultimately leading to the dinosaurs' ability to change sex). Furthermore, Wu explains in *Jurassic World* that even the "natural" dinosaurs living in the park have been created based on what the designers' intended audience expected to see, before going on to defend their more selective patchwork counterparts such as the *Indoraptor*. He chastises Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard), reminding her that "you didn't ask for reality, you asked for more teeth". The dinosaurs are therefore not "real" dinosaurs, instead they are an amalgamation of dinosaurs, other animals and human expectations; despite being animals, they are also genetically influenced by humans. As such, they represent the potentially monstrous consequences of human interference with Nature; the results can be uncanny, Othered, uncontrollable. Similarly, the parks are an attempt at a fabricated wilderness, where the influence of humans reveals the supposedly wild space to be "'constructed' by humankind, and consequently as 'inauthentic'" (Parker 2020: 240). In doing so, the parks' designers make mistakes (such as the West Indian Lilac [see below]) because they designed a wilderness that was visually pleasing rather than benefitting the creatures destined to live there.

2 Animal Agency and Monster Hybrids

There is a question within the *Jurassic* films as to whether the carnivores are animals or monsters. Certainly, they act and are discussed by other characters as both, sometimes simultaneously. Christy Tidwell notes that, "We are fascinated by dinosaurs as animals, but we also fear them as monsters", (2020: 33) arguing that the horror aspects of the texts present them as monsters, while the science fiction elements encourage the spectator

to see them as animals and/or identify with them. This is further illustrated by the infamous *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, an agent of chaos who pursues and punishes human and animal alike, consistently disrupting, destroying and reclaiming her environment. The park becomes her home rather than an objectifying viewing platform, or, as Tidwell categorises it, "a place where visitors come to be entertained by captive, controlled, even performing dinosaurs...not by wildness" (Ivi: 37). Both animal and monster, the once-chaotic *Tyrannosaurus* is reformed throughout the course of the series as an anchor of stability and a reminder of the history of the park; she defeats the volatile *Velociraptors* (*Jurassic Park*), the grotesque *Indominus Rex* (*Jurassic World*) and assists in killing the colossal *Giganotosaurus* (*Dominion*),[1] reclaiming her place as the uncompromising queen. Humans may have created the *Tyrannosaurus*, but they have no control over her. She will attack and kill at will, yet time and time again, her apex predator instincts ultimately saves the heroes. *Jurassic Park* makes particular note of this inverted hierarchy, with the iconic image of the *Tyrannosaurus* roaring as the banner "When Dinosaurs Ruled the World" flutters around her.

However, as the series continues, the carnivores are increasingly considered monstrous rather than simply animals acting on predatory instincts. This move towards monstrosity reflects the amount of human interference in their DNA and behavioural conditioning. While Grant makes a point of identifying the dinosaurs as animals rather than monsters in *Jurassic Park*, the *Indominus Rex* in *Jurassic World* prompts Owen Grady (Chris Pratt) to comment "That thing out there...that is no dinosaur". As the dinosaurs are sometimes employed as agents of punishment, some of their attacks are mined for thrills and scares, while others are cathartic, funny and even pleasurable (such as the deaths of antagonists). This imbues the animal with "the capacity for ethical or unethical agency" (Gregersdotter and Hållén: 208-9) which is required for them to have actively antagonistic desires and "a prerequisite for positioning animals as the other of the civilised, modern human, since otherness requires a combination of difference and comparability" (Ivi: 209). Therefore, as explained by Tidwell's earlier statement, the dinosaurs are simultaneously monsters *and* animals, or, as Wu states in *Jurassic World*, "Monster is a relative term. To a canary, a cat is a monster. We're just used to being the cat".

