



# The New Dinosaurs

*Dougal Dixon*

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The New Dinosaurs: An Alternative Evolution, 1988, by Dougal Dixon and with a forward by Desmond Morris. Illustrated hardcover book with dust jacket, 120 pages, published by Salem House Publishing.

## The New Dinosaurs Details

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Author : Dougal Dixon

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# From Reader Review The New Dinosaurs for online ebook

## Julian Meynell says

Dougal Dixon's alternative evolutions demand to be better known than they are. The New Dinosaur's is the weakest of the three. It is less inspired than After Man and Man After Man.

The book suffers a bit from Dixon beating the drum of convergent evolution too loudly, so that we get a dinosaur giraffe, dinosaur panda, dinosaur whale and even dinosaur koala bear. That is fair enough but there could have been more completely novel dinosaur variants. Probably his least interesting book of fictional evolutionary history, but they are all well worth reading.

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## Andre says

Wow, what difference it can make when you read a book again after some years. I remember to like it very much when first reading it years ago, but now it has dropped a lot. Now, that is not due to most of the speculations in it but rather due to its inconsistencies and some speculations seeming extremely unlikely. Plus there are some things that I think could have been skipped and a few really uncreative things.

In terms of its content, there is of course the problem that this book is from the late 1980s and so some things are pretty damn outdated (like claiming that all Mesozoic mammals were small insectivores), but of course things like giving dinosaurs feathers or fuzz were pretty progressive for its time and something many people still have a problem today.

But most of this book's problems have nothing to do with that. After all, that the author needs about one quarter of the book to finally get to his fictional dinosaurs is something that is really unnecessary in my mind. I could understand if he shortly introduced dinosaurs from before the KT extinction, but did he have to put out so much text regarding modern continents and climates? This book is only 120 pages long, dammit!!! Everybody picking this up will want to see the new dinosaurs and not the old ones.

Shortly after this we had the first problem with some of the author's speculations: It's not that I am against the idea of ground dwelling pterosaurs, in fact even at the time of the end of the Cretaceous period we did have big pterosaurs spending lots of time on the ground hunting like storks. And of course in a speculative scenario such as this, those could diversify more and become fully terrestrial, but not only is it not explained why such specialized flyers became continental ground dwellers in the first place here, but how on earth could the fourth finger, which supported the wing membrane, become a part of the animal's carriage-support and even develop a hoof? How would that ever work? I think it would be more likely if the fourth finger just atrophies. Not to mention that the way the author did it, the front legs simply have too many long joints and I doubt that this would work well during locomotion.

But still, you could say that this idea was at least somewhat creative, even if a bit illogical (albeit nothing compared to the Harridan pterosaur later with its rather birdlike form, that might only be possible unless the evolutionary line of this species included an earthbound time evolving two-legged locomotion to then return to flight), but his take on Madagascar was just lazy (even lazier than the later sauropod with a trunk or the swan and penguin pterosaurs, or the whale pliosaur and bird snatching plesiosaur). The dinosaurs remained unchanged ever since the island broke off from Gondwana? I think pure gene drift and change of climate would have changed them somewhat. And why are the Megalosaur and Titanosaur still this big? The latter is twice as tall as an elephant and the biggest creatures Madagascar had in our times were the elephant birds, if

more was possibly why weren't they bigger? And isolation doesn't explain this in the least. In fact based on that, they should be a lot smaller.

And sadly this was not the only thing I negatively noticed after reading this again after so many years. This book is also quite inconsistent. You see, why do some of the dinosaurs have "fur" and some don't? And if they have this covering (alot in some cases, like that one "ankylosaur") why would the tundra be too harsh for them (as this here states) if birds are just fine? I know this was released in the 80s and the big "revolution" only started in the 90s, but still, inconsistent. The author introduced that "fur" (possibly simply feathers) for so many dinosaurs, so why would none of them have adapted to the arctic? That makes no sense. In fact it makes even less sense when he introduced alpine dinosaurs. As these creatures clearly show every adaptation you would have in an arctic region so why on earth are there none in the tundra? How does that make sense? Plus, why do they have "fur" but no other sorts of feathers? Did Dixon not know about the feathers back then? If yes, where does the "fur" come from? And sadly it was not just a few times this problem showed up. There seems to be no logic or consistency as to which dinosaurs have "fur" and which do not. In theory all dinosaurs could have had some amount of feathers or "fur," but why do some here have that, even those whose ancestors had no fossil evidence of feathers but clear evidence of scales, and others don't?

