



The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon

W. J. T. Mitchell

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For animals that have been dead millions of years, dinosaurs are extraordinarily pervasive in our everyday lives. Appearing in ads, books, movies, museums, television, toy stores, and novels, they continually fascinate both adults and children. How did they move from natural extinction to pop culture resurrection? What is the source of their powerful appeal? Until now, no one has addressed this question in a comprehensive way. In this lively and engrossing exploration of the animal's place in our lives, W.J.T. Mitchell shows why we are so attached to the myth and the reality of the "terrible lizards."

Mitchell aims to trace the cultural family tree of the dinosaur, and what he discovers is a creature of striking flexibility, linked to dragons and mammoths, skyscrapers and steam engines, cowboys and Indians. In the vast territory between the cunning predators of *Jurassic Park* and the mawkishly sweet Barney, from political leviathans to corporate icons, from paleontology to Barnum and Bailey, Mitchell finds a cultural symbol whose plurality of meaning and often contradictory nature is emblematic of modern society itself. As a scientific entity, the dinosaur endured a near-eclipse for over a century, but as an image it is enjoying its widest circulation. And it endures, according to Mitchell, because it is uniquely malleable, a figure of both innovation and obsolescence, massive power and pathetic failure—the totem animal of modernity.

Drawing unforeseen and unusual connections at every turn between dinosaurs real and imagined, *The Last Dinosaur Book* is the first to delve so deeply, so insightfully, and so enjoyably into our modern dino-obsession.

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