By *Fallen Kingdom*, dinosaurs are not only regularly reanimated but actively designed, with different species patched together to create hybrid predators (only carnivores fall under the "more teeth" policy) for use both by the park and in combat. The danger of these creatures lies in their ability to apply intelligence and cunning as well as their physical prowess. Rather than breeding from organic DNA, dinosaurs instead become creations that are genetically stitched together and controlled by implants or conditioning, taking the creatures progressively further away from how real, living dinosaurs actually looked and behaved (as well as further complicating their taxonomic identity by potentially aligning them with cyborgs). Even the "pure" dinosaurs of *Dominion*, bred to more closely resemble their ancestors, can have their behaviour altered in emergencies. Alongside this, the dinosaurs are attributed desires and motives beyond animal instincts; they begin to pursue targets for revenge rather than food or protection.

The *Velociraptors* are an exception to this pattern, instead progressing from monster to animal over the course of the franchise. Their "too human" actions in *Jurassic Park* mark them as the primary risk to the protagonists, even more so than the much bigger *Tyrannosaurus*. Even the park's pragmatic gamekeeper, Robert Muldoon (Bob Peck), insists that the raptors' intelligence is such a dire threat that the creatures should be terminated. Throughout the series, the *Velociraptors* and their hybrid children (the *Indominous Rex* and the *Indoraptor*) set traps to hunt their prey, further destabilising the concept of the human as the intelligent—and therefore dominant—species. Cognitive capabilities and rational thinking make them "too human"; they can learn skills such as opening doors and apply advantageous "human" strategy such as organisation, logic and deception without losing their useful predatory-animal traits. In *Jurassic World*, Grady has been able to imprint on and train a pack of raptors by establishing himself as the alpha, but he remains exceptionally aware of the danger they pose and respectful of their status as predator (rather than monster). When the raptors encounter the *Indominus Rex*, Grady realises that the latter's spliced DNA includes genetic material from the *Velociraptors*, allowing it to become the new alpha. The only raptor that remains somewhat loyal to Grady is Blue, who ultimately returns to protect him in the climactic fight against the *Indominus Rex*. In *Fallen Kingdom* and *Dominion*, Blue is anthropomorphised to paint her as sympathetic, with emotions and desires more akin to a

1. This moment is particularly notable despite the *Tyrannosaurus* only offering assistance, as it is implied in the prologue of the film's extended addition that there is a violent history between these two predators.

companion animal than wild creature. This idea is exacerbated by her and her biological offspring's relationship to Maisie and their shared origins as clones [see below].

The *Velociraptors* eventually become agents of Nature, punishing transgressions while destroying the genetically spliced abominations made by the scientists. Blue's hybrid child the *Indoraptor* taunts and kills abusive hunter Ken Wheatley (Ted Levine) and others as revenge for their horrific animal cruelty (particularly Wheatley who takes teeth from live animals as trophies). However, the *Indoraptor* is too monstrous to live and, ultimately, Blue kills the monstrous child despite their shared heritage. By the later films in the franchise, therefore, the raptors (represented by Blue) are more aligned with the heroes than either the monstrous predators or the dinosaur-beasts, further destabilising species boundaries and the hegemonic hierarchy between them.

The dinosaurs' behaviour therefore both supports and subverts the common parlance found in animal horror that malevolent creatures, simply do not act "that way". Initially at least, dinosaurs act in line with the expectations of human characters; at the beginning of *Jurassic Park* Grant tells the children that the pursuing *Tyrannosaurus* is following her carnivorous instincts, yet he encourages them to pet the wild *Brachiosaurus* without caution. Yet, again, the concept of the dinosaurs as animals is challenged by their status as clones (and therefore—in the *Jurassic Park* universe at least—artificial and unnatural. Squier writes that cloning threatens the boundary between reproduction and replication, writing that

> We have gone from the binary model of reproduction common to humans and other animals to a model based on the proliferation of sameness, be it bacterial budding or rhizomic proliferation. The technology of cloning, if applied to human beings, could arguably challenge not only our definition of "human" but also the broader dominions on which it rests: our membership and dominant position in the animal kingdom (1999: 112; see also Squier 1998: 360-381).