At least you could mostly guess how the evolution might have worked, but the many-jointed pterosaur was not the only case of extremely odd evolution. You see, I really asked myself what sort of pterosaur this "Koon" descended from. It has teeth that look like the ones of an ungulate. Where there any toothed pterosaurs left at the end of the cretaceous period? As far as I know, there were none. Sadly towards the end I asked myself more and more how much the author actually knew. You see according to him these islands in the end have no big predators and as such the big terrestrial pterosaurs have no defensive mechanisms of any kind. Which is bullshit. A good comparison would be Madagascar and New Zealand with giant flightless birds and both had big predators. The Moa were hunted by the biggest eagle ever in fact. But this here has no such thing? No big carnivorous pterosaur, mammal or reptile? And the guy who wrote this was an alleged expert?

And if this weren't enough, shortly before the end we had the dinosauroid again, that humanoid dinosaur that would probably never evolve.

Something like this would need genetic engineering.

Again: This guy is supposed to be an expert. 1988 or not, such mistakes should not be made.

So all in all, this was worse than I remembered it. Apparently Man after Man was not the only sketchy book of the author. Sure it had some interesting and plausible ideas but it's pretty damn inconsistent and some things would probably never have evolved in any way.

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## Max says

WOW.

This was SO COOL. I'm a budding paleontologist, but I also love Speculative Evolution. The two combined? Mind=Blown. Of course, I read this in 2015, and so it's just really outdated now. I would love to see this updated, mainly because of our research on birds, feathers, and dinosaurs, and how they are related. The fact that pterosaurs evolve in a more avian fashion is a little strange, because we now know that dinosaurs would've undoubtedly done this instead.

My only problem with this book? Some of it seems a little too whimsical. Not that I don't love fantasy

creatures, but some of these seem too far from their ancestors. Perhaps I'm wrong- I don't actually have a PhD in this or anything. But I must say, a ground-dwelling pterosaur- the lank- with hooves on its front fingers and a long neck splattered with brown spots across a tan, leathery skin, seems a little too much like a certain african creature we know today. \*Giraffe\*.

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## Tracy says

Another excellent science picture book from author Dougal Dixon. This one postulates: What if the Cretaceous extinction event never happened, and dinosaurs (and related species) continued to rule the earth?

As usual, he comes up with some strange yet plausible creatures for each of earth's biospheres. In the ocean, a pliosaur has evolved into the whale-like whulk, which filter-feeds plankton as the baleen whales do in our world; hadrosaurs gallop across the plains like antelope hunted by nightmarish cutlasstooths. The artwork is slightly inferior, I think, to that in *After Man*, and I missed the charming cursive captions that made the creatures look like they came out of a field sketchbook. Judging from today's perspective, with digital 3D modeling and texturing readily available, some seem stilted and dated. And I think the pastel maps of each realm before the chapters could have been more creative, too -- pastels and dinosaurs don't really mix.

As for the science lessons, Dixon does a good job, showing how a pterosaur might morph into a penguin-like creature or a pseudo-giraffe. (Though his reasons why seem arbitrary -- wouldn't a bird, which still exists in this timeline, have an edge in an arctic environment?) But I realize the purpose of the book is not as a definitive picture of an alternative dinosaur-filled world, but instead as an exploration of evolution and biology.

Recommended if it's still in print.

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## Yael says

Dougal Dixon's marvelous books of speculative biology are in enormous demand, commanding high prices on eBay and amazon.com, as well they should. Like his *After Man: A Zoology of the Future*, and *Man After Man: An Anthropology of the Future*, *The New Dinosaurs* contains a wealth of creatures not known on Earth today. But whereas *After Man* and *Man After Man* take off modern life and show what might evolve from it, *The New Dinosaurs* is based on the assumption that rather becoming extinct 65 million years ago due to whatever cause, the non-avian dinosaurs, great marine reptiles, pterosaurs, and other signature Mesozoic life lived on and evolved into modern forms unlike those that grace our world now.

