

DINO-MITE

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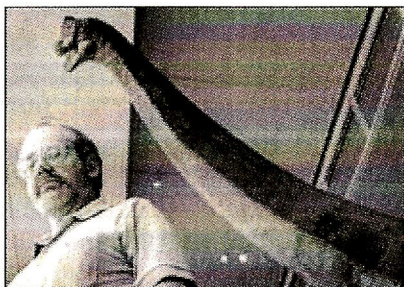
story by Grant Huang

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Two dinosaurs, a plant-eater and a predator, are locked in eternal combat in downtown Baltimore.

The 29-ton, plant-eating astrodon whirls in surprise and pain as the smaller but more aggressive 4-ton acrocanthosaurus lunges lithely forward and bites its tail.

The dramatic, 69-foot-long fiberglass sculpture _ the brainchild of paleontology consultant and paleo-artist Greg Paul of Charles Village _ never fails to attract the attention of pedestrians passing by the building-high plate glass windows of the newly renovated Maryland Science Center, 601 Light St.



Greg Paul of Charles Village helped design the replica of Maryland's state dinosaur that towers above him at the Maryland Science Center.

Using a series of fossilized footprints found in Texas, paleontologists were able to reconstruct the facsimile of the 110-million-year-old predator attacking its peaceful prey.

The sculpture now serves as the centerpiece of the 15,000-square-foot Dinosaur Mysteries Exhibit, part of the newly built Earth Science and Dinosaur Hall that opened May 28.

Paul and the center's executive director, Gregory Andorfer, were driving forces in making a major dinosaur exhibit part of the Science Center's 40,000-square-foot expansion project. The exhibit is designed to help the public understand how dinosaurs lived and died, and to understand related topics such as evolution, anatomy and climate changes.

The exhibit is almost entirely hands-on, allowing visitors to touch 13 full-scale dinosaurs made of fossils and casts of actual

specimens. The largest is a 45-foot-long, 19-foot-tall *Giganotosaurus*, mounted on a platform so that people can walk underneath it. There's also a 40-foot *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and a 100-million-year-old dinosaur egg excavated in China.

The exhibit also has the look, feel and sound of a working 'dig' site. The noise of simulated drills fills the exhibit area as children wearing safety goggles sift through large, sand-filled boxes with tools modeled after authentic excavation equipment used to find fossils. Computer displays and staff members explain how real paleontologists unearth, brush, clean and handle the delicate specimens they find.

"I'm very pleased with the exhibit," Paul said. "The exhibit is one of the best in the country."

Paul, 49, said he has been interested in dinosaurs since he was a child.

"They're alien creatures that existed on Earth," he said.

Although he has no formal training in either paleontology or art — in fact, no college degree whatsoever — Paul has come to be highly regarded in an innovator and maverick in the field. He authored and painstakingly illustrated several semitechnical books on dinosaurs and said matter-of-factly that he "set the standard for modern dinosaur artists."

He got his start as a volunteer at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where he became friends with the curator of the fossil sciences museum and then with the noted paleontologist Robert T. Bakker, formerly at Johns Hopkins University. He has worked closely with Bakker and as a science consultant for the Discovery Channel's "Dinosaur Planet" and "When Dinosaurs Roamed the Earth" educational TV series.

His artwork and skeletal reconstruction studies were used as material for those shows, and his work on dinosaur skeletal reconstruction was used in the blockbuster "Jurassic Park" movies.

Touches of his artwork and influence can be seen — and heard — throughout the exhibit at the Maryland Science Center. He drew little sketches of dinosaurs for the background of written descriptions for the public. He painted a mural of what the Potomac River area would have looked like when dinosaurs roamed the earth, and sections of the mural have been reproduced, blown up in size and placed on the walls.

The exhibit also includes behind-the-scenes footage of Paul and other experts talking about their work.

While Paul remains critical of popular culture for oversimplifying the science of paleontology, he admits that it has helped drive what he terms a "dinosaur renaissance" that began in the 1970s.

A combination of popular entertainment and fossil discoveries sparked the interest and imaginations of both the public and the

scientific community, he said.

Popular entertainment is "a double-edged sword," he said. "It creates public interest, but some of the science is lost when you popularize dinosaurs."

When asked about movies such as "Jurassic Park," he shook his head and smiled.

"Jurassic Park" used lots of artistic license," he said.

For example, the notion that raptors _ fast, lethal carnivorous dinosaurs that hunted in packs _ were highly intelligent and could open doors "was just ridiculous," said Paul, who was one of the original film's science consultants.

"But at the same time, you wouldn't want to be caught in a dark alley with one," he noted wryly. "This is an animal that could kill you in a few seconds if it wanted to."

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