

DINO *Might*

The stars of *Jurassic Park*, reuniting for the first time onscreen in nearly 30 years, share surprising memories
By Anthony Breznican



THIRTY YEARS IS nothing in terms of geologic eras, but it's a large swath of a lifetime. In 1992, Laura Dern, Sam Neill, and Jeff Goldblum first gathered in Hawaii to make Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. The adaptation of Michael Crichton's sci-fi best seller galvanized Hollywood with its photo-real digital dinosaurs, and the awestruck performances of this trio in particular helped moviegoers believe the impossible things they were seeing.

After the film's debut in the summer of 1993, the technology it pioneered made it possible to conjure onscreen nearly anything that could be imagined. Monsters, aliens, apocalypses, and even the resurrection of long-deceased actors have followed. What never happened again, even after four sequels, was a reunion of all three characters, paleobotanist Ellie Sattler, paleontologist Alan Grant, and mathematician Ian Malcolm. The sixth film in the series, this month's *Jurassic World Dominion*, finally remedies that, bringing the originals back together for one more round of man (and woman) versus nature.

When they reunited in Los Angeles to look back at their original experience, Dern, Neill, and Goldblum noted how

much the world had changed. For one, every big-budget tentpole movie is now locked down under state-secret levels of confidentiality. "We didn't have an interweb in those days," Neill points out.

"On a lot of these projects...you're like, oh, yes, I won't tell anybody. But I don't remember specifically that we were [asked], don't reveal the dinosaurs or anything," Goldblum says.

"I think no one really understood what we were up to," Dern adds. "Just Steven Spielberg was making a movie, and it might have something to do with dinosaurs." But because the *Jurassic Park* script deviated in key ways from Crichton's novel, the production did take precautions. "I remember when we received our first script of *Jurassic Park*,

Jeff Goldblum, Laura Dern, and Sam Neill first met on the set in Hawaii—not long before Hurricane Iniki struck.

it was on red paper. Do you remember that?" Dern asks her costars. "You couldn't copy it. So old school." "I don't remember a red-paper thing," says Neill. "People might have been a little concerned with Laura Dern and discretion."

This is how it goes with them. Nearly every answer is accompanied by a playful jab.

Even decades after the first movie, there are still secrets to share about *Jurassic Park*, among them why Neill's accent sometimes shifts between continents. The New Zealand actor winces about that now, but he was



following Spielberg's guidance. "It was the day we fried the kid on the electric fence. That's where we started. And I had been working..." he begins.

"I just love the very delicate way you described that," says Dern. "The day we fried the kid!"

Neill doubles down, growling: "We fried that kid on the *goddamn fence!*"

"You're *so* Alan Grant," Dern says. "You wonder why he cast Sam Neill to play this role. It's so *you*."

"Anyway, he came up to me halfway through the day and he said, 'Hey, Sam, you know the accent we were talking about?' I said, 'Yeah, I've been working on it for four weeks....' He said, 'Don't worry about it, just use your own voice.' I said, 'That's great, Steven, thank you so much.' And then four days later, he came up to me and said, 'You know that voice you're using now?' I said, 'Yeah, *my* voice?' He said, 'Somewhere in between.' It's an actor's nightmare! So that's why I get a lot of flak to this day: Sam Neill's American accent in *Jurassic Park* was a load of T. rex poo."

"You give the fans everything they want," says Dern. "A little bit of you, a little bit American."

"Yes," Neill says. "It's generous that way."

THE ACTORS WERE strangers to each other when they arrived in August 1992 on the island of Kauai. "We hadn't met," Goldblum says. "Never at a party or in passing or anything."

"And we met in a hotel that literally had three weeks to live," Neill adds. "It was destroyed three weeks later."

"How about that?" Goldblum says gravely.

That was during Hurricane Iniki, the Category 4 tropical cyclone that pulverized the island, stranding the cast and crew and making them huddle for their lives during the most punishing parts of the storm. "Partly because of the hurricane, I think we really made a family," Dern says. "Steven, [producer] Kathy Kennedy, I mean, these are family members now, through all our lives together, including the amazing Jeff Goldblum and my gorgeous Sam."

That connection was useful on

Dominion, which became one of the first major films to resume production after the pandemic lockdown in 2020. Much of the filming took place near London, with the cast and crew living together nonstop in a bubble to maintain safety. Re-creating beloved characters was the least intimidating part. "I could relax into it because we had been there before," Neill says. "We knew the knitting pattern."

After Spielberg's initial blockbuster, Goldblum returned for the sequel, 1997's *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, and Neill returned as the lead in 2001's third installment, with a cameo by Dern. The franchise's DNA was sufficiently strong that the 2015

Neill says Spielberg vacillated about **WHAT ACCENT HE SHOULD USE:** "That's why I get flak to this day: 'Sam Neill's American accent was T. rex poo.'"

relaunch—*Jurassic World*, starring Bryce Dallas Howard and Chris Pratt—became the biggest of the series so far, earning \$1.67 billion globally. Goldblum made a brief appearance in that film's sequel, 2018's *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, which proved to be another behemoth. The return of all three original stars, combined with Howard and Pratt, in *Dominion* both closes the circle and raises box office expectations to record-breaking levels.

Director Colin Trevorrow says he wasn't sure what to expect when he reassembled this iconic trio, especially under such dire and restrictive

circumstances as pandemic production. "I think there was a bit of tenuousness at first, with me wondering, 'Is their dynamic going to echo the dynamic of the characters in the movie? Do Jeff and Sam actually have a problem with each other?' None of those things ended up being true. They have a completely unique dynamic that is all their own. I just had to learn it over time."

That chemistry continues to play out during the talk with *V.F.*, as the actors torment and compliment one another in equal measure. When talk turns to the famous scene in which Goldblum is sweaty, open-shirted, and wounded after a dino attack, Neill refers to it as "the bleeding Michelangelo Adonis."

"Yesss...." Goldblum purrs. "What about it?"

Asked how Goldblum devised that scene with Spielberg, Neill jumps in again. "How many buttons were too many?"

"I don't remember how it came to be," says Goldblum. "I have no idea.... It just happened somehow. I'm sorry, for better or worse. I apologize profusely. Or...you're welcome?"

"That was the only CGI in this movie," Dern jokes.

"Did he muscle you up or something, is that what you're saying?" Neill says.

"Nooo," Goldblum says, pivoting away from his sultry sequence by deploying one of his most famous lines from the film: "Anyway, life finds a way."

The technological footprint of *Jurassic Park* is undeniable, making it one of the clear game changers in Hollywood history. But there's also a case to be made that the original movie endures because of the affection viewers harbor for the human characters.

An unheralded and ongoing impact, Dern says, is how many girls idolized her brave paleobotanist and found themselves drawn to careers in science: "Now, generations of kids or families connect to these characters. For me, to have women who have been inspired by Ellie Sattler, that's an amazing feeling." Her character's prophecy came true, sort of: While dinosaurs feasted on mankind, women inherited the earth. ■