

Futures

Ah-Nee-May-Tron-Ick

The secrets of the past revealed. **By Kurt Pankau**

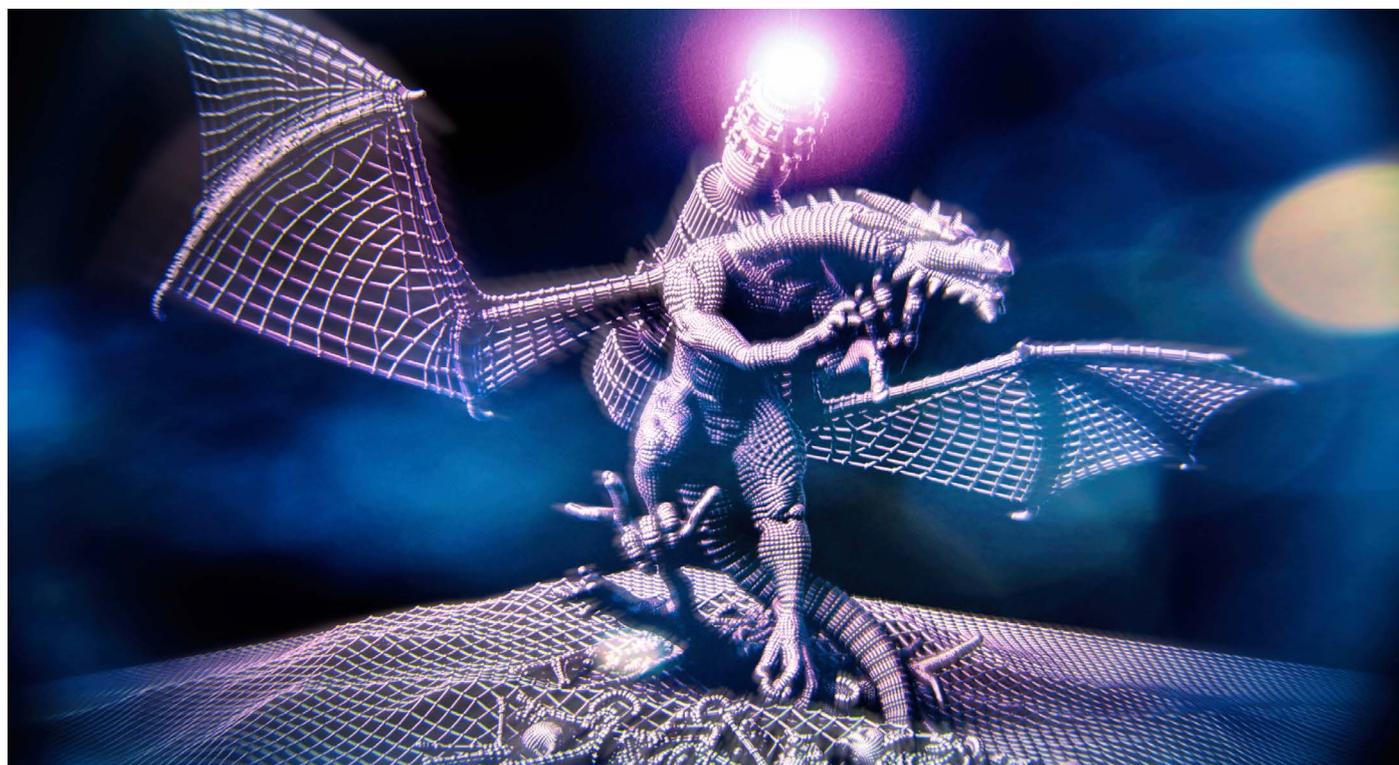


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Colonel Brazoit slithered over to his lead scientist, a squeamish little Noroidian named Kretsch, who was examining two skeletons: one made of stone, the other of steel and wire.

“Colonel,” said Kretsch with a bow. “What brings you here?”

“Kretsch,” he bellowed, “I’ve come for your report.” He stared up at the skeletons. They towered over both the colonel and the scientist. Massive ribs and legs, tiny arms, a long tail and terrifying sharp teeth. These were killing machines, pure and beautiful. It was high time they started killing again.

“Of course, Colonel,” said the scientist. “They’re skeletons of an ancient animal called a ‘Trex’. The stone one is several million years old and was apparently organic at one point. The metal one is a facsimile that is less than a thousand years old. Both had skins at some point, we believe. The metal one was labelled ‘Ah-Nee-May-Tron-Ick’.”

