

# MONTHLY MOVIES

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## ‘Blue Beetle’ brings satisfying helping of Latinx culture, ‘Jurassic Park’ returns in 3D

*By T. Rob Brown*

**DC** Comics fans and the rest of the world met a new film character planned for the new DCU film franchise: Blue Beetle.

Originally slated for an HBOMax streaming platform release, the film’s status changed in December 2021 to a cinema release—which was a wise choice. Major film releases, especially ones with a \$104 million budget or more, don’t bring in enough new subscribers to justify direct-to-streaming releases. Because they released it to cinemas, it’s already brought in \$105.5 million worldwide, as of Sept. 7, according to Box Office Mojo by the International Movie Database.

Initially fans were unsure if Blue Beetle would be a standalone film, since it was produced under the former DCEU umbrella, or something more. Officially, the film itself is not part of the upcoming DCU, but Puerto Rican director Ángel Manuel Soto told media sources that the character Blue Beetle will be part of co-CEOs James Gunn’s and Peter Safran’s DCU. Rather this means star Xolo Maridueña will return in the title role as Jaime Reyes/Blue Beetle is uncertain.

“I can’t wait for audiences to meet Jaime Reyes, who will be an amazing part of the DCU going forward,” Gunn posted on Instagram with a photo of himself and Safran from the film’s premiere.

Fans of the comics know the Mexican-American Reyes as the third and modern version of the Blue Beetle. Dan Garrett bore the Scarab during Golden Age comics and Ted Kord, who is referenced in the film, donned the mantle in the Silver and Bronze Age comics.

My first viewing took place in August on an IMAX screen in the Kansas City, Missouri, metropolitan area. If you get a chance to see this film on an IMAX, be sure to jump at the opportunity if you’re a superhero film fan. My second viewing was at Alamo Drafthouse in Laredo.

When I first saw it, I knew Maridueña looked familiar. I couldn’t quite place where I’d seen him before. By the second watch, I realized he was one of the main characters, Miguel Diaz, on the *Kobra Kai* TV series (2018 to present) that continues the storyline beginning with *The Karate Kid* (1984). The fifth season of *Kobra Kai* dropped on Sept. 9, 2022, and the sixth and final season is slated for the future.

Maridueña needs to return in the DCU.

While the MCU’s Latinx/Hispanic representation has been somewhat lacking, but growing, the DCEU’s was pretty much non-existent. *Blue Beetle* brought an important culture, often underrepresented in Hollywood films, to the forefront in this film. Smartly, DC Studios chose a director, screenwriter, and a full cast that shows significant representation.

I can’t imagine this film having the same cultural impact if it had been directed by people outside of the Latinx/Hispanic cultures. There is an understanding and truthfulness in this film that represents the strong bonds of family, religion, and themes important to the members of these cultures.

Watching the film for the first time, I didn’t get all of the cultural references—some I did, due to my time in Laredo and cultural discussions with colleagues. On the second viewing, I learned more about the references I missed at first, such as telenovela “Maria la del Barrio” starring Thalia, Don Francisco’s “Sabado Gigante,” and Guillermo del Toro’s *Cronos* (1992). It helped that Alamo offered a pre-show that went over some of the cultural influences on *Blue Beetle*.

Previously, Reyes hailed from El Paso, Texas, in the comics. In the film, and a change that also occurred earlier this year in the comics, Blue Beetle now calls Palmera City home. In order to make a reference to his comic book origins, the director placed the Reyes home on El Paso Street.

Reyes’ relationship with his father is crucial to the film, as well as with his uncle Rudy, portrayed by comedy legend George Lopez. Lopez doesn’t disappoint as comedy relief in this film, from his distrust of government, his love of his pickup truck, to his personality. The film does a good job integrating humor, but not forgetting dramatic, heartfelt moments.

My only complaint, and not too seriously, is that elements of the story and the Blue Beetle character design seemed a bit derivative of other superhero characters and films: Spider-Man, Deadpool, Iron Man, and Ant-Man, with a hint of Egyptian mythos—like Moon Knight. Mix all that with sci-fi, some ‘80s-style tech, an ‘80s-style visual theme for the text logos, DC style, and a major helping of Latinx/Hispanic culture

Directed by Soto, *Blue Beetle* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Maridueña, Adriana Barraza, Damián Alcázar, Elpidia Carrillo, Becky G (voice of Khaji-Da), Bruna Marquezine, Raoul Max Trujillo, Susan Sarandon, Lopez, Belissa Escobedo, and Harvey Guillen. It runs for 2 hours and 7 minutes. It received a certified fresh 78% on the Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer, and a more solid 92% audience score, plus a 6.7/10 on IMDb. I give it two thumbs up.