Therefore, the threat of the raptors specifically is a Gothic one; it is their hybridity, their "humanness", that makes them uncanny and threatening. They do not act within the parameters of what the humans consider to be natural behaviour for animals, but demonstrate human skills and motives, something that is revisited in *Jurassic World* where the laboratory-designed *Indominus Rex* kills for pleasure rather than sustenance. However, by *Fallen Kingdom*, the raptor Blue exhibits traits such as empathy and affection towards humans (which, as demonstrated by the video footage Owen watches, is not natural behaviour). Blue even displays emotion, notably shedding a tear in fear and pain while she is being operated on.[2] Instead of projected humanity creating an uncanny monster, Blue is reframed as a positive destabilisation of the boundaries between human and animal. This theme is revisited through Maisie, a child linked to the dinosaurs not only through her status as a human clone developed with the same technology that created the creatures, but also her play-behaviours (she hides, she jumps out and scares people, she climbs and roars). Maisie makes this connection explicit when she saves the trapped dinosaurs from certain death and releases them into the wild, telling the others that "I had to. They're alive. Like me".

Jurassic World: Dominion further explores the positive destabilisation of the human/non-human animal that Maisie represents, revealing that both Maisie's biological mother (Charlotte Lockwood) and Blue were able to procreate asexually. Maisie, alongside Blue's daughter, Beta, are kidnapped by the antagonists in order for their genes to be examined. The film takes pains to explicitly tie Maisie and Beta together: both of them are told that they look like their mothers, they have similar background stories and behaviours as well as a tentative affection for each other. The research done by Maisie's mother that allowed her to create a clone of herself and carry to term is ultimately the reason that Blue is also able to reproduce asexually. Furthermore, Owen, who raised Blue and risks his life to return Beta to her mother, has become one of Maisie's adopted parents, creating an interwoven pseudo-family based on biology, technology and found families. In doing so, both species treat each other more like equals than human and wild animal, with Blue soliciting Owen's help when Beta is kidnapped ("You made a promise to a dinosaur?" Malcolm later asks Owen in disbelief, only to be met with "Yeah, why?").

Unlike the "standard narrative of the clone" outlined by W. T. J. Mitchell (with the clone as a "headless, mindless, soulless creature, the exemplification of the human organism reduced to 'bare life' ..., the reduction of

2. While lizards can cry, it is a biological or protective behaviour, not an emotional one.

the human organism to a purely instrumental and commodified condition" [Mitchell 2011: 37]), clones (both human and animal) are able to transcend; created as object commodities with specific, predestined purposes, they nevertheless reclaim agency either as human child or wild animal. Ivakhiv notes the success of "commodity capitalism" at "encouraging us to think that objects are real, and at projecting value into those objects" (2018: 23), explaining how efficiently and quickly these can be made complex and monstrous as they grow:

> Thing seem to be getting livelier and more complex: digital life, nanotechnology, online worlds. We are building a complex meganetwork atop a complex meganetwork, but with relations between the two—Terra 1.0 and Terra 2.0—growing ever more tenuous and fragile (Ivi: 29-30; see also Ivi: 12 and 22-24 for eco-criticism of *Jurassic Park* and movie-making as a commodities).

Fallen Kingdom and *Dominion* attempt to rectify these meganetworks by encouraging identification and empathy with both Maisie and Beta. Rather than positioning them as the next phase of reproduction, hybridity or human/animal, spectators are encouraged to see them as vulnerable offspring; human child and infant animal instead of the far more dangerous and transgressive clone. In doing so, families (including inter-species families) can be formed.

Therefore, the demand of the *Jurassic Park* novel and film that "The closer the grouping comes to approximating a middle-class, racially/species homogenous, white American nuclear family with mom at home and girls in dresses, the better their chances for survival" (Briggs and Kelber-Kaye 2000: 98) is destabilised. At the end of *Jurassic Park*, the children are "properly re-gendered" to conform to traditional gender expectations, and they sleep peacefully against Grant watched over by a smiling Sattler (who wanted Grant to be around the children because "it would be good" for him). The nuclear pseudo-family is (re)formed, with Grant and Sattler rejecting their "dinosaur children" for human ones (Ibidem). The end of *Dominion*, however, is more transgressive: formed families include the mixed-species family of Owen, Claire, Maisie, Beta and Blue, while Grant rejects his palaeontology dig/dinosaur children for a child-free life with Sattler.[3]