Dixon shows us a fantastic zoo of creatures on every one of Earth's continents and giant islands that might have filled the same niches occupied by life as it has actually evolved since the End-Cretaceous Event. From the dwarf Megalosaurus and dwarf Titanosaurs of Madagascar to the plains-dwelling, giraffe-like, long-legged running forms descended from Pterosaurs of Africa, to the Amphisbaenian- or Caecilian-like Sandle and Wyrm of the Sahara with their beautifully colored and patterned fur and tough scales, to the coconut-eating ammonites of the Pacific and the strange creatures of the southern ocean that look like a cross between a seal and a penguin, and many more, Dixon's creatures delight, fascinate, and teach readers as nothing else does.

My only complaint with this book is two-fold: The first is that Dixon does not take into consideration that the world now would still be locked in an ice age if fire-wielding creatures like ourselves had not evolved. The rise and spread of humans has been associated with a growing volume of atmospheric carbon dioxide which gradually stabilized and warmed the Earth, ending the Pleistocene Ice Age with its wildly unpredictable swings of weather. The types of creatures characteristic of an ice age world would in many places differ considerably from those typical of a warmer world. It would have been fun to see what Earthly life might have been like if the signature Mesozoic fauna hadn't gone extinct but did have to cope with an ice age now; the book disappoints because it doesn't show that.

The second problem is a more general one which I have noticed not just in Dixon's books, but in almost all books dealing with life's history on Earth. Dixon uses "intelligence" as if it were perfectly interchangeable with "consciousness," and assigns it only to humanity, as if we were or could be absolutely certain that no other type of creature on Earth could be either intelligent or conscious. In fact, as we have been learning over the past several decades, numerous nonhuman organisms are not only intelligent *and* quite conscious, but are also share many of the traits with which we identify human-like consciousness, such as the linguistic abilities of cats and some birds, the ability to count, strategizing abilities, the nasty sort of sense of humor peculiar to the adolescent mentality and many of today's hackers and Internet trolls, and many others. Some birds even use fire to "ant," a vice peculiar to them, and many of them can easily be taught to strike a match and set a pile of kindling on fire to have something to "ant" over. We really need to come up with some other way to talk about intelligence, and to distinguish the various kinds of species-specific intelligence from one another. In fact, every sort of creature may be intelligent in its way, and the only thing keeping us from being sure one way or the other about whether they are is a lack of perfect telepathy.

Other than that, this is a magnificent book, suitable for all ages, and one that every home library ought to have in it.

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### **Nick says**

Read the intro, know radiation, convergence, niches and a few other basic biological concepts and you will enjoy this book 20 times more. Dixon has his fun exploring mammalian/rodent evolution in "After Man", so here he gets to explore dinosaurs/reptiles.

I dunno what to say about this thing. Its speculative biology? Alternate zoological history? Its creative, beautiful, well explained and highly entertaining. Do it.

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### **Peter says**

Dougal Dixon's second (and IMHO only other) magnum opus of speculative non-fiction. Though this book was sort of outdated even during the time of publishment, a lot of the extrapolation from the Late Cretaceous status quo is excellent - and even rather scientifically sound (which is always a plus).

I particularly like the large "furry" species of the northern latitudes, like the Hadrosaur-descended "Sprintosaurs" and the muskox-esque ankylosaur "Taranter". Very prescient for a late 1980s book, given how evidence for feathered or fuzzed dinosaurs was still a rather new development at the time. I also loved the South American sauropod "Turtosaurus", which is perhaps one of the most plausible species shown in the

book - it's basically just a further evolved version of the real *Saltasaurus*. Nice ! The African island-dwelling dwarf subspecies of *Megalosaurus* and *Titanosaurus* were also a nice touch - it never hurts to teach your readers about concepts like insular dwarfism in an entertaining way. Some of the other species (the whale-like pliosaurs and mosasaurs and the penguin-like pterosaurs) are a bit less realistic, but still very good, looking like something that could actually live in an environment like the one they occupy.

However, there are some factual problems, given not just by our current but also the then existing knowledge of the era when the book's point of divergence (no mass dino extinction) occurs : The continued proliferation of pterosaurs in the book's fictional version of the tertiary is downright baffling, as is the near-absence of more diversified bird and mammal species. OK, mammals I can take, the niches are simply occupied by dinos and therefore full. But the growing influence and number of birds not pushing the pterosaurs to the brink of importance or even extinction (as it already happened in the real Late Cretaceous !) - that's really not very credible... Still, this really ISN'T something that I couldn't accept. It was at least plausible - somewhat plausible, though not justified in any way.

