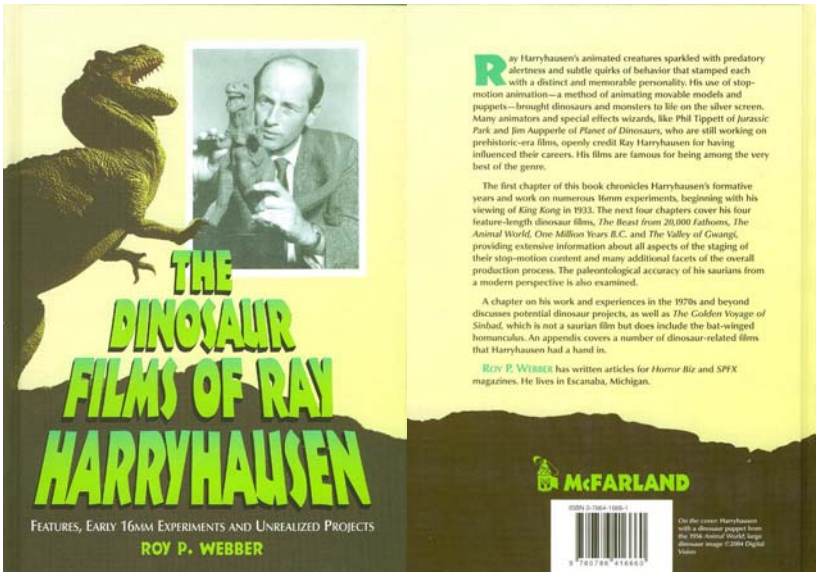
Webber, R.P. 2003. The dinosaur films of Ray Harryhausen. Features, early 16 mm experiments and unrealized projects. – Jefferson, McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers

Book review by A.S. Schulp



We are getting more and more used to seeing things that are not there. 'Living' dinosaurs nowadays crawl, walk, hop, run or fly almost routinely from the computer straight into movies and documentaries such as 'Jurassic Park' and 'Walking with dinosaurs'. The appearance of dead fossils as living creatures in movies often ignites hot debate amongst palaeontologists. The *T. rex* chasing a Jeep in 'Jurassic Park', giving up the pursuit only after the fourth gear has been engaged, inspired lots of research and yielded numerous publications on the topic of the top speed of *Tyrannosaurus*.

Dinosaur films, in other words, can inspire palaeontological research, while, on the other hand, an enormous amount of palaeontological expertise was used in making 'Walking with dinosaurs' and (although perhaps to a lesser degree) 'Jurassic Park'.

If we compare 'Jurassic Park' with earlier dinosaur movies, there is a good chance we will come across one of the 'stop-motion-animation' movies made by Ray Harryhausen. We may encounter slow, fat, 'primitive' monsters with dragging tails, but also swift, agile, active and, above all fearsome creatures. Clearly, the image scientists have of dinosaurs has changed over the years, and these changing views are often reflected in the portrayal of dinosaurs in movies.

One of the earliest, and certainly one of the most famous stop-motion dinosaur movies is 'The lost world' (1925), made by the father of the 'stop-motion' dinosaur animation technique, Willis O'Brien. O'Brien later would become even more famous with the 'King Kong' movie (1933). Ray Harryhausen is, in many ways, considered the successor of O'Brien, and Webber discusses his life and oeuvre in great (and perhaps to some readers' tastes even too much) detail in this book. The biography starts with Harryhausen's early experiments, followed by chapters on 'The beast from 20,000 fathoms', 'The animal world', 'One million years B.C.', and 'The valley of Gwangi'. A short final chapter summarises Harryhausens's work in the '1970s and beyond'. A Ray Harryhausen Dinosaur Filmography and a list of Casts and Credits is included too.

This makes the book a great reference work for movie enthusiasts, but unfortunately for palaeontologists, the book very closely sticks to the subject of the dinosaur films. Hardly anything is said about the way the changing views of dinosaurs in palaeontological research are represented in the work of Harryhausen. Instead, a lot of movies are discussed scene-by-scene, animation techniques are explained in interesting, but perhaps too much detail. For a palaeontologist, 'The dinosaur films of Ray Harryhausen' is an interesting book, but mainly as an overview and a biography to provide some more background behind the Harryhausen dvd collection. In terms of real palaeontology there is not much to be found in this book, but that was never intended by the author anyway.

Webber, R.P. 2003. The dinosaur films of Ray Harryhausen. Features, early 16 mm experiments and unrealized projects. – Jefferson, McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers. 226 pp. ISBN 0-7864-1666-1. Price £ 30.50/$ 45.00 (hardcover).