However, these later films still feature problematic maternal compulsions and enforced re-gendering that is linked to "proper" engagement with Nature. In *Jurassic World*, dinosaurs have lost some of their novelty, with Claire explaining that the park needs to reveal a new attraction every few years to keep the public's interest. She is emotionally unavailable and controlling, ignoring her nephews when they come to visit.[4] Although she works at the park, she shows little interest in the dinosaurs themselves, referring to them as "assets" and carelessly walking through holographic representations of the creatures. Yet, in *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* and *Dominion*, she works tirelessly to protect the dinosaurs, while also becoming a maternal figure for Maisie. Claire's previous ordeal made her vulnerable to terror, but also to enchantment, desire and the maternal. She learns to see the dinosaurs as living beings that must be respected and protected, rather than business assets. Whereas at the beginning of *Jurassic World* she was physically dissociated from the dinosaurs behind glass or in offices, she is forced to be in direct contact with them, making them real in her eyes. She is also forced to accept responsibility for her part in their creation (and escape), and, therefore, their suffering. Unable to remain aloof after being confronted with the reality of the animals, she becomes increasingly empathetic until she is primed to fill the mother role. Engagement with the dinosaurs "softens" her enough to become mother, allowing her to form her found family.

3 Eat or Be Eaten

Of all the deaths that occur throughout the *Jurassic* franchise, the most memorable inevitably occur when people are eaten by dinosaurs. In addition to the terrifying concept of being ripped apart and devoured by an indifferent, hungry creature, the sudden and brutal reversal of humankind's place on the food-chain destabilises any sense of species superiority. The *Jurassic* films reframe the seemingly clean and clinical production of meat into a visceral, messy and immediate threat. The imperative dread of being devoured hovering over

3. In the original *Jurassic Park*, Sattler wants children in the future while Grant does not. By the time they are reunited in *Dominion*, Sattler has children with her former husband, but they are now adults.

4. For a more detailed analysis of the controversies surrounding Claire, see Noah Berlatsky (2015).

the protagonists saps them of their agency. Dethroned as the apex predator, they are transformed from subject to object, dehumanised into a product that, to the consumer, is indistinguishable from other meat.

Jonathan W. Thurston explains,

> Current scholarship surrounding the predator mythos in culture and literature suggests a distinctive binary of wild–domestic. Scholars often argue that the uniquely terrifying aspect of the predator is in its unconscious capacity to invade our standards of civilization, disrupt any semblance of life, and pass the final frontier of fear for us; being eaten alive (2019: 36).

