

# John Sayles and the Unmade *Jurassic Park IV*

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## Abstract

This article offers a critical and in-depth analysis of the unmade and ultimately abandoned *Jurassic Park IV*. Written by script doctor and pioneering Indie director John Sayles (who had previously worked on the unmade sci fi horror *Night Skies* with Spielberg — a project which would lay many of the foundations for *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*), the script would have taken the series in a very different direction. While it was never made, it did however, open the way for the *Jurassic World* franchise and this article will offer a close reading and analysis of the script which was leaked online in the mid-2000s. This article will demonstrate how the script is part of the bedrock on which the *Jurassic World* franchise was built, but it will also examine the overlooked importance of the role of the Hollywood script doctor, and consider Spielberg's waning attachment to the franchise. Finally, the article excavates a range of now defunct early internet forums and discussion boards in order to show how the film emerged (or rather didn't) at a time when the internet was proving itself as a new landscape for fans to speculate about cinema and for the leaking and drip feeding of information. It is through these sites that we can piece together a timeline for the unproduction of *Jurassic Park IV*.

**Keywords:** Unmade; Script; Franchise; Internet; Hybrid.

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## 1 Introduction

The Critical literature surrounding Steven Spielberg's work has largely tended to evade his many film projects which failed to make it to completion. His career is scattered with projects that he was keen to develop but which were passed over, or which he was keen to produce or had been intended to direct (including, right at the start of his career in 1970, a biopic of Thomas Crapper, inventor of the first flushing toilet). Only more recently has such critical attention started to turn towards these 'Shadow projects' with Peter Kunze's work on the director's abandoned collaboration with the theatre impresario Andrew Lloyd-Webber and their struggle to adapt the latter's stage musical, *Cats* (Kunze, 2023). Kunze's study forms part of a turn in contemporary critical research towards the phenomenon of the unmade and the abandoned film project — facilitated in no small part by James Fenwick, Kieran Foster and David Eldridge's 2020 publication *Shadow Cinema: The Historical and Production Contexts of Unmade Films*. However, despite the inclusion of Kunze's writing on *Cats*, Spielberg's unmade films have been somewhat neglected in this contemporary research milieu. James Fenwick, in his doctoral thesis on Stanley Kubrick's work as a producer, nevertheless, contextually engages with Spielberg's apparent habit of moving on from a given project before its completion. Fenwick observes that Spielberg's production company Amblin Entertainment gained a reputation for leading projects into 'Development Hell' causing industry insiders to be "wary of entering into deals with the company [...] This was put down to Spielberg's business strategy of acquiring a vast array of projects that he himself did not have time to direct" (Fenwick 2017: 206).

Given Spielberg's prolific work as both director and producer, his status as founder of Industrial Light and Magic and of Amblin (a company, through which, despite its corporate setup and his tendency to delegate creative control, Spielberg wielded and maintained 'total control' and executive power over his movies [Ibid]), his presence in modern American cinema is much more diffuse and wide ranging than, for instance, his close friend Stanley Kubrick, (another director whose many unmade projects have become the source of critical-historical scrutiny)<sup>1</sup>. As Fenwick has observed, Spielberg and Amblin are synonymous with each other with Amblin, an extension of the Spielberg brand, and from the 1980s, he would become 'more prolific as a producer of other's movies than a director of his own projects' (here Fenwick cites Spielberg's work with Robert Zemeckis on the *Back to the Future* trilogy [1985-1990], *Batteries Not Included* [1987] and *Gremlins* [1984] [Ibid, 205])<sup>2</sup>. Hence what is and what isn't a Spielberg film is, perhaps, a trickier proposition that we might first imagine. The prodigious influence Spielberg has had in shaping popular American cinema is an indicator of his almost universal presence across it — but it also sometimes problematises Spielberg's own authorial position — especially given his production and development roles in and across other people's films; as an initiator of projects which were then dropped and taken forward by other people; in films made by Amblin and produced by Kathleen Kennedy or Frank Marshall (Spielberg's 'Vicars-on-Earth' and in which he is essentially there by proxy); in the work of ILM, or more broadly in his cultural influence and the industrial and authorial power he has exerted since *Jaws* (1975). These projects, despite not being directed by him, maintain the essence of the Spielbergian.