Recently, we had a chance to return to Isla Nublar for a RealD 3D presentation of the original *Jurassic Park* (1993). This film came out before the 3D craze hit in 2009 with *Avatar*. Following that, quite a few older films (including *I, Robot* (2004) and *Jumper* (2008)) underwent a conversion and got a 3D release direct to Blu-ray. I bought the Jurassic one after it came out.

Watching this classic film in 3D makes it even more suspenseful and scary—even on a 3D TV, but even more so when it's back on the big screen at Alamo Drafthouse for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-release. My only disappointment was that the aspect ratio was incorrect and the tops of taller dinosaurs seemed to be cut off.

In case you happen to be new to the concept of aspect ratio, this is the comparison of the height and width of a given visual presentation. The first major aspect ratio was 4:3 (technically 1.33:1), the nearly square aspect of older tube TVs and early 35mm cinema films. That aspect ratio began in 1892 from Thomas Edison's company. It was used for classic silent films like *A Trip to the Moon* (1902).

The next major aspect ratio, nicknamed "Academy Ratio," measured 1.37:1. The driving factor for this size image was the addition of sound. It was used for classic "talkies" like *Casablanca* (1942). Since it's so similar to 4:3, most cinema experts place them in the same classification.

Once TV sets became popular, the film industry wanted to set itself apart from the common living room 4:3 view and thus widescreen presentations began in cinema. Film adopted Cinerama (2.59:1), VistaVision (1.85:1), and later IMAX (1.43:1), which is the tallest format of these three. These wider aspect ratios became what we now identify as cinematic imagery, along with anamorphic widescreen (2.39:1).

To sum it up, a 16:9 or wider aspect ratio gives us sweeping landscapes—a dynamic presentation. On the other hand, 4:3 gives us intimate character closeups. As a professional photographer, I liken 4:3 to the visual coverage of a normal 50mm lens, while 16:9 (basically 1.777:1) has the feel of a 28mm wide angle lens, 1.85:1 feels like a 24mm wide angle, and an anamorphic 2.39:1 widescreen film feels like a 20mm super-wide angle—at least in terms of how much visual space they consume during a viewing.

Director Steven Spielberg chose to shoot *Jurassic Park* in 1.85:1 aspect ratio (fairly close to our 16:9 modern widescreen TVs), rather than the much-wider 2.39:1, which would be the more typical size for that level of action-film production. The reasoning was to have enough height to frame those tall dinosaurs—anamorphic widescreen simply would not do justice.

Spielberg continued that ratio with *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997) and director Joe Johnston also with *Jurassic Park III* (2001). Similarly, when director Colin Trevorrow shot *Jurassic World* (2015), he decided to compromise between the formats by using a rare 2:1 ratio to keep some of the height, but to go wider than Spielberg had. Oddly, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (2018), directed by J.A. Bayona, became the first of the series to be filmed in 2.40:1 aspect ratio. For *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022), they went back to 2:1 with Trevorrow as director.

Altering that aspect ratio, changes the way each film feels.

The original film also had a 70mm IMAX Digital Media Remastering blow-up in 3D and a D-Cinema 3D version for its 2013 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-release.

Some online fans proposed on Reddit that perhaps some of the 3D cinema showings were on a 1.90:1 screen, which may have lost a bit from the top of the film. Also, it could be that my showing simply was set to an incorrect aspect ratio at the projector. Following the showing, I had a nice conversation with one of the Drafthouse employees and another moviegoer—the employee mentioned that he thought other showings looked about the same.

Regardless, it was great to see this classic on the big screen again.

Directed by Spielberg, *Jurassic Park* (1993), Rated PG-13, stars Sam Neill, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum, Richard Attenborough, Bob Peck, B.D. Wong, Samuel L. Jackson, and Wayne Knight. It runs for 2 hours and 6 minutes. It received a certified fresh 91% on the Tomatometer and a solid 91% audience score, plus an 8.2/10 on IMDb. I give it two thumbs up.

“The show must go on.”