Thurston identifies horror predators as colonial invaders and conquerors, noting that scholars typically "tend to read the terror of these predators with an almost colonial analysis, centring around the concept of the predators' ulterior motive to flip the cultural hierarchy of human above animals" (Ivi: 37). However, he also argues that there is an innate "genetic response to these predators' general anatomical outlines and features", clarifying that horror "relies on anatomically deconstructing the image of the predator in such a way that it appeals not to a scientifically realistic description but to the instinctive psychological reduction of predators that humans experience" (Ibidem). Developing theories by cultural evolution writers such as Paul A. Trout (2011), Thurston describes the response to predators as "triggers of fear": environmental stimuli that activates an instinctual fear of imminent threat to life. Rather than identifying a specific species of animal, the fear response is triggered by facial features such as staring eyes, an open mouth and sharp teeth as well as "menacing movements, blood, bones, certain sounds, tracking signs, and darkness" (2019: 38). Applying this theory to *Jurassic Park*, Thurston emphasises how the predatory aspects of the carnivores are highlighted: "We see the flashing eyes, the sharp claws, the open mouth. So, altogether, predators are not just a taxonomical entity but also a subconscious construct composed of clearly identifiable anatomical parts" (Ivi: 40). The bodies of the dinosaurs are mostly obscured by darkness, vegetation or barriers, while teeth and claws are shown in close-up and accentuated — not by daylight or unobscured vision — by unpredictable, constricted and/or unnatural light such as torches, lightning or even the distorted light through a grate.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell notes that, despite the violence involved in the killing of animals for food, in Western culture the process is rarely considered to be violent (2017: 136). It is instead seen as a necessary and justified act, with violence hidden behind closed doors and negated by the objectification/anonymity of the slaughtered animal. Piatti-Farnell writes, "there is an acceptance of — or, perhaps, a desire to ignore — not only the fact that meat comes from animals, but that the process involves the brutal absentification, physical and conceptual, of the living creature from which 'meat' comes" (Ivi: 139). Citing Carol J. Adams' terminology of animals as "absent referents" where living animals become anonymised as a new object (cows/beef; pig/pork) (Adams 1990: 40), Piatti-Farnell explains, "The very notion of 'meat' relies on the destruction of animals, and the creation of a new category of food; that destruction is not simply physical, but depends on the re-imagining of living flesh as 'dead meat' " (2017: 139-40). She goes on to write that, "Humans customarily occupy a higher position in the structure of cultural referents, especially in relation to animals ... [they] are the ones who commit the slaughter, annihilate the animal, and consume the meat" (Ivi: 140). Reducing the human body to meat not only eradicates identity through objectification, but also "[deprives] the cultural structures that identify the human as superior and separate from other creatures within the animal kingdom, the body is reduced to flesh and, even more horrifically, to food" (Ivi: 147). The violence of the meat industry is further explored in *Dominion*, during a scene at a black market in Malta where dinosaurs are traded (including for consumption) and their meat is openly cooked for purchase. An early scene in the film also sees characters breaking into an illegal breeding facility where they discover horrific neglect, including infants separated from their parents and restrained in an obvious nod to the equipment and practices of some facilities that provide animal products (breeding, meat, dairy, eggs and so on).

As Piatti-Farnell notes, once the practice of slaughter is removed from its "civilised" surroundings, it is clearly identified as horrifying and violent (Ivi: 139). *Jurassic Park* juxtaposes ideas about animals as meat, humans as meat and humans as consumers of meat several times over the course of the film. Exploring the still-operational Jurassic Park, the group watch as a cow is lowered into the *Velociraptor* pen, with the barbarity of its unseen death hinted at through distressing noises, the violent rustling of vegetation and the damaged sling that is removed, now empty and ripped apart—at the sight of which, Hammond brightly suggests "Lunch?". The

following scene shows the group seated around a table filled with luxurious and expensive food, the "civilised" dinner table uneasily juxtaposed with the greedy and violent feeding of the previous scene.

Similarly, the "civilised" realm of the kitchen is both a domestic space and a place of violence and forceful transformations, filled with instruments for "the complete physical disintegration of matter, often to create something different, something 'Other' " (Ivi: 183); a theme underlined in the kitchen scene when the raptors attack the children. Shortly after gorging themselves on the leftover buffet in the dining room, Lex (Ariana Richards) and Tim Murphy (Joseph Mazzello) are pursued through the kitchen by two *Velociraptors*, hiding behind counters as the creatures slowly stalk them in an unsettling composite of food preparation and consumption. The introduction of the carnivorous dinosaurs into the empty, sterile and metallic kitchen underlines the alienness of the scene; the wild, savage and "outside" meat-eaters interrupting the domestic, industrialised and sanitised "civilised" environment. However, just as the "civilised" humans are disadvantaged by the natural environment of Jurassic Park, the dinosaurs are tricked and entrapped by the "civilised" interior space: human culture and intelligence is ultimately re-established as dominant over animal strength. The creatures may be able to open doors, but they are still animals and are fooled by reflective surfaces and icy floors, with Lex able to outsmart them through knowledge of the environment as well as trickery.

