

**IN THE
SHADOW
OF THE
DINOSAURS**

The actors of "Jurassic Park" had their work cut out for them, holding their own against prehistoric co-stars.

By MARC SHAPIRO

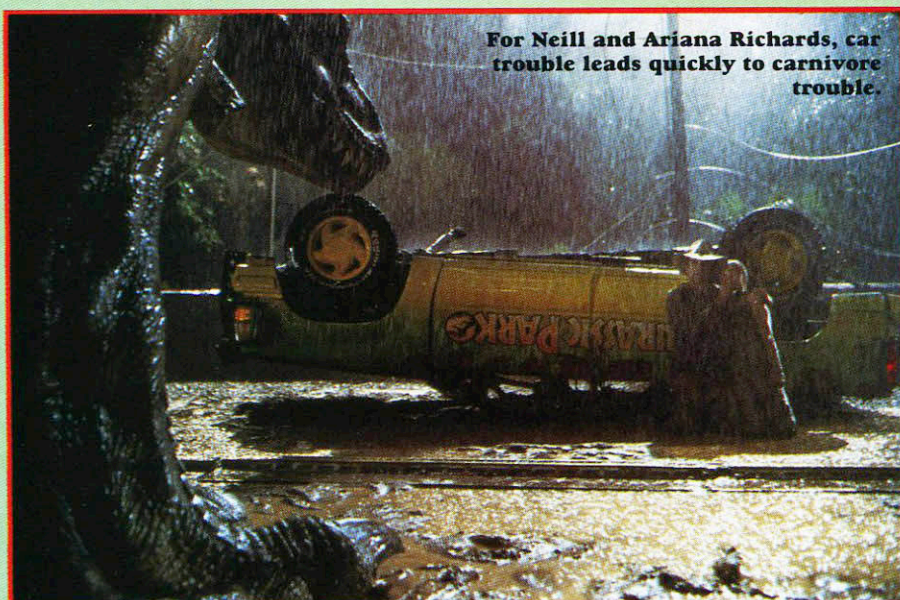
Laura Dern had just completed what she describes as her "negotiating period" with Steven Spielberg. The topic of those early talks was the role of Dr. Ellie Sattler, the female lead of *Jurassic Park*. The director wanted her for it, but the actress wasn't sure if she should accept the part. Her solution? Ask a friend.

"I went to Nicolas Cage," recalls Dern of her post-Spielberg conversation with her pal and fellow actor. "I told him I didn't know what to do, and what did he think? He stopped me in mid-sentence and said, 'Are you crazy? You not only get to be in a dinosaur movie, but the *ultimate* dinosaur movie, and you're asking if I think you should do it? Take it!'"

