**Clarion Review**

Science Fiction

**The Dinosaur's Descendants**
Mark Ellsberry
iUniverse
978-1-4759-9016-4
Two Stars (out of Five)

Time-traveling dinosaurs, cross-temporal war, and the future of humanity combine in this sci-fi thriller.

*The Dinosaur's Descendants* is a science-fiction thriller in the tradition of Michael Crichton. Having recently discovered time travel, the government sends a team of researchers sixty-six million years into the past. They arrive to discover a monumental surprise: not only are dinosaurs technologically sophisticated, but they are planning an invasion of the twenty-first century. As dinosaur agents sow chaos in the present, Team T-REX must fight to save the future of humanity.

The book's dinosaur antagonists, the Laurasians, are simultaneously threatening and appealing. Following the pattern of many human governments, Laurasian political administration is dismissive of its citizens' ethical qualms. Its appetite for oil is a good motivating factor and makes a great deal of sense in the context of this universe—after all, what lengths wouldn't an energy-dependent society go to for oil? In contrast, the Laurasian citizens are generally open and easygoing. Their attitude helps to make their willingness to help the time-traveling human protagonists much more convincing.

The most appealing aspect of this book is the concept of cross-temporal war. The possibility of armies from separate eras duking it out in situ should entertain fans of both the novelist Harry Turtledove and the J. J. Abrams show *Fringe*. In the case of *The Dinosaur's Descendants*, humanity's complete lack of awareness of dinosaur capabilities is nearly fatal. Team T-REX doesn't even respond to any perceived danger of dinosaur time travel—they get astronomically lucky and run into it by accident.

Throughout the book, Ellsberry seems to be making a number of comments on the

relative value of belief and knowledge. Humanity's ignorance is presented here as a keystone tactical weakness, and that ignorance is contrasted multiple times with the advantages of the Laurasians's religious belief in research.

Despite its interesting story, the novel suffers from an awkward, breathless writing style. Plot points come thick and fast, usually stated without flourishes or excess description: "As she spoke, the leader of the group shot Ellie with her projectile gun. When he saw her fall to the floor, Steven went a little crazy. The situation felt too much like the incident he had been through with his girlfriend." The upside of this style is that the action being referenced is never in doubt. Though dry, these extremely clear and direct descriptions do communicate the story in such a way that any reader will be able to understand exactly what is going on at all times.

However, this directness also tends to generate fairly wooden dialogue. One good example occurs when one of the human time travelers, Ellie, is captured by the Laurasian military after attempting to open diplomatic relations with the Laurasians' contemporary political rival, Gondwana. Ellsberry writes, "Because she remembered how Laurasian character predisposed them to be naturally helpful when they responded to questions, Ellie continued, 'Why were you in Gondwana, and why did you capture me?' 'Our exalted Lord has declared war on Gondwana,' said the guard." Story-oriented readers may appreciate the clarity of such dialogue, but others will notice the lack of variation in tone and voice.

The story is solid but leaves the fates of many minor participants open to further exploration. From a kindly dinosaur couple to a terrorist who misses his quiet antiques store, the narrative could follow up on a number of characters with implied but interesting backstories. *The Dinosaur's Descendants* is well imagined, features some good ideas, and can be entertaining.

*Anna Call*