While on the initial Jurassic Park tour, Grant, Sattler, Malcolm, the children and the "blood-sucking lawyer" Donald Gennaro (Martin Ferrero) visit the *Tyrannosaurus* enclosure, the occupant of which is conspicuously absent. Staff send in a tethered goat to tempt the dinosaur out, to no avail. Lex, a vegetarian, is horrified, to which Gennaro coldly asks her, "What's the matter kid? You never had lamb chops?."[5] Tim, the younger sibling (and, in the coding of the film, the more "natural" and hegemonically suitable child as oppose to the computer-savvy tomboy Lex), is excited by the gruesome prospect, something revisited later in the film where Grant has to forcibly remove the fascinated child from watching the *Tyrannosaurus* feast on another dinosaur. Despite almost suffering the same fate himself earlier in the film, Tim is thrilled by the sight: there is no empathy or fear because this example of meat-eating is in keeping with the "natural order": it is disruption to the status quo that creates horror for him rather than the gruesome act of feeding itself. Emotional detachment from meat-eating is brought to a literal screaming halt when the *Tyrannosaurus* begins to attack humans rather than other animals. The gap between the humans as observers of consumption and the object of consumption abruptly closes; like the goat they are now categorised as meat, simply "lamb chops" for a hungry consumer. Furthermore, while dinosaurs killing humans is designed to be terrifying and tense, the *consumption* of humans by the creatures on screen is generally played with tinges of humour, and as a punishment for unlikable characters.[6] Gennaro and Dennis Nedry (Wayne Knight), who are eaten by the *Tyrannosaurus* and *Dilophosaurus* respectively, are given undignified, slightly cartoonish and relatively bloodless deaths, with Gennaro eaten while sitting on the toilet and Nedry after falling into mud and "playing" with the seemingly pacified dinosaur.[7] While the potential for becoming meat is terrifying, antagonistic characters are actually *seen* to become meat, further cementing the process as something justified and natural.

4 Environmental Hazards

Although the dinosaurs are the most overt threat throughout the *Jurassic* films, other aspects of Nature continually prove to be exceptionally dangerous and actively malevolent. Violent storms, hazardous landscapes and perilous plant life endanger human and animal alike, not to mention the erupting volcano on Isla Nublar that ultimately destroys the island, engulfing everything in its path. Yang and Healey note that

> Landscape, whether natural or man-made, is an aspect of the Gothic that powerfully embodies how the genre's fluidity enables it to challenge tradition and liberate anxieties. Gothic's ambience

5. This statement further objectifies the goat by misidentifying the kind of meat produced from it.

6. There are, of course, exceptions to this, notably Eddie Carr from *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and Zara Young from *Jurassic World*, whose prolonged and gruesome death caused controversy after the film's release (Welch 2021). Zara's death, however, is reserved for arguably the most heinous of crimes against Nature according to the ideology of the franchise: a young woman who rejects the role of maternal caregiver and is ripped apart and consumed by several different creatures in an extended attack.

7. Deaths of likeable or neutral characters, including Ray Arnold, Muldoon and the unfortunate Park worker he tries to save at the beginning of the film, either take place off-screen or are only alluded to/heard, not seen.

> of uncertainty, delusion, fluidity, isolation, and instability is created mainly by landscape" (2016: 5).

The wild weather that appears in all the *Jurassic Park* films not only adds tension, but also an extra level of peril for the human characters (unlike the dinosaurs themselves, who rarely seem to experience problems with natural conditions). Storms have a particular prevalence throughout the series, featuring in several iconic scenes from the *Tyrannosaurus* and *Dilophosaurus* attacks in the original film to the climactic *Indoraptor* chase in *Fallen Kingdom*. Yang and Healey explain that "the power and sensory obfuscation of storms, fogs, dark forests, and night leave characters unable to orient themselves, unable to assert human power to perceive a shifting, even hostile, nature, let alone control or define it" (Ivi: 5-6).

