

fantastic world of dinosaurs in *The Lost World*, (in bookstores this week).

So, then, why bother? *Jurassic Park* left little unresolved on any level, and if Crichton had a new, exciting prehistoric adventure in mind, it didn't make it to the book. What he *did* seem to have was a headful of scientific concepts from his outside reading. After working hard to make a sequel justifiable and plausible, he lets *The Lost World* lapse into "T. Rex Meets the Paleontologists, Part II," a chamber-of-horrors chase story punctuated by scientific musings.

We're back on an island off Costa Rica, the site at which the *JP* dinos were born and raised before transfer to the theme

Crichton's T. Rex redux

park. Hushed-up reports of oversized lizards on the mainland draw the attention of researchers, who head south to find the animals.

Of *JP*'s human players, only curmudgeonly mathematician Ian Malcolm (played winningly by Jeff Goldblum in the film) makes the trip. Crichton introduces us to a new cast that looks oddly familiar: the plucky young female scientist; the bright, slightly older male scientist; the brainy teenaged boy and girl. And let's not forget *The Extra Guy*.

Guess who doesn't make it off the island alive.

THERE'S ALSO a trio of foul-mouthed *Bad Guys*, led by a man renowned for muscling in on, and appropriating, others' discoveries, not unlike Indiana Jones' nemesis in "The Raiders of the Lost Ark." (Were *The Lost World* set in 1944, this guy would have Nazis as sidekicks.)

Anyone want to take a bet on whether he or his mercenary cronies make it off the island alive?

So we know early on who'll live and who'll die. That's OK, since *Jurassic Park* worked fine without our caring about the characters. But Crichton gave *that* novel a reason for being outside of showing us monsters: he developed an intriguing premise — the resurrection of the dinosaurs and the creation of a theme park to cover the research-and-development costs.

In *The Lost World* he's content to present a plotless parade of maiasauruses and velociraptors and stegosauruses, with long and minute accounts of their various appearances and behaviors.

Since our fearless heroes are unlikely to be terrified and on the run from slow-moving herds of fern-chewers, Crichton overpopulates his island with bloodthirsty carnivores who show near-human resourcefulness in almost landing their prey time and again. At book's end he stages an unconvincing conversation to explain why there are so darn many raptors and Tyrannosaurus rexes.

THE OVERALL effect is oddly lifeless; there's no sense of wonder at these creatures' existence. It resembles lackluster sci-fi, like 1950s Robert Heinlein — clunky scientific exposition, workmanlike prose and preteens who speak like jaded baby boomers.

And while *Jurassic Park* had readers and filmgoers debating its discussions of chaos theory and don't-mess-with-nature advocacy, *The Lost World's* "novel of ideas" pretensions seem forced, as its scientists discourse blithely, at length, on Darwinism, self-organizing systems, and other topics of great interest.

(Anyone fascinated by this sort of material should pick up nonfiction books which actually address these subjects, like Kevin Kelly's brilliant *Out of Control: The Rise of Neobiological Civilization* [Addison-Wesley].)

The book's conclusion ties up all the loose ends without an ounce of drama. While you're unable to put down the novel with 20 pages to go, neither are you sorry to see the last page, nor are you eager to see the great lizards again.

But don't count on this being the dinos' swan song; Godzilla's been going strong for forty years.

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THE LOST WORLD

By Michael Crichton, Knopf, 393 pp., \$25.95

By MATTHEW BUDMAN
Special to The Times

None can make four or five hours zoom by — and make you feel as though you've read something substantial — like Michael Crichton. As an author and screenwriter he's become an influential polemicist on weighty issues: Millions now believe that ruthless Japanese businessmen are buying the United States (*Rising Sun*), that men are helpless victims of sexual harassment (*Disclosure*), and that scientists shouldn't meddle in God's domain (*Jurassic Park*).

No matter what the topic, Crichton's books all sell in massive quantities, so it's not for lack of money that he returns to the