

Yabba Dabba Food

Perhaps the food critic was stoned when he decided to eat at T-Rex.

By [Charles Ferruzza](#)

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If you believe most history books, dinosaurs vanished about 65 million years ago, at the end of the Cretaceous Period. There are dozens of theories — some pretty wild — as to why this happened: a biblical flood, a giant asteroid slamming into the Earth, a volcanic eruption, global climate change. The "gravitational hypothesis" suggests that Earth's gravity changed and dinosaurs were suddenly too heavy; unlike smaller mammals, they couldn't adapt.

Angela C. Bond



Where:

T-Rex Café

Details:

1847 Village West Parkway, Kansas City, Kansas, 913-334-8888. Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday- Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Price: \$\$-\$\$\$ Dexter's Dual Dip \$8.49

Jurassic Chicken Tidbits \$5.99

Tribal Tacos \$14.99

Sebastian's Steak & Shrimp \$18.99

Triassic Tortellini \$13.99

Chocolate Extinction \$11.99

Subject(s): [T-Rex Café](#)

None of these theories is particularly important to the staff or the customers at the 10-month-old T-Rex Café, a noisy interactive restaurant and gift shop at the Legends at Village West. In fact, despite the building's intriguing exterior — weathered concrete "stones" are embedded with archaeologists' tools, including rusty shovels,

ropes and brushes — this place has more in common with the imaginary Bedrock than it does with the Jurassic Morrison Formation.

Just ignore the photo mural that depicts kids and adults digging for ancient dino bones. Archaeology is an afterthought at T-Rex, where, thanks to the magic of animatronics, dinosaurs are still alive. Unconcerned with the gravitational pull of Wyandotte County, a two-story growling *tyrannosaurus rex* greets guests (and scares the hell out of toddlers) right inside the entrance to this Cretaceous-era café.

I'm not sure what a T-rex actually looked like back in the good ol' days; in the movies, the giant carnivores are typically greenish-brown. This restaurant's toothy greeter is an interesting combination of pumpkin and metallic navy — the same shade of blue as my mother's 1955 Buick.

The first time I peeked into this restaurant, I was startled by how far the jerky animated machine's head dropped down to show off its pointy teeth. When I returned to actually eat here — with two kids in tow — I was eager to see how the youngsters would react to the growling giant. But on that day, as luck would have it, the T-rex wasn't moving.

"It runs on pneumatics, and we're working on them today," explained the congenial bartender. He was standing behind a blue-lit glass bar that resembled chunks of glacier ice. Knowing how busy this joint gets on weekends, I had tried to encourage my friends Bob and Ann (and her young sons, Vincent and Oliver) to arrive at T-Rex as close to the 11 a.m. opening time as possible. But we all dawdled and got there closer to 2 p.m. There was already a 45-minute wait for a "passport" to a table.

So we climbed onto bar stools at the ice slab and ordered a couple of appetizers to fortify ourselves until the pager buzzed. The kids were almost hypnotized by the sensory overload. In the bar, piped-in light jazz was almost drowned out by the roars, growls, caws and rumbles coming from the dining room.

"Look up!" Oliver screamed. "An octopus!"

Behind the bar, balancing over the curvy shark aquarium, was a massive fake orange-and-purple octopus with rubbery tentacles yanked around by nearly invisible cables hanging from the ceiling. The oversized octopus was about as languid as the real

sharks in the tank (also filled with lots of gorgeously hued tropical fish), which were small and clearly depressed.

We ordered some appetizers with cutesy names, probably culled from the Fred Flintstone dictionary. Fried chicken tenders are Lava Me Tenders, and buffalo chicken wings are Pterodactyl Wings. The boys nixed those choices in favor of Dexter's Dual Dip (a runny spinach-and-pepper-Jack *queso* and a decent crab-artichoke concoction served with a mountain of corn chips) and fried cheese sticks. It was, you know, ordinary bar fare.

I wasn't expecting culinary excellence. Even before I'd set foot inside the T-Rex Café, friends had warned me that the food wasn't very good. One friend calls the place "a total tourist trap."

I can't imagine adults dining here without a toddler or two, but when our group was finally escorted to our table, near the mooing *parasauropholus*, I did spot a couple of cooing adults at a secluded corner two-top.

"Are they here on a date?" I whispered to our waitress. She nodded. "We rarely get adults without kids here, but it does happen. I heard one couple even got engaged in here."

Personally, I think T-Rex would be a great place to break up with someone. It's so damned noisy that none of the surrounding tables would hear your rejected lover curse or cry. Or even scream when, at the half-hour mark, the dining room suddenly grows dark and stormy and sounds as though all hell is breaking loose. Even the mechanical *parasauropholus* duo made nervous yelps.

"Every half-hour, we get a meteor storm," explained the server, setting our lunch plates in front of us: Triassic Tortellini for Ann and Vincent, dino-shaped Jurassic Chicken Tidbits for Oliver, and Sebastian's Steak & Shrimp for Bob.

The latter dish was creative and even multicultural, by T-Rex standards: a thin strip of surprisingly tender and tasty marinated skirt steak wrapped around a clump of jasmine rice, topped with pico de gallo and drizzled with chimichurri.

Less dazzling were the Tribal Tacos. I had requested the tempura-fried fish but inexplicably was presented with soft corn tacos filled with blackened fish and a side of tempura-fried shrimp on skewers. "She didn't hear you correctly," the manager later explained. I had made the mistake of ordering during the height of the meteor storm.

Vegetarian Ann gave thumbs-up to her veg-only tortellini. "I'm a fussy eater," she said, "so if I like something, it means something."

Fidgety Oliver kept trying to run off to the gift shop. I ordered the most elaborate dessert in an effort to keep him at the table. Chocolate Extinction isn't just a big platter of chocolate brownie cake and ice cream dripping with whipped cream — it has a centerpiece of bubbling, smoky dry ice tucked into a plastic shaker. Naturally Oliver ignored the cake and kept reaching for the dry ice. The three adults loved it, though. After a few bites, I was feeling that gravitational pull myself.

Several days later, I decided to make an adults-only foray to the restaurant for lunch, but none of my friends wanted to join me. "Are you out of your mind?" Ned asked. "The very idea of that kind of restaurant offends me. It's not about food. It's about merchandising crap to greedy suburban brats."

Another friend told me that he'd come along if he could order a cocktail, but he reneged. "I just don't like to be around children," he said, "unless some of the dinosaurs are real and will eat them."

So I dined alone at the glacier bar, eating a thick-stacked grilled Reuben sandwich that was, to my amazement, one of the best I'd eaten in this town. While dipping waffle fries into ranch dressing, I noted that the T-rex at the front door was working again.

I also was thrilled to see that one of the servers looked just like "Ann-Margrock" from my favorite episode of *The Flintstones*. Perhaps T-Rex is the perfect modern Stone Age family place to eat. T-Rex Café "I just don't like to be around children. Unless some of the dinosaurs are real and will eat