The landscapes of both Isla Nublar and Isla Sorna appear to be actively antagonistic, refusing to remain passive or relegated to the background. Images of Nature dominate the screen: when Hammond's helicopter descends onto the island in *Jurassic Park* the machine is quickly lost against the expanse of trees, rugged mountains and gigantic waterfalls. Furthermore, several deaths (Muldoon) or near-deaths (Malcolm, Tim) occur behind vegetation as leaves, logs and palm fronds block the spectator's view. Dawn Keetley explains that one of the dangers of plants is that "we are unable to 'see' them; they seem to have a unique ability to strike us blind" (2016: 10) — humankind is attuned to notice animals, not plants, because plants do not move or prey on us. But the plants in *Jurassic Park* are treacherous and merciless; predators are obscured by vegetation, characters engulfed or overshadowed by the landscape. The landscape refuses to remain a passive backdrop, instead asserting Nature as a sublime and formidable force.

Despite images of dinosaurs co-existing or even thriving in their new environments (in the parks/sanctuaries themselves or in the wider world), the callousness of Nature is evident as early as the original film. Palaeobotanist Ellie Sattler warns Hammond that the park features poisonous plants that have been chosen for aesthetic purposes, but will "defend themselves, violently if necessary". However, these plants do not discriminate between species and shortly afterwards the visitors are given a demonstration of what Keetley calls the indifference of plants (Ivi: 9) when they encounter a *Triceratops* poisoned with West Indian Lilac. Although the keeper explains that the dinosaurs do not eat the dangerous plant, the novel confirms that they in fact ingest it accidentally when eating stones to aid with digestion. Furthermore, in *Fallen Kingdom*, the imminent volcanic eruption threatens all of the remaining dinosaurs with (re)extinction. Although several species are ostensibly "rescued" for a sanctuary (in reality a front for an illegal auction house), the vast majority are killed. By the time the group of protagonists reach the island in *Fallen Kingdom*, it has been completely overtaken by Nature. Plants have turned the tourist attractions of *Jurassic World* into ruins where dinosaurs wander freely—all of which is ultimately erased in the volcanic eruption, effectively turning the island into a blank slate for Nature to start again. Here, Nature has no loyalty and will destroy with complete indifference.

One of the biggest threats in *Jurassic Park* and *Fallen Kingdom* is the uncontrollable proliferation of the dinosaurs, and the underlying fear that they will eventually, inevitably take over causing humanity's extinction. Wu insists in *Jurassic Park* that there is "no unauthorised breeding" due to the dinosaurs being genetically engineered as female. However, later in the film, Grant and the children discover a nest of hatched eggs with tiny footprints leading away from it. Grant hypothesises that the use of frog DNA to fill in sequence gaps in the dinosaur's genetic blueprint allowed them to change sex and breed. At the end of *Fallen Kingdom*, the dinosaurs are released into America, presumably able to procreate as they please. Dinosaurs become the invading species, something humanity is in no way prepared for. The implicit threat becomes dinosaurs once again ruling the planet, disrupting not only human dominance, but acting as a proxy — or possibly threat to — wildness and chaotic nature itself, summed up by one of the final moments where the *Tyrannosaurus* and a lion roar at each other. The confrontation between the symbolic king of the animal world and the queen of the dinosaurs suggests Nature is at war with itself; the natural, wild, masculine mammal against the unnatural, undead female reptile. However, the lion is a zoo-creature and the *Tyrannosaurus* breaks through the barriers of his enclosure to get to him, offering the chance of rewilding if he survives the encounter. While the scene suggests conflict, it also underlines the parallel between the two semi-domesticated creatures, both kept captive and displaced from their natural environment. It is a reminder that the natural world has been inherently altered by the dinosaurs' release, not only destabilising the hierarchy between animal and humankind, but between humankind and Nature itself. Nature can no longer be controlled and contained, or even isolated to

a remote island; it is forever Othered, uncanny and re-wilded. Grant and Malcolm's concerns about dinosaurs and humankind being thrown back together have come true, life *has* found a way and brought with it a re-wilding chaos that threatens to disrupt and already unstable environment and, both figuratively and literally, consume all it finds.

