

Extinct maneaters prowl in new, improved Jurassic

By Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Finally, a summer blockbuster really worth seeing. Jurassic Park III stands a Spinosaurus head and shoulders over JP II, that dreadful San Diego invasion sequel.

And for my money, it's even an improvement over the Spielberg original.

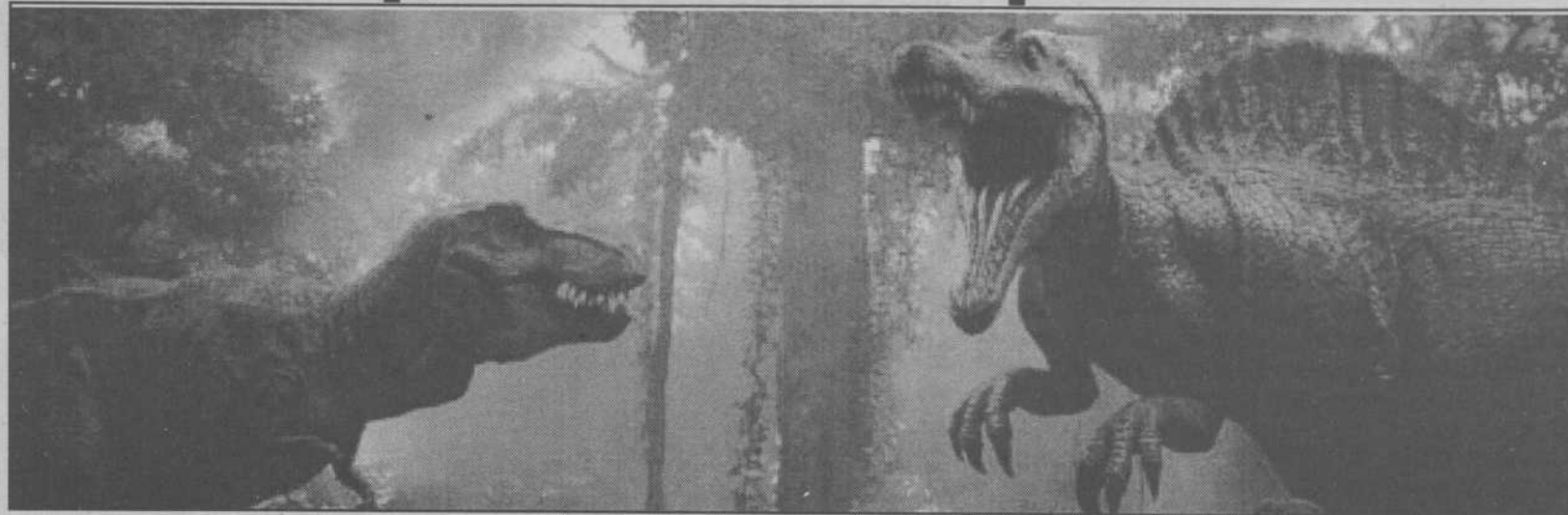
This installment, directed by Joe Johnston, puts the emphasis on entertainment with precisely the perfect blend of spine-tingling action and humorous asides.

Johnston, who established himself in the industry as a special effects designer for Star Wars, Return of the Jedi and The Empire Strikes Back, won an Oscar for his innovative visual effects work in Raiders of the Lost Ark.

Since turning to directing, Joe has successfully specialized in family-oriented, fun for the whole family offerings such as Jumanji, Honey I Shrank the Kids and October Sky.

Thus, Johnston has fit Jurassic Park III into his own time-tested formula which works for both young and old. So, out the window is all the paleontologist pretense. No wasting time with laborious, academic background material. The net result: less talk, more terror, as any appreciation of the wonders of evolution is supplanted by blood-curdling encounters with man-eating creatures.

To its credit, JP III has twice as many special effects and more dinosaurs than JP I



The T-Rex and the Spinosaurus face off in Steven Spielberg's graphic summer blockbuster sequel Jurassic Park III.

and JP II combined. Because dinosaurs have never appeared so life-like or interacted so seamlessly with humans on screen before, another Oscar nod is in order for Special Effects Coordinator Stan Winston. Winston has been nominated nine times before, winning four.

