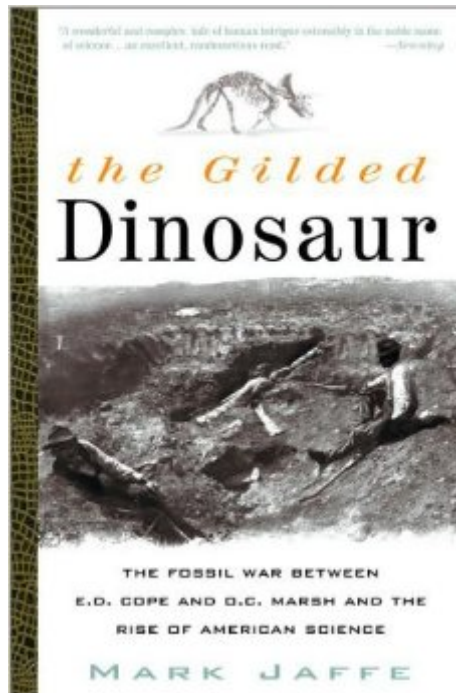


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The Gilded Dinosaur: The Fossil War Between E.D. Cope And O.C. Marsh And The Rise Of American Science



Synopsis

It was an age of counterfeit giants, corrupt politicians, and intrepid pioneers. It was a time of scientific ferment. The second half of the 19th century â the so-called Gilded Age â was a time when Americans were exploring the West and building a nation which stretched from coast to coast. It was also when scientists began finding dinosaur fossils across the western half of the nation. Could the answer to the history of life and the proof of evolution be found in these bones? That was the question two young American paleontologists â Edward Drinker Cope and Othniel Charles Marsh â set out to answer. But what began as a friendly contest quickly turned into a bitter rivalry that would spill over into American science and politics and rage relentlessly for nearly three decades. Despite their Gilded Age celebrity, the names of Cope and Marsh have disappeared into the recesses of the library and archive. In *The Gilded Dinosaur*, Mark Jaffe exhumes from those archives the notes, journals, and letters of these two great opponents to reanimate and retell one of the most fierce rivalries in the history of science.

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Customer Reviews

What could be drier than a book devoted to two men battling over collecting fossils and gaining the rights to name creatures extinct for over 100 million years - and this having taken place over 125 years ago at that. Well it could be dry and stuffy but not when Mark Jaffe takes his broad brush to his canvas and we find that intertwined in this story traipse the likes of: P.T. Barnum, Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, George Custer, and even Buffalo Bill Cody. We also will find U.S. Grant's cronies siphoning off aid that was supposed to go to the Indians. Add to the mix a few thousand Sioux

warriors to liven up the story. At the core is the story of O.C. Marsh and E. D. Cope in the 1870's building the foundation of modern paleontology. These two totally different personalities immediately began to clash and we have one of the more interesting personal warfares in the history of science. Each built a coterie of supporters but at times the various personae and the shifting of loyalties begins to make the story seem like Tolstoy's War and Peace. There is never a dull moment. We have T.H. Huxley musing with O.C. Marsh's in Marsh's precious bone room at Yale. We see Marsh banging on doors in Washington until he eventually meets with Grant himself to try and right the injustice he sees happening to the Indians. It's always a race against time and in his haste Cope puts the head of one of his dinosaurs on the end of the tail. Marsh will forever remind Cope and the world of his folly. True, an innocent enough mistake, but in this world no one gives any quarter, especially Marsh. Is it political infighting you like? Like really nasty stuff? You've got it.

When it was first suggested that I read this volume I was resistant, as I had already read Lanham's The Bone Hunters and felt I had been sufficiently schooled in the Cope/Marsh dinosaur fossils. While Lanham's book did a good job of introducing the battle, it was a mere shadow of what, according to this volume, actually occurred and what were the ramifications of those actions. As is true with all books dealing with history or historical events, there are many names, dates, events that are mentioned in both books and such information can be tedious and cause the book to get bogged down. When, however, they are mentioned in a context of clear timeline, the breadth and significance of those names/dates/events connect with now in a manner that is surprising and enlightening. Mr. Jaffe is to be commended for doing such in as concise manner. Edward Drinker Cope was reared in a prosperous shipping family near Philadelphia. His Quaker parents instilled in him an ethic of hard work, intelligence, piety and devotion to task that was to serve him well in his life. Othniel Charles Marsh was born into modest means in the Northwest New York town of Lockport. Because of his innate curiosity, superior intellect and the generosity of his uncle, financier George Peabody, he was able to study at Yale and THE centers of learning in Europe. Both men were of vast intelligence, strong wills and egos that seem to be connected to such traits. Initially, they were collegial if not colleagues in their interest in the budding field of Paleontology. As their careers began to bloom, the desire to be recognized for their contributions likewise grew.

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