5 "We Need Each Other"[8]

The environmental and identity destabilisation that began building in *Jurassic Park* overspills during the final sequence of *Fallen Kingdom*. Dinosaurs are released into the wilderness and begin to make their way into human environments; there are no borders here and the human and animal world are permanently entangled, leading to Malcolm in voiceover explaining that it is the humans who will have to adapt. The follow up, *Dominion*, further explores Frankensteinian themes and Gothic anxieties of reproduction with the reveal that both Maisie's mother and Blue were capable of asexual reproduction. There is a conscious effort by the film's creators to return to "pure" dinosaurs rather than the designer hybrids of previous films, yet genetic engineering remains a site of horror and transgression, resulting in two distinct sets of dinosaurs: the "pure" dinosaurs that are nevertheless created through intricate genome altering and kept in a preserve, and the "wild" dinosaurs that are left to roam (and breed, adapt and evolve) across the world. Both the opening and closing sequences of the film show the dinosaurs interacting with human and animal life. However, while the opening images show dinosaurs and other species in conflict, the final sequence shows different species existing in harmony, such as herds of horses and *Parasaurolophus* or elephants and *Triceratops* travelling together. The beautiful and peaceful images of a re-wilded world encourage both the audience and the characters within the film to remember the enchanting power of the dinosaurs as well as their inherent danger, echoing the wonder of Grant and Sattler upon first seeing the *Brachiosaurus* in 1993.

In the original *Jurassic Park*, Hammond attempts to justify his role in the dinosaurs' de-extinction, arguing that they are a triumph of ecological conservation. However, Malcolm is quick to point out that dinosaurs "had their shot", a distinction he maintains in *Fallen Kingdom*. Asked whether he believes the dinosaurs of Isla Nublar should be rescued from the imminent volcanic eruption, he explains that the apocalyptic event is Nature's "correction" after an upset to the natural order. The films make a distinction between genetic engineering efforts for the sake of conservation and those done for capitalist gain; resurrecting and/or altering DNA for monetary gain always leads to a corruption of morals and usually mass destruction. However, Wu's attempts at creating a pathogen to prevent a global famine in *Dominion* is eventually rewarded by success as well as redemption.[9] Intent matters in the *Jurassic Park* universe, as does humanity's efforts to redress its destructive actions and rebalance what it has destabilised. Here, scientific intervention is not punished by avenging Nature as long as it is done with altruistic conservation in mind.

Dominion's re-wilding, then, revitalises the environment, ending on a note of transgressive — perhaps even positive — potential. The discourse of devouring begins to fade, offering the potential for a new sociological and environmental framework. Fears of dinosaurs (and other creatures created from the same technology) as entities that only consume are counterbalance with transgressive families and images of adaptation. It suggests that the de-centring of humanity may appear terrifying, but it can also be beneficial if there is the possibility of harmony (and that peaceful de-extinction of Nature is conceivable). There is still inherent danger in the world that remains, but the films underline the message that in order to avoid being consumed by a monstrous environment, it is humans that must learn to adapt and change. In the *Jurassic* universe, science, including cloning, reanimation and asexual reproduction, has proven to be unstable and dangerous, and although there is zero chance of these technologies being retired or even applied with caution (hubris being what it is), post-human potential is primarily left in the hands of this new hybrid environment. As Malcolm declares, "We not only lack dominion over nature, we're subordinate to it". Regardless of the existence of dinosaurs, the environmental message of the film is clear: Nature and humankind are intertwined to the point where humanity needs

8. Said by Ellie Sattler in *Jurassic Park*.

9. Wu is not monetarily rewarded for his actions; previously obsessed only with the reaches of science and not the ethical consequences, it is his desire to make amends and prevent an environmental disaster that ultimately redeems him—and allows him to survive the events of *Dominion*.

Nature to survive. *Fallen Kingdom* argues that humanity must accept its dethroning and respect the power of Nature. However, the final moments of *Dominion* speak of a more progressive possibility: that humankind and Nature exist in balance and, therefore, unexpected disruptions (such as the rewilding of dinosaurs) can be accepted and even adapted into a harmonious dynamic. Over images of peaceful co-habitation, Maisie's mother, Charlotte, addresses her audience from beyond the grave: "We act like we're alone here, but we're not. We're part of a fragile system made up of all living things. If we're going to survive, we'll have to trust each other, depend on each other. Coexist".

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