BUT, alas, it wouldn't be Dougal Dixon if his book wasn't a mixed bag... As usual, two thirds (or even three quarters) of the book are filled with the aforementioned fully or partially believable species, but then comes the "random weird crap I made up so people would find the animals more cool". Penguin-esque pterosaurs is A-OK with me, but... flightless African pterosaur evolved into a giraffe-like form, with their vestigial long fingers evolving into impossibly thin front legs ?! Really ?! And a South American descendant of the *Tyrannosaurid* family with a megacroc/python combo body (!) that has a single pair of legs... in the middle of said body ?! What ?!!! Also, the coconut eating ammonites and the many seal-like descendants of *Hypsilophodons* weren't completely unbelievable, but were still a little too weird for their own good...

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## **Preston says**

A great book of prehistoric 'what-ifs' that makes for a lot of fun for anyone interested in prehistoric life and evolution.

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## **David Wells says**

Very interesting, but somehow less engaging than Dixon's "After Man: A Zoology of the Future." I think this is because After Man takes place in our actual world, and is a speculative look at what could be, while The New Dinosaurs is a work of alternate history, where evolution took a different turn millions of years ago. It therefore takes place on an earth where humans never existed and probably never will exist, and where intelligence--what Carl Sagan might say allows the cosmos to know itself--might never come into being. It's still a fascinating book, and the illustrations are excellent. It's just not my favorite.

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## **Actually-A -Badger says**

About as scientifically accurate as the Crystal Palace dinosaurs these days, but nonetheless a very fun read. The ichthyosaur whale and the giraffe pterosaurs are particular highlights.

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### **Christopher Saenz says**

Pretty nice book, the art for it is very interesting. The designs and biology of the creatures presented is very interesting. Definitely recommend this book if you enjoy speculative evolution and biology.

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### **Curtis Runstedler says**

Dougal Dixon imagines a world where dinosaurs never became extinct and mammals never existed. As with *After Man*, it's an incredible work of evolutionary biology and fantasy. The creatures are fascinating and well-described (my favourite is the gimp), and they seem quite realistic. I found their evolution and adapting features much more believable than some of the creatures in *After Man* (i.e. the tusking mole in that one, which was just ridiculous). I love dinosaurs and all, but it didn't quite captivate me in the way that *After Man* did when I first experienced its illustrated pages.

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### **Helio says**

This book is a delightful expose on how animals might have looked had there not been the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous Period. It offers up a well written explanation about how the dinosaurs were disappearing before any meteorite landing that most other tellings ignore. There is also a nice summary of the other Archosaurs (pterosaurs, crocodilians, pleiosaurs...) that were around at the time.

Of the hundred or so new species pictured include the: tube nosed Waspeater, the giraffe duck billed like Lank, the dainty Flarp, the hind legs only snake like Wurm, the colourful dwarf Megalosaur, the nest ant like tree dwelling Gestalts, the hadrosaur headed Bricket, the mole like Coneater, the sandpiper like Whiffles, the hairy undersided Taranter, the single horned duck-billed antelope like Sprintosaur, the Monocorn with feature like a bison and rhinoceros, meerkat feathered like Mountain Leaper, pterodactyl flamingo cross Sift, the lion ostrich like Cutlasstooth, and the birdbrained Numbskull.

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### **Peacegal says**

Dougal Dixon's scientifically informed speculative books are always a pleasure to read. His fantasy animals leap off the page in realistic paintings. The natural world is incredibly diverse and often more than a little bizarre, and it's not unthinkable that creatures such as those dreamed up by Dixon could actually exist at some point.

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### **Douglas Summers-Stay says**

This was a book I really coveted when it came out when I was about 16. It explores what might have happened if the great extinction that killed off most of the dinosaurs had never happened. How might the



dinosaurs have evolved? One of the most interesting is a dinosaur that develops a communal lifestyle, a little like a beehive. A lot of it is about convergent evolution-- what strategies would dinosaurs have used to fill the niches that were in fact filled by mammals? *After Man* is Dixon's more famous book.

He has a third book, called *Man After Man* that borrows a lot from Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*, but there's something unholy and creepy about his depiction of the evolution and genetic engineering of humans. I'm not really that opposed to seeing hypothetical evolved humans, but every real animal is beautiful in its own way, they aren't just monstrous warpings of what they evolved from. I'm not sure why he gets that so well in these other two books but not in the third.

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