“What’s that mean?” asked Brazoit.

“We don’t know. It’s a human word. Seems to

be related to their word that means ‘not having enough iron’, which is curious. Maybe it was a commentary on the alloy.”

Brazoit wrapped a tentacle around his face contemplatively. “What do you think the purpose of this metal skeleton was?”

“Well,” said the Noroidian, “this place, this so-called ‘Centre of Science’ building, it appears to be a place of learning. We suspect that the metal skeleton was part of a model that simulated the beast’s motion and behaviour. It has limited movement and relies on parts built into the floor.”

“Why would they need a simulation?” asked Brazoit, unconvinced. “Why wouldn’t they just study the real thing? The humans conquered these trexes, after all, didn’t they?”

Kretsch flopped his head from side to side. “It’s possible that all of the trexes were gone before the humans arrived on Earth and began their conquest.”

“Gone where?” asked Brazoit. “We haven’t found any on neighbouring planets.”

“We’re not certain, Colonel.”

“And ... that’s the best explanation your scientists have come up with?”

Kretsch bowed. “We’re working with limited data, of course, so this is all speculation. We’re updating our model of their civilization as we recover more information from sites that weren’t razed to ashes in the assault.”

“Good, good,” said Brazoit. “You will need to update that model. Because I can assure you that their purpose was” – the Colonel rotated his eyes around to make sure no one was watching – “military,” he whispered.

“Do you really think so?”

“Of course, Kretsch. Why else?”

“Well,” said the Noroidian, “some learn for the sake of learning.”

“Bah!” said Brazoit, hocking phlegm towards the ceiling. “The only useful purpose of knowledge is to aid in conquest. Any fool knows that.”

“Of course, Colonel,” said Kretsch with a bow.

“Let me enlighten you,” said Brazoit, curling a friendly tentacle around Kretsch’s bulbous dorsal air sac. The Noroidian shrank back.

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"We've learnt much of their military tactics," said Brazoit in a low, soft voice. "We *know* that they walked the earth with these trexes. We found a research centre in Kentucky dedicated to just that, disguised as a giant boat, of all things. Furthermore, I've seen some of the humans' archival films. There were several about a park where trexes were developed as biological weapons. In one of these films, the humans unleashed a trex on a city. Do you know what happened to that city?"

"No," said Kretsch.

"It was lost. That was the name of the archival film. *The Lost World*."

"By the Seven Chrysalises," gasped Kretsch.

"I can only assume that *this* facility, this 'Centre of Science' as you call it, was an attempt to further weaponize the trex." He paused for effect. "By making it from metal."

"Are you quite certain, Colonel?"

"There is another set of archival films called *Terminator*. The humans made skeletons of their own from metal. And they were almost destroyed by them. One of the generals of that war went on to rule the land of California. It

was an important land – it's featured in more of their archival films than any other. The Intelligence Department thinks the humans got scared by their experiments with the metal skeletons, and instead of learning from their mistakes and building them properly and subserviently, they shuttered the entire programme."

Kretsch bowed. "That's ... an interesting hypothesis, Colonel."

Brazoit straightened – insofar as he could without bones. "You doubt me?"

"I don't doubt the intellectual rigour of yourself or any of your resources in the intelligentsia," said Kretsch. "It's just ... we have a saying in the scientific community. *Any sufficiently complex society will be very confounding to future archaeologists*."

Brazoit hissed. "We have a saying in the military as well. *Fire and glory*. And if the humans were so sophisticated, how did we defeat them so quickly? Eh? Look at that thing!" He flung a tentacle towards the metal trex. "Do you think we would have stood a chance against an army of these? Of course

not! And yet we were victorious! Because the humans conquered the lesser biological version, but they lacked the fortitude to complete a perfected metallic trex and subjugate it. If they'd only finished what they'd started, they'd still be in charge of this planet!"

"Of course, Colonel," said Kretsch.

"Ah-Nee-May-Tron-Ick ... Lacking iron, you say? We can fix that. We'll weld a 90-cal phase-masher onto its back and put it at the vanguard of our attack on Ganymede!" Brazoit flung his tentacles wide. "Fire and glory, Kretsch!" he bellowed.

"Fire and glory," the scientist replied.

The colonel retracted his tentacles and coiled them satisfactorily under his body. "And maybe make those arms a little longer, will you? They're not doing any good up there."

"Of course, Colonel."

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