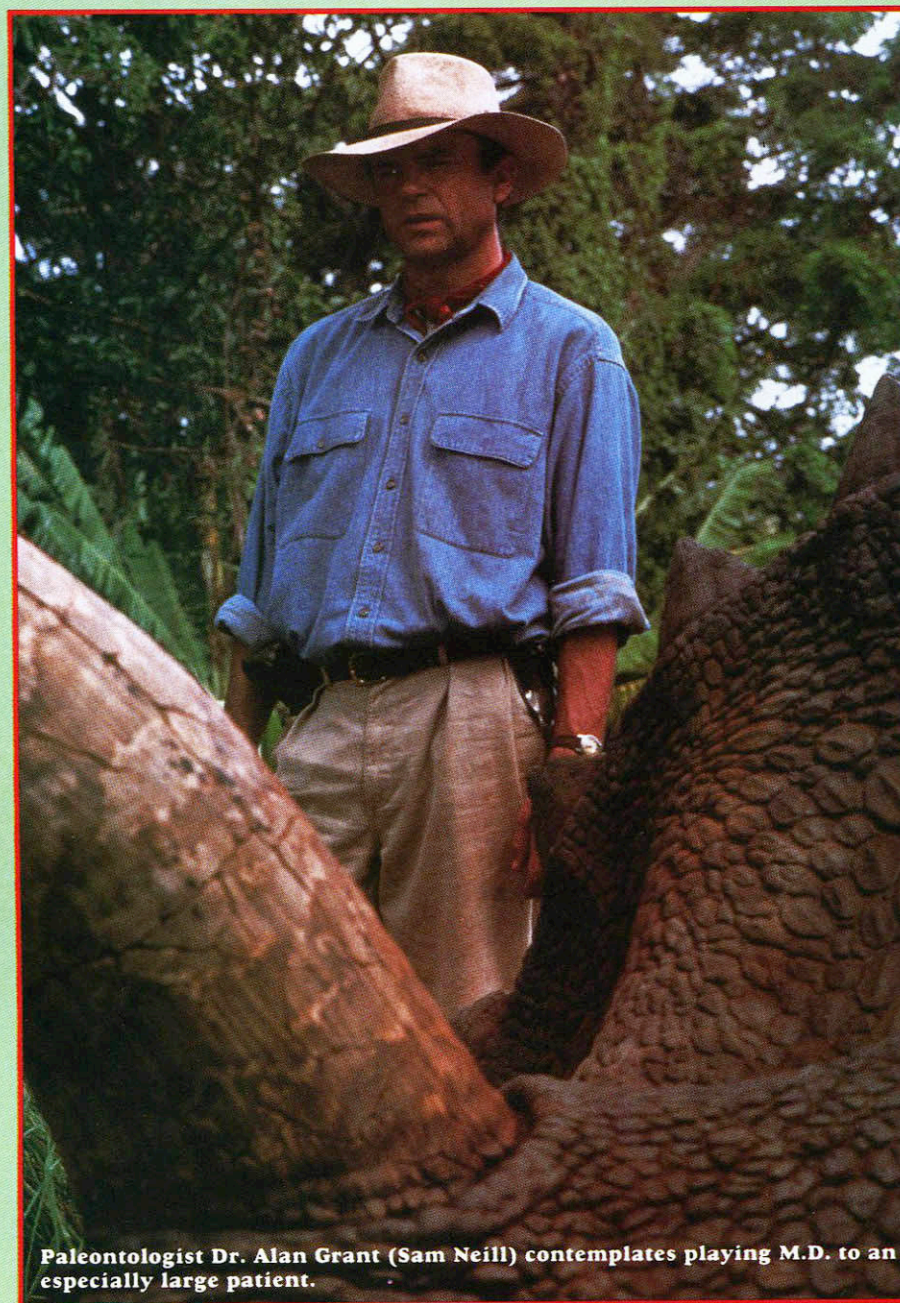
This point of view, coupled with Spielberg's presence at the helm of the ambitious project, were the hooks that ultimately brought not only Dern but the remainder of the cast and crew on board for Universal's recently-released tale of DNA-cloned dinosaurs on the prowl. At the time of these interviews, *Jurassic Park* was just on the verge of opening, amidst a wave of hype, anticipation and apprehension. And producer Kathleen Kennedy is the first to admit that while making this movie appeared to be a safe bet on the surface, it also represented a monstrous gamble.

"There was always an element of fear on our part from the moment we decided to make this film," the producer recalls. "We felt the script was there, but our major concern was the dinosaurs and how we wanted them to come across on screen. So on that level, we were constantly asking ourselves, 'Can this work?'"

Jurassic Park's transformation from best-selling novel to blockbuster film entailed enormous technical and special FX challenges (see *Fango* #124), and as Kennedy recalls, "Our primary concern going in was how to make the movie for a price. It would have been easy to plan out a movie that cost \$100 million. But if we were going to try to follow the book, the challenge was to



For Neill and Ariana Richards, car trouble leads quickly to carnivore trouble.



Paleontologist Dr. Alan Grant (Sam Neill) contemplates playing M.D. to an especially large patient.

Photos: Murray Close/TM & Copyright 1993 Universal & Amblin



A pair of Velociraptors raid the cafeteria in search of a snack—young Tim (Joseph Mazzello).

find a story we could tell, take what we could from the novel and determine how many dinosaurs we could realistically build. We had to figure out what approach to use to create something so realistic that audiences would believe it was alive."

Spielberg and Kennedy found what the producer calls "the four best guys in the business" (Stan Winston, Dennis Muren, Phil Tippett and Michael Lantieri) to design *Jurassic Park's* prehistoric denizens and bring them to life. Kennedy relates that coming up with a final shooting script also resulted in a collaborative approach.

"Michael [Crichton] wrote a first-draft screenplay that was basically a distilled version of the book," she recalls. "This draft served the purpose of breaking down the story and becoming a guide for what we would eliminate from the novel. Malia Scotch [Hook] Marmo was brought in to work on another draft in conjunction with Steven. That version ended up going off on a tangent that, for reasons I would rather not go into, we were not happy with. David [Death Becomes Her] Koepp was then brought in, and he wrote the subsequent drafts, including the final shooting script."

