

If there's a Kim Kardashian of the dinosaur world, it may well be *Tyrannosaurus rex*, an overexposed and unrepentant media hog more famous for being famous, in some ways, than for anything else.

*T. rex* is not the only member of his theropod family (many of which were smaller and more "ecologically marginal," as Stephen Brusatte and Thomas D. Carr put it in a recent paper), not the biggest dinosaur who ever lived, not necessarily the most paleontologically interesting dinosaur that ever lived, and not even the most "American" dinosaur that ever lived (though many of the world's most famous *T. rex* fossils have been found in the American West, Brusatte and Carr suggest—as does the University of London's David Hone—that *T. rex* was an "immigrant" Asian species that did not necessarily evolve in the area that would become North America).

And yet *T. rex* is the one everyone knows—either because of its objects-in-the-mirror-are-closer-than-they-appear antics in *Jurassic Park* or through any number of earlier *One Million Years B.C.*-type films or the comics and pulp novels of another generation. Having your remains sold for more than eight million dollars at Sotheby's (as were those of "Sue") certainly doesn't hurt your reputation either.

The *Jurassic Park* films also made an effort to bestow respect and awe on enormous non-"meatosaurs," pterosaurs, a cuddly-looking *Triceratops*, a murmuring flock of *Gallimimus*, and, of course, velociraptors (especially in the first and the latest installments). Still, it was *T. rex* who prevailed over the destruction of the Jurassic Park visitor center in the first film (thus providing the ultimate comment on human hubris) and saved the day in the last one, and it was *T. rex's* roar, a sound

mélange of dog growls and the trumpeting of a baby elephant, that shot around the world.

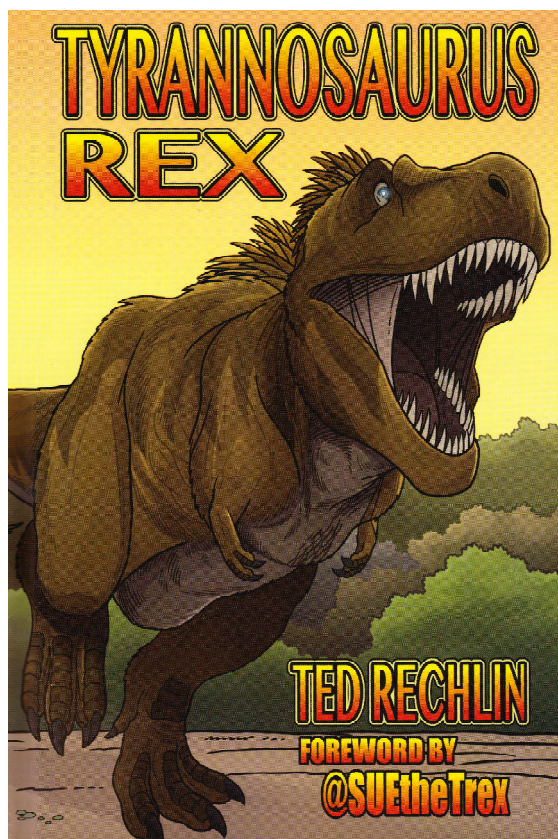
There's an awful lot of roaring in *Tyrannosaurus Rex* as well, Ted Rechlin's new illustrated dinosaur book for children—along with roffing, rarghing, huurring, hroaahhing, urraaaaaarrghing, and, of course, chomping, crunching, and a whole host of other onomatopoeic sound effects.

That's probably going to make the book a huge hit with children who have dramatically-inclined adults on hand to read the book to them aloud or who are old enough to provide their own sound track (which is perhaps why this book should come with a warning label for anyone whose nerves are already shot). A small complaint on behalf of pint-sized readers, meanwhile: The lettering is too small for the size of the pages and is harder to read than it needs to be.

What Rechlin does best, in fact, is the artwork, which is realized, colored, and reproduced beautifully and is dramatic, evocative, and nuanced (he even manages to give his "rexes" actual facial expressions). His non-rexes can be a touch rudimentary, but he has lavished attention on the stars of his book (and on cameos by a striking mauve and brick-red *Triceratops*).

One could imagine a cavil over Rechlin's interpretation of *T. rex* science (it isn't clear, for example, whether *Tyrannosaurus* vocalized at all—the bellowing creature known to fans of *Jurassic Park* was a figment first of the imagination of Michael Crichton and later of Spielberg's studio), but he has obviously done his homework, and his rexes seem to stay within the realm of reasonable debate about such questions as nest building, parenting behavior, and the animals' physical appearance. Rechlin's adults, for example, show clearly defined lips—meaning no exposed teeth when their

*Tyrannosaurus Rex*, written and illustrated by Ted Rechlin. Bozeman, MT: Rextooth Studios, 2016, 80 pp.



mouths are closed—and they sport a feathered sagittal crest that continues down to their tails. He gives them a body surface that’s clearly fluffier than it is scaly, though his hatchlings seem to have no feathers at all.

*Tyrannosaurus Rex* is big on action—mostly the kind of action that involves one dinosaur trying to kill another one, either for food or to defend its territory—but focuses a good deal less on story. In fact, readers may notice a couple of *T. rex*-sized plot holes. At one point, for instance, one of Rechlin’s heroes is about to put the fatal bite on a *Triceratops*. Turn the page, though, and a *T. rex* couple is peaceably constructing a nest of sticks. Sure, it’s clear what happened, and Rechlin may have deliberately chosen to downplay the mayhem in a book for kids (there’s not a drop of blood anywhere, despite an impressive amount of predation), but a bit of attention to transitions between scenes wouldn’t have gone amiss.

At the same time, Rechlin both anthropomorphizes his *T. rex* (in the style of Discovery Channel nature documentaries in which the merest penguin has human emotions and a human name—they’re Cobalt and Sierra in *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, which at least merits serious points for creativity) and, paradoxically, bestializes them. His rexes hunt, eat,

fight off intruders, reproduce—and, of course, roar—but they don’t do much else.

In a certain way, of course, the same could be said of all animals, including humans, but here the effect is to reinforce the *T. rex*’s position as uniquely ferocious, uniquely predatory, and uniquely scary—all of which comes a little closer to a sensationalistic hop aboard the dinosaur celebrity train than it does to saying something revealing about tyrannosaurs. But perhaps that wasn’t Rechlin’s point.

Still, what Rechlin calls the “Age of Teeth” (that is, the Cretaceous) could just as accurately be called the Age of Ammonites or the Age of Rudists. The fact that it is not, one suspects, has little to do with the size of *T. rex*’s dentition and everything to do with the size of its publicity machine.

—Wendell Ricketts

#### **Note**

Brusatte, Stephen L. and Carr, Thomas D. (2016, 2 February). The Phylogeny and Evolutionary History of Tyrannosauroid Dinosaurs. *Scientific Reports*, 6. Retrieved from <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep20252>. DOI:10.1038/srep20252.