The storyline, too, is a winner, resting on a very witty script by Alexander Payne, who was nominated for an Academy Award for Election, a biting high school satire. Set eight years after the genetic engineering which triggered the first outbreak of reverse Darwinism, JP III takes us back to the tiny island off Costa Rica where the trouble all began.

But instead of returning in the interest of scientific research, the plot revolves around a missing 12 year-old boy who reportedly crashed on the quarantined isle after a hang-gliding accident.

Every member of the ensemble cast plays his or her part flawlessly, including original survivors Sam Neill and Laura Dern. The new litter of sacrificial lamb is topped by Oscar-nominee William H. Macy (for Fargo) and the talented Tea Leoni (The Family Man). Neill reprises his role as Dr. Alan Grant, the skeptical inquirer first lured to Jurassic Park by a speculating venture capitalist. This go-round, he is tricked into the trip by Paul and Amanda Kirby, the estranged parents of Eric (Trevor Morgan), the young lad lost in the jungle.

The desperate, but filthy rich, Kirbys, reunite for the sake of their child and offer Dr. Neill millions of dollars to oversee the motley crew of scientists and soldiers of fortune assembled for the rescue. The good doctor reluctantly accepts the job and we're off to the mythical Isla

Sorna where plenty of raptors, triceratops, tyrannosaurus, brachiosaurus, ankylosaurus and the newly-discovered spinosaurus lay in wait.

The first victim, always the black guy, gets swallowed faster than a NASCAR pit stop. At this point, Neill admits that he doesn't really want to be there anymore.

The Kirbys counter with a

comical confession of their own, that they're not really millionaires and couldn't come up with the money promised.

Similar moments of levity punctuate the ensuing carnage, such as when the production of a T-Rex urine sample triggers the following humorous exchange: "How'd you get it?"

"You don't want to know."

And neither will you, as you cringe and cower at the instinctive antics of ugly animatrons who hate human beings. All anybody could possibly care about is making it off the island alive.

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG-13 for amazingly life-like creatures which savagely and fairly graphically attack humans. Not for nightmare-prone tykes.

Soul

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Jerry Booking, with Don Pickard on drums.

At the conclusion of "Tobacco Road," off sashed the cast and on ran 9-year-old Thomas McCants, making his acting debut with Cynthia Wilson as his mother hot on the trail. Though her delivery of the poetic monologue entitled "Encouragement" was well done, her movement was restricted by the huge microphone she held.

The poetic vignette was laced with humor, still allowing the seriousness of the issue to be confronted- as did that of the scene to follow, "Mister President," featuring Felicia Hughes. Hughes is one of the more seasoned actresses of the show.

Her portrayal of an elderly woman having a conversation with the president was solid. I so enjoyed the look on her face when she hung up on the president. Her timing was good and her delivery smooth. This scene, as was much of the show, was skillfully covered with a thin layer of humor while consistently giving you a lens view of the Black experience.

"I Wanna Thank Ya," a moving poetic monologue delivered by Robinson, was pure energy. The stage sound was inadequate, forcing Robinson to hold a microphone, a disappointing fact. Robinson, an obvious pro-

fessional, is merely resting in Las Vegas on his way to Broadway, I hope.

After a brief intermission, the show reopened with another roof-raising song, "Two Hundred Years," featuring Wilson, Davison and Brown. A harmonic blend of talented voices rang like a bell of liberty. The cast, dressed in black, most wearing the facial mask of oppression, shared a powerful moment.

Pleasantly surprising was the appearance of local radio personality Galaxy Glenn. Accompanied by Hughes, the pair did a love ballad, "Thank Heaven For You."

"Soul Is Beautiful" gave us the glitz and glitter of Las Vegas. The brightly-costumed cast was electrifying. The "feel good" production number was well directed, as was the entire show.

The show kept a steady pace and was well received by the audience, as displayed by their standing ovation. The choreography was tight and well-timed, transitions generally smooth.

This successful Platinum Production theatrically aroused the audience with its emotional renditions of poetry and song, while unselfishly sharing the highs and lows of the Black Experience through an amazing "An Evening Of Soul."

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