Much has been made of *Jurassic Park's* relatively trouble-free shoot, with the film reportedly finishing 12 days under its projected wrap date. Even an unexpected hurricane during location shooting in Hawaii only wound up costing the company a day that was made up later. "It's funny what two years of prep time will do," chuckles Kennedy in re-

gards to the smooth sailing. "Having that much preproduction time really put Steven at ease, and because of that, everybody was well-prepared for any situation. We were always ahead of the movie, rather than trying to catch up. So if something went wrong, we always had an immediate place to go, or something else to do in its place. No one was flailing around out of control when something went wrong—they were very calm."

Immediately following the completion of principal photography, Spielberg left for Poland and his next assignment, *Schindler's List*. According to Kennedy, however, the

director was only a satellite hookup away from those working on *Jurassic Park's* FX-heavy postproduction.

"Every morning around 10 or 11, the effects people and myself would get together in a conference room and run effects shots," she explains.

"Working with Spielberg was the main attraction. I knew a Spielberg dinosaur movie would be completely different."

—Sam Neill

"At night, Steven would get our reports in an editing room in Poland, give his comments, and we'd go from there. So even though he wasn't there, he was definitely still on top of things."

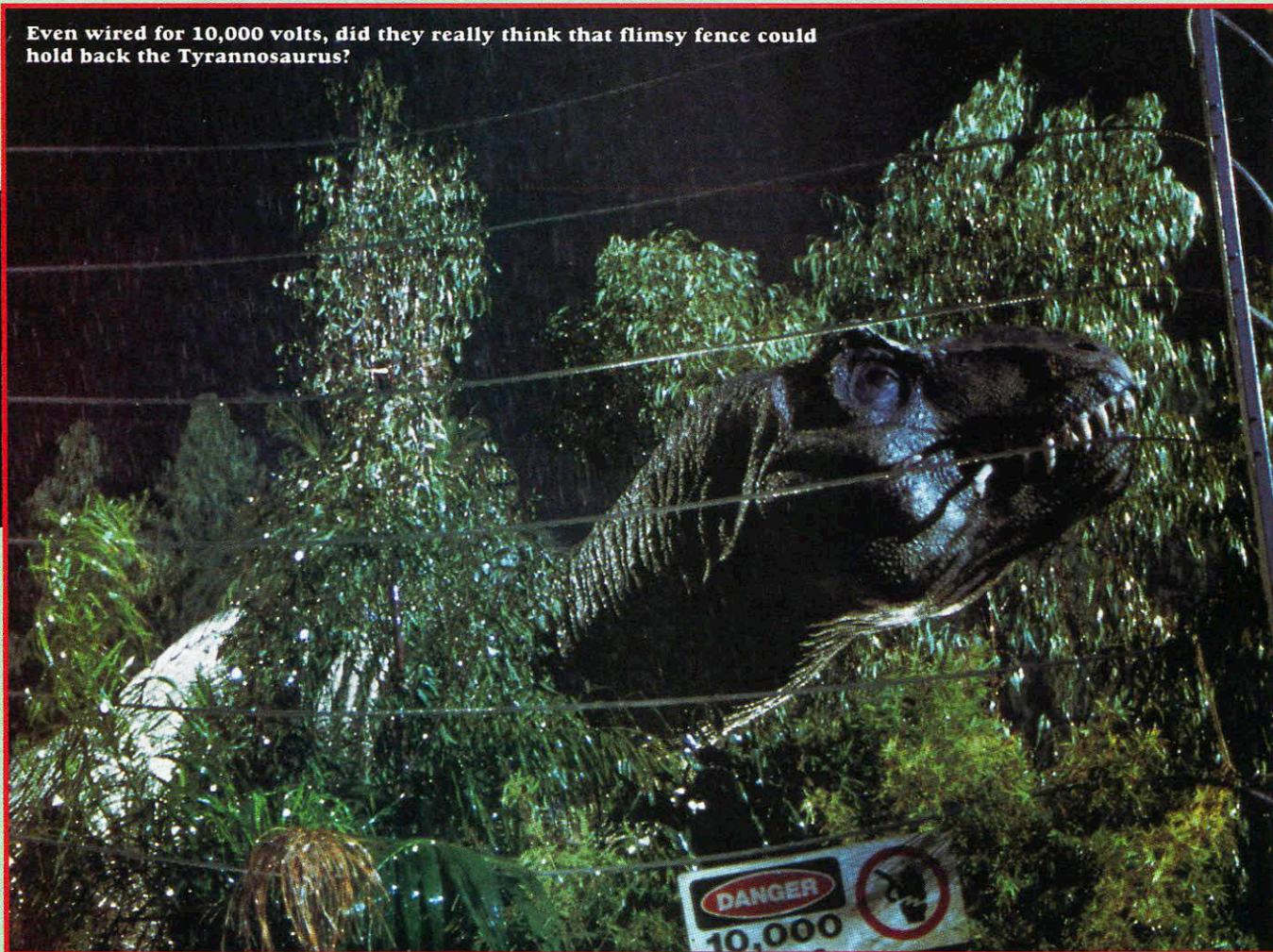
While extremely tension-packed, *Jurassic Park* remains well within the boundaries of its PG-13 rating—something the producer confirms was always intended. "The ratings were a constant consideration in the making of this movie," Kennedy reveals. "We didn't want to make a film that kids couldn't see, which is why there's not a lot of blood or excessive violence. As a matter of fact, my only problem in that regard was the scene where they feed the cow to the Velociraptor. I was constantly walking around saying, 'Do we really have to kill the cow?'"

