

The Dinosaurs That We Deserve



by Lee Duigon

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Does each generation get the dinosaurs that it deserves?

Consider *Tyrannosaurus rex*, possibly the most famous dinosaur of them all. In the 1940s we had Rudolph Zallinger's epic dinosaur mural at the Peabody Museum. His T. rex was a hulking brute with a colossal beer-belly. So when Marx Toys came out with plastic dinosaurs in the 1950s, their T. rex was patterned after Zallinger's, belly and all.

Meanwhile, the American Museum of Natural History mounted a more or less complete T. rex skeleton. For various logistic reasons, they mounted it standing bolt upright like a human being, with its tail dragging on the ground. They knew this probably wasn't accurate, but it made a great exhibit. So for years artists depicted T. rex standing tall and straight. They also shrank the beer belly. Marx came out with a new *Tyrannosaurus* reflecting this change.

In 1968 Bob Bakker revolutionized dinosaur studies by arguing that far from being lumbering monsters buoyed up by swamp-water, these were active, war-blooded animals, like birds and mammals. By late in the 1980s his argument had mostly carried the day—and the toy manufacturers, and popular book publishers, followed suit. (I had the privilege of interviewing Bakker for an hour and a half—wow for me!) No more flabby belly, no more dragging tail.

The *Jurassic Park* movies, starting in the 1990s, gave us a

Tyrannosaurus that really scared us. Balanced fore and aft at the hip, the new T. rex ran like the wind, turned on a dime, and could only be challenged, eventually, by imaginary dinosaurs cooked up in movie studios. But that was not the end of it.

In our time scientists and artists sprouted a penchant for slapping feathers onto dinosaurs, with or without evidence. By and by they wound up with a T. rex festooned with dirty, greasy-looking feathers—I mean, it looks like a fugitive from Skid Row, all it needs is a bottle of Thunderbird.

Now each and every one of these wildly diverging Tyrannosaurs was hailed, in its time, as Settled Science. Each was the authoritative version. Each strutted its hour upon the stage and then was heard no more. Because settled science doesn't stay settled. Heck, in the 1800s, when they first started creating dinosaur statues for world's fairs and public parks, all the dinosaurs were sculpted as stocky, chunky, four-legged behemoths that probably couldn't have run much faster than their statues. That, too, was settled science.

Given our current fascinations with COVID, transgender, Climbit Chainge and electric cars that no one can afford and which burst into flame when you least expect it, I think we're getting exactly the Tyrannosaurus we deserve: a giant wino.

No wonder they went extinct.

I have discussed these and other topics throughout the week on my blog, <http://www.leeduigon.com/> . Click the link and visit, later on today: I want to post some pictures of the ever-changing T. rex. My articles can also be found at www.chalcedon.edu/ .

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