Here we may turn to the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* franchises which are comprised of two interconnected trilogies: *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1997) and *Jurassic Park III* (Johnston, 2001); and *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow, 2015), *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (Bayona, 2018) and *Jurassic World: Dominion* (Trevorrow 2022). Spielberg famously renounced directorial duties after *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*. The *Jurassic World* trilogy is a product of Amblin Entertainment with the films produced by Frank Marshall. If Spielberg himself had relatively less direct creative input in *Jurassic World*, its relationship to the original film and its embedded textual nostalgia effectively positions it as a Spielberg film in all but name — he remains a signifier of the film's identity. As Linda Ruth Williams has rightly noted "we now recognise [...] that his influences are not just industrial and corporate but semiotically and culturally complex" and that "*Jurassic Park* crucially stands beyond Spielberg's career as well as squarely in it" (Williams, 2023).

This article turns to director John Sayles's role as script-doctor for the unmade *Jurassic Park IV*, which provides

1. Made possible by the open-ness of the Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of the Arts, London: London College of Communication.
2. All films which while not directed by Spielberg bare all the hallmarks and signifying elements of Spielbergian cinema.

the connective tissue between both branches of the *Jurassic* franchise. This article considers the screenplay in detail and notes its formative influence on the ensuing *Jurassic World* franchise. In doing so it ultimately and implicitly recognises how the work of the script doctor on this particular abandoned project helped give rise to and acted as a the catalyst for an entire second franchise. Furthermore, whilst it was ultimately left unmade (at least in its original form), *Jurassic Park IV* also has a digital afterlife — as the subject of online fan discussion and speculation as to what *might* have been, and the different direction in which it, potentially, would have led the franchise. This speculation was catalysed by the leaking of the script — first reported on the *Ain't it Cool News* website on August 13<sup>th</sup> 2007<sup>3</sup>. It was subsequently made available as a PDF download in 2016, unofficially entering the public realm.

Other than the leaked script (currently available for download on the *Jurassic Outpost* website) there is nothing in the way of archived correspondence or production material around the early incarnation of the film — hence while this article draws on a range of contextual academic sources it will also look to the online history of the film as here is where its origins are best expressed. Gathering information on *Jurassic Park IV*, and its evolutionary journey through to *Jurassic World*, necessitates a certain degree of internet archaeology — tracing its online presence, discussion and speculation to defunct-but-archived film news websites. Hence the methodological framework for this discussion entails referring to, and unearthing, a range of long buried websites and pages dating from when the early internet opened a new space for fan engagement, speculation and reporting and when the fan became an active participant in the dissemination of film development news. These websites and discussion forums help us piece together the history of a film that would never exist. There is little to no critical academic discussion surrounding *Jurassic Park IV* but online discussion of the project dates back as far as 2001 (and the project's inception in the wake of *Jurassic Park III*) and the early days of the world-wide web. This article hopes to fill the gap in knowledge and present a coherent timeline of the un-production. Piecing together its history is reliant on these websites and message boards.

## 2 The Script-doctor

The *Jurassic World* franchise evolved out of Spielberg and screenwriter and script-doctor John Sayles's collaboration on the abandoned *Jurassic Park IV*. This was a pivotal project that established several of the textual and narrative foundations for the second franchise. Script-doctoring is a long-established practice in Hollywood dating back to the 1930s and the advent of the 'talkies'. The work of the script doctor has been frequently overlooked in critical academic literature (mainly due to the frequently uncredited nature of the role — their work is often misattributed to the officially credited screenwriter). Sarah Jones defines the role of the script-doctor as someone who is drafted in to rescue or rewrite an ailing script or to 'work during production on redrafts if the original writer is busy elsewhere' (Jones 2004: 15). In a 2002 article for the L.A Times, Rachel Abramowitz noted that,

Script doctoring remains a controversial craft, one that seems to grow more common by the minute, as Hollywood more and more cedes original filmmaking to the indies and concentrates on its true metier: the creation of blockbusters for which the single vision is a corporate one (Abramowitz 2002).