When actor Jeff Goldblum stepped into the role of Dr. Ian Malcolm, mathematician and propo-



It's a tense moment for *Jurassic Park's* heroes: Will there be a live-action dinosaur prop to react to in the next scene?

Even wired for 10,000 volts, did they really think that flimsy fence could hold back the Tyrannosaurus?



nent of the dread chaos theory, he was happy to find out that his own character would survive the terrors of *Jurassic Park*. He was also relieved to discover that his role would require little mental preparation.

"You really can't research a role like this," says the actor, whose most memorable previous genre performance was his turn as Seth Brundle in *The Fly*. "You just kind of go with the inherent fun of the role, and your instinct. You look at these things and think, 'I never expected to see something like that,' and just run with it."

Goldblum points to his character's initial encounter with the Tyrannosaurus rex as a definite highpoint of the film. "It's spectacular!" he raves. "I get to be swash-buckling and heroic, taking this dinosaur on and yelling at Sam [Neill] to save the kids while I distract it. I also got a kick out of doing the T. rex chase sequence, reacting to all that computer stuff that would be added later. It was a coordinated effort. We had to know exactly where to look at the dinosaur, so we had some guy out there rustling the trees and another holding a long stick with a dinosaur face on it."

The actor has very positive memo-

ries of his working relationship with director Spielberg. "He had this movie all planned out, with a very clear vision—and because of that, he was free to be spontaneous." Goldblum goes on to relate how this improvisational approach led to an on-the-set change in *Jurassic Park*'s ending. "We were shooting the final scenes of the T. rex attack on the Universal backlot," he recalls. "The original ending called for a hanging skeleton to fall on one of the Velociraptors and crush it to death. Then John Hammond was to show up and shoot the other. But all of a

sudden, Steven decided that there should be one more appearance by the T. rex—so he made up a whole new ending involving it right there on the set."

The actor also appreciated the fact that Spielberg kept his character and performance out of what he calls "the dangerous area." "What he kept at me about was not making Malcolm obnoxious, unpleasant or a womanizer," Goldblum says. "I was glad of that, because otherwise the audience would be rooting for the dinosaurs to kill him," he laughs.

Goldblum's heroic co-star Sam Neill found few problems of his own playing Dr. Alan Grant, *Jurassic Park*'s lead. The character starts off as introverted, but comes to bond with the two children he must protect from the rampaging dinosaurs. "I happen to like children," Neill deadpans. "I have to, because I have some of my own. As for the animals—well, we got on fine."

"This is just the sort of adventure film I wanted to see when I was a kid," continues the soft-spoken actor, whose credits include the truly frightening *Dead Calm* and the FX-laden fantasy *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. "It's a movie that takes you to a place you've never been before and



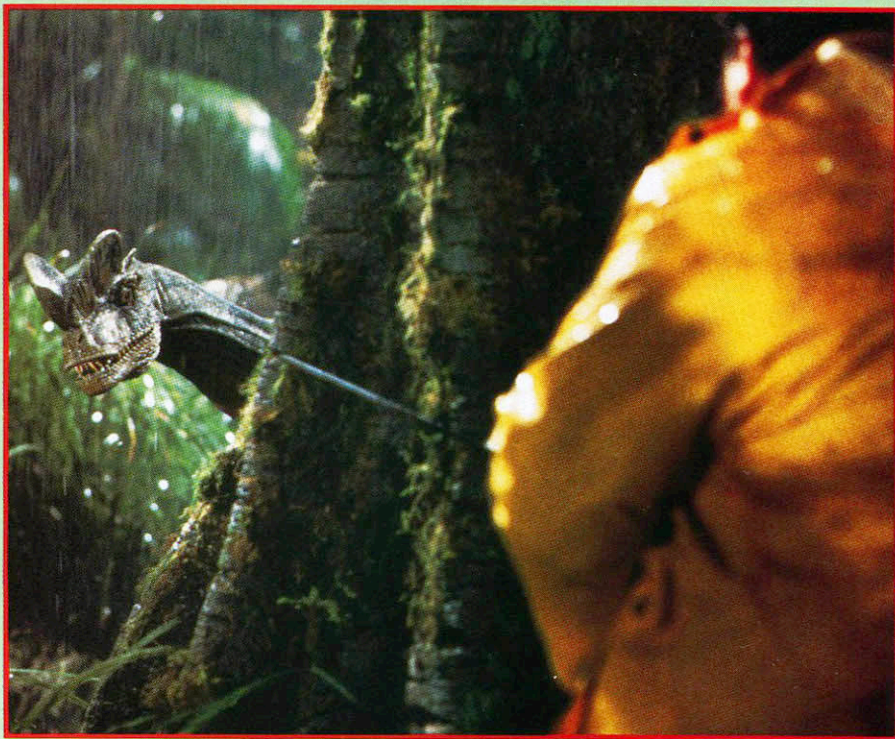
Chaos theorist Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) never expected things to get so bad so fast.

gives you some real frights. The idea of working with Spielberg was the main attraction. I knew a Spielberg dinosaur movie would be a completely different project, but I must admit that just the idea of being in a dinosaur movie, period, did have a certain appeal."

Neill, who admits to a lifelong fear of high places and makes laughing reference to his "prowess as an action actor," found *Jurassic Park* to be a rough physical workout. "There were a few too many scenes involving heights for my liking," he admits. "Spinning around on that fragile-looking skeleton will always be a highpoint. So was coming down the tree with that jeep right behind me, and rappelling down that wall was also quite difficult. Ariana [Richards] was hanging onto my neck and holding on real tight. So there I was, trying to rappel down this wall, do my lines and breathe all at the same time. There were not that many stunts in the film, but because of the way the film was shot, when there was one it usually had to be me doing it."

Neill goes on to jokingly voice one particular disappointment resulting from his work with *Jurassic Park*'s state-of-the-art dinosaurs. "The damned things always worked right, the first time," he chuckles. "Occasionally, while we were filming, I had the notion to just go back to my trailer and watch Oprah Winfrey. But those damned dinosaurs were always up and on their marks, so I never did get to find out what Oprah was up to."

The veteran actor, whose thriller credits also include the role of the adult Damien in *The Final Conflict* and a part in the submarine blockbuster *The Hunt for Red October*,



At a crucial moment, Nedry (Wayne Knight) makes the fatal mistake of playing hide and go spit with the Dilophosaurus.

gives Spielberg high marks on his handling of *Jurassic Park*. "Steven's always been a bit underestimated in terms of how involved he gets with his actors," Neill asserts. "On this film, it wasn't a matter of his spending all his time directing the dinosaurs and leaving the actors to fend for themselves. In fact, most of the time he would hang out with the actors, listening to suggestions and keeping a very fluid working set." In an echo of Goldblum's observations, he applauds the director's openness to improvisation. "A lot of things that were not in the script just happened on the floor. But despite

that, there were days when we'd get as many as 23 scenes shot. With Steven I felt that, as an actor, I was in safe hands."

Nor does Ariana Richards, who portrays Lex, one of the youngsters in Dr. Grant's care, profess to having felt unsure on the set. But that doesn't mean there weren't some sticky moments. "I did get sneezed on," the young actress laughs of one onscreen dinosaur encounter. "It was made of this clear, yellowish goo that they put in a big tank and added a little bit of spinach to. Then, when it was time to shoot the scene, the stuff was shot out of the tank with a big blast of air. This scene took four takes, and it was really disgusting."

Even when Richards' interaction with her prehistoric co-stars was less of an in-your-face experience, she had little problem reacting to the imaginary beasts. "A lot of the time, there was something there to play off of, like a full-sized model or a dinosaur prop, like a leg or a tail," she recalls. "Sometimes, if there wasn't a dinosaur around, somebody would hold up a stick, or Steven would make some dinosaur noises—he's very good at that. Working with the full-sized models wasn't hard at all, because they were so realistic. Sometimes I would imagine that if all this was real, I would definitely be done for, and that would help get the feeling of being scared across."

One of the film's most frightening moments involves the pursuit of



***Jurassic Park* was once touted as "Jaws on land." At the very least, it's scarier than *Hook*.**

Richards and her screen brother, Tim (Joseph Mazzello), by some hungry Velociraptors. In addition to working up a convincing sense of terror, the actress also had to deal with the scene's technical demands. "That was pretty complex; it was shot in parts and at a lot of different angles," she says. "How the scene really worked is top secret, and Steven made us promise not to tell."

"The main change for me is primarily the genre. Let's face it, *Jurassic Park* is not *Rambling Rose*."

—Laura Dern

Richards' strongest memories of the *Jurassic Park* shoot also include some moments of real-life tension thanks to the aforementioned hurricane. "I've never been through anything like that," she says. "It was scary. The building we were in was really safe, even though half the roof wound up being blown off."

The actress, already a genre veteran with such films as *Tremors*, *Grand Tour: Disaster in Time* and *Spaced Invaders* under her belt, won the *Jurassic Park* role after auditioning for Spielberg. Part of the process, naturally, involved proving her ability to convey the appropriate fear. "Steven just said, 'Give me your scariest and loudest scream. Make it sound like a dinosaur is trying to attack you,'" recalls Richards, who did some background research by going to the original source. "I did read the book before the audition, and felt it was really good. There were some really scary parts, but they changed things around in the movie. The one difference I noticed early on is that my character in the book is the younger of the two, while I'm the older in the movie."

For her part, Dern found Spielberg to be completely honest when they discussed her future in *Jurassic Park*. "He told me, 'You're not going to win an Academy Award for this movie, and it's not always going to be fun,'" the actress recalls. "But I think you should do it." And so Dern, who was all of 7 when she was scared to death by Spielberg's *Jaws*, accepted the director's offer. She soon found herself in the midst of a film that was far removed from the more personal, mainstream roles that had thus far marked her career.

"The character I play is unique to a certain extent, but the main change for me is primarily the



Neill and the kids get the world's biggest wakeup call from the Brachiosaurus.

genre," she states. "Let's face it, *Jurassic Park* is not *Rambling Rose*. It's a dinosaur movie, and that alone makes it completely different."

The actress affirms that her character of Dr. Sattler involves mostly big, simple emotions; "She's in a constant state of dealing with fear, movement and action," Dern says. But she jokingly remembers the sick Triceratops scene as one that will live in her mind forever. "I had to put my hands in dinosaur droppings," she laughs. "I don't know what they were made of, and I didn't ask. But [FX man] Michael Lantieri definitely made them look real. There was stuff in those droppings that was truly terrifying."

Dern, like Neill, found the physical moments in *Jurassic Park* to be the most difficult scenes. "Swinging from the dinosaur skeleton was tough, and running from the Velociraptors was also a real workout. That's really what it boiled down to: a lot of running, jumping and leaping. It was just intense work. On the surface, those kinds of chase scenes would seem easy to do. But to do them honestly and emotionally in a physically taxing way was a whole different kind of work for me. It was definitely something I had to get used to."

Beyond the athletic demands of

her role, Dern recalls that playing off the dinosaurs offered its own particular challenges. "We were all quite fortunate that the dinosaurs, in most scenes, were physically on the set with us," she allows. "That made the whole process more honest. But it was tricky. We'd be on the set with these full-sized models and there wouldn't be any animal sounds [although she reveals that Spielberg would occasionally cut loose with a goat noise to goose the scene], and there would be all these puppeteers and effects people lying on the floor, manipulating the creatures. Acting in those scenes was basically a matter of choices; trying to figure out what was subtle, appropriate or over the top, and when to use it."

In the end, Dern enjoyed her trip to *Jurassic Park*, and found that the experience lived up to the promises of those early, honest conversations with Spielberg. "Steven basically said, 'Come and have fun,'" she says. "I thought about it and said, 'Why not? I've never done this.' In some ways it was easy, and in others it was difficult. But finally, when it boiled down to was that I could never do 18 weeks on a movie like this if it wasn't going to be enjoyable, and if it wasn't going to be an adventure. For me, *Jurassic Park* was both."