From the 1980s to mid-2000s there was a perceived schism in American cinema between the so called 'Indies' (films produced relatively smaller, independent production companies) and popular, high-concept and commercial blockbuster cinema from the major studios<sup>4</sup>. The Indie transformation of Hollywood relationship has been discussed extensively by scholars such as Geoff Andrew in his book *Stranger than Paradise: Maverick*

3. *Ain't it Cool News* was a pioneering and leading film news and entertainment website. Its roots were in the early days of internet newsgroups and online fan discussion, it was built up over time by its founder, Harry Knowles and gained a reputation in the film industry for breaking news stories before they officially broke. It had a global reach of regular contributors many of whom jumped ship after Knowles was accused of sexual misconduct in the wake of the #Metoo movement, which dramatically impacted the sites standing and power. Its currently run by Knowles's sister.
4. The mid-1990s to the early 2000s saw the re-emergence and dominance of the studio disaster movie, a genre which had come to define the studio blockbuster inform the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. It's mid 1990s renaissance was anticipated by the release of a number of big budget studio blockbusters in the early to mid-part of the decade — not least *Jurassic Park* in 1993 (see Melia 2023b: 239-293).

*Filmmakers in Recent American Cinema* (2005) and Alissa Perren in *Indi.,Inc.: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s* (2012). Both independent and mainstream *did*, in fact, exist in a reciprocal relationship facilitated by the script-doctor, with producers and directors of such big budget, mainstream fare increasingly reliant on indie screenwriters in order to bring credibility and 'cool' to finished screenplays. Abramowitz draws on the example of the cop-movie sequel *Bad Boys II* (Bay, 2003). Its star, Will Smith, had been unhappy with the script causing producer Jerry Bruckheimer to call in "specialists" from the indie scene (in this case John Lee Hancock, fresh from his directorial debut, *The Rookie* (2002) who left after 3 weeks and was followed by a host of other writers including Judd Apatow). Furthermore, as Abramowitz also notes in her article

Studios and producers are willing to pay -- \$200,000 to \$300,000 a week for Oscar winners or nominees and others considered to be in the top echelon of the business -- for those who can furiously tap out pages in as short a time as possible [...] There also is still widespread sentiment that the best scripts spring from the head of a single writer and that writer pile-on is often evidence of a movie's being in an increasingly desperate search for characters, plot and dialogue [...] It's moviemaking at its most relentlessly commercial, offering a seductive payday to writers who put aside original work to help realize flashy concepts that have been jammed into production to meet release dates (Abramowitz 2002).

Script-doctoring also provides a side-hustle or secondary payday for key Hollywood performers and directors too. Quentin Tarantino and Carrie Fisher are both examples of key Hollywood players who have come to the aid of screenplays for various high-profile productions and been rewarded with an uncredited role in their development. Fisher carved out a lucrative side-career for herself as one of the most in-demand script-doctors in Hollywood, working on screenplays for such major releases as *Sister Act* (Ardolino, 1992), *The River Wild* (Hanson, 1994) and *The Last Action Hero* (Cameron, 1993) (the film originally positioned in the media and by the studios as the main competition to *Jurassic Park* (1993) [Melia 2023a: 3]). At the peak of his post-*Pulp Fiction* fame Quentin Tarantino worked on the script (with Screenwriter and dramatist Aaron Sorkin) for *The Rock* (Bay, 1996) and was uncredited for the screenplay for submarine thriller *Crimson Tide* (Scott, 1995) — here his signature use of pop culture laden dialogue (a conversation regarding the Marvel comic book character *Silver Surfer* incongruously occurring between two characters at one point) was signature evidence of his contribution to the scripting process.

Spielberg's work is no exception and screenplays for his work have frequently been subjected to the scrutinous eye of the script-doctor. Sorkin, for instance, worked on *Schindler's List* (1993), overseeing the development of Stephen Zaillian's script in his absence. Carrie Fisher, who specialised in comic dialogue, was called into do re-writes on *Hook* (1991) — specifically for the role of the mischievous fairy "Tinkerbell" (Julia Roberts). Dana Daly observed that,

Fisher found it enjoyable to essentially ghost-write for *Hook* and provide Julia Roberts more comedic moments. Overall, she felt it was "just nice being treated with a different kind of respect than certainly you would be as an actor". This is in spite of receiving the Spielberg treatment; *Hook* screenwriter Jim V. Hart explained, "Steven tends to use writers like paintbrushes, he wants this writer for this, this writer for that" (Daly 2020).

Script-doctors have often also stemmed from outside the Hollywood milieu — originating often from the worlds of literature or theatre. The British playwright and screenwriter Tom Stoppard had an uncredited role in ghost-writing *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). Spielberg also consulted Stoppard over *Schindler's List*. The writer remembered that "I actually got quite angry with Spielberg, who was and is a good friend, and told him just to film Zaillian's script. But Steven, like a lot of other people in movies, tends to think one more opinion can't hurt". Stoppard was also (as revealed by Kunze) approached to write the screenplay for the abandoned *Cats* project.

*Jaws* may be the most famously 'doctored' script in the Spielberg canon with input from several different writers: director John Milius (allegedly) worked on Quint's (Robert Shaw) famous 'U.S.S Indianapolis' speech; Shaw, a playwright and poet himself, also worked on the speech. Writer Howard Sackler was drafted in to work on the film's script (originally by author Peter Benchley) — Nathan Abrams notes that Sackler was hired for

his experience as a scuba diver and had begun the writing of Quint's speech which Milius (according to some accounts) had expanded on (Abrams 2020: 117). Carl Gottlieb, who had originally been cast as Harry Meadows, the editor of the local paper in the film, was hired to 'redraft the script, adding more dimensions to the characters' (he did so in tenuous collaboration with Peter Benchley) becoming the films de facto screenwriter.

The script for *Jurassic Park*, similarly, went through a number of iterations with author Michael Crichton's original draft providing the baseline for its development. It was then subsequently worked on by Malia Scotch Marmo (uncredited) and finally screenwriter and filmmaker David Koepp (who also developed and wrote the screenplay for the sequel *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*). Oliver Gruner sums up the evolution of the script, observing that,

The three screenwriters involved in *Jurassic Park* were Michael Crichton, who worked on the screenplay until January 1991; Malia Scotch Marmo, who had collaborated with Spielberg on his previous directorial effort *Hook* (1991) and joined *Jurassic Park* from October 1991 to March 1992; and David Koepp, who had co-written the dark comedy *Death Becomes Her* (1992) and was introduced to Spielberg by that film's director Robert Zemeckis. Koepp delivered several drafts from April 1992 until the end of that year (Gruner 2023: 26, in Melia 2023).

He notes also that while only Crichton and Koepp received a writing credit,

All three worked closely with Spielberg, as well as other creatives involved in the project. Notably, thanks to the research of Derrick Davis, creator of the *Jurassic Time* website, we have clear evidence that production designer Rick Carter was also involved in shaping ideas that made it into the finished film (Ibid).

### 3 John Sayles, *Night Skies* and *Jurassic Park IV*

*Jurassic Park IV* illustrates the co-dependent relationship between 'Indie' and commercial Hollywood. John Sayles has been a leading proponent of the US Independent movement from the end of the 1970s. He had established himself firstly as a novelist and then as a screenwriter and director whose film *The Return of the Secaucus 7* (1980) helped consolidate his position at the forefront of the burgeoning 'Indie' movement. Over the next three decades he wrote and directed a variety of key indie dramas including *Matewan* (1987), *Passion Fish* (1992) *The Secret of Roan Innish* (1994), *Lonestar* (1996), and *Sunshine State* (2002). Sayles was also a committed realist whose work was steeped in social commentary — *Matewan*, for instance, dealt with the real life story of the 1920 shooting of unionised coal miners in Matewan, West Virginia; *Lianna* (1981) dealt with a married woman coming to terms with her sexuality, and her affair with a female college professor; *The Return of the Secaucus Seven* offered a relationship drama dealing with the reunion of a friendship group of college activists — all films seemingly as far removed as possible from the fantastic and speculative world of genetically manufactured dinosaurs!

In an article on Sayles in the New York Times, in April 1983, renowned film critic Janet Maslin identified him as part of a New Wave of American realists, noting especially his attention to detail and to the prosaic. She observed that his 'brand of realism can be almost startlingly familiar, the audience is apt to appreciate the director's attention to the ordinary' (Maslin: 1983). Sayles's tendency towards realism and his independent repertoire and status are, however, also balanced by his work as a scriptwriter for the exploitation director and producer Roger Corman. Between 1978 and 1981 he had worked for Corman's New World Pictures writing the screenplays for Joe Dante's creature feature *Piranha* (1978), Lewis Teague's *The Lady in Red* (1979) (a film about the American outlaw John Dillinger), as well as the space opera *Battle Beyond the Stars* (Murakami, 1981). Sayles would also pen the script for two other early 1980s monster movies, *Alligator* (1980, Lewis Teague) and the 1981 werewolf classic *The Howling* (for which director Joe Dante would hire Sayles to rewrite the script). 1984's *The Brother from Another Planet* (which Sayles wrote and directed), was a blaxploitation science-fiction comedy with thematic resonances of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Roeg, 1976).

Writing in *The Guardian* in 1989, film critic Derek Malcom describes him, saying:

No one sits on the fence with quite so much expertise and quite so little pain as John Sayles, screenwriter and filmmaker. He's a writer for hire in Hollywood with epics like *Piranha*, *The Howling*, and *Alligator* among his commercial credits. But he is also a director who is very much his own man in the independent sector. "I feel like Fidel Castro" he says "playing of the Russians against the Americans in order to remain autonomous" (Malcom 1984).

It was Sayles's collaborations with Corman and his work for New World pictures, his hard-earned reputation as a screenwriter-for-hire and his pedigree in writing mutant B-Movie monsters that initially brought him into contact with Spielberg in the early 1980s after the director had seen *Piranha*. Interestingly, screenwriter Carl Gottlieb has admitted that with *Jaws* both he and Spielberg had aimed at writing a Roger Corman movie (Biskind, 1998: 265) so we might speculate that Sayles's history working for Corman was instrumental in Spielberg gravitating to him as a writer. Furthermore, *Piranha* and *Alligator* leaven their more fantastic elements with a degree of realism (a marker of Sayles's style) and where themselves in turn influenced by *Jaws*. I.Q. Hunter categorises these films among a body of post *Jaws* 'Jaws-ploitation' films ('the franchised sequels, unlicensed rip-offs and other imitations that followed the unprecedented success of *Jaws* in 1975' [Hunter, 2016: 77]).

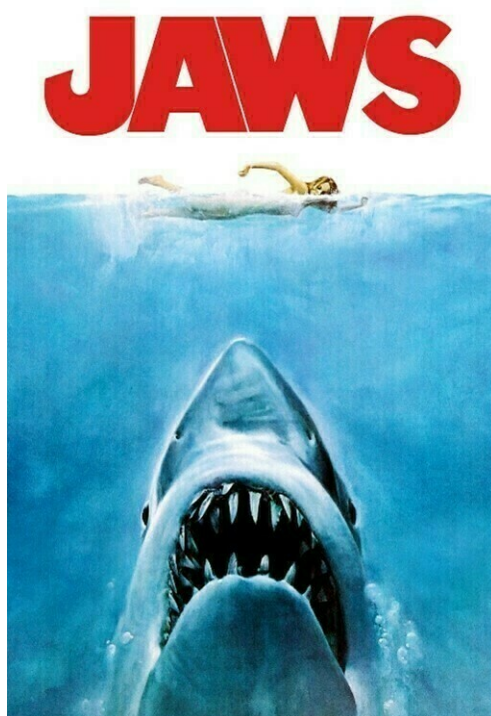


Fig. 1. *Jaws* (1975), Designer: Roger Kastel, Zanuck/Brown Productions, Universal Pictures.

The plot of *Piranha* involved genetically modified Piranhas terrorising the backwoods waterways of the US. Its plot beats concerning the weaponization of genetically modified killer creatures (the fish are a result of a weapons programme and had been intended to infest the rivers of Vietnam) feed almost directly into Sayles's script for *Jurassic Park IV* (see below). Universal Pictures had attempted to prevent *Piranha*'s release and only relented after Spielberg's effusive praise for the film.

Prior to *Jurassic Park IV* however Sayles and Spielberg had initially collaborated on an ultimately unmade science fiction horror script called *Night Skies* (1980). Sayles would describe the project as '*Straw Dogs*' or '*Drums along the Mohawk*' with aliens' (Lyman in Carson, 1999: 48). David Hughes, who has written in some detail about both the development, evolution and metamorphosis of the *Night Skies* project, observes how Sayles's first draft screenplay — the story of a farm under siege from a band of malignant extra-terrestrials,



Fig. 2. *Piranha* (1978), Designer: John Solie, Piranha Productions, United Artists.

drew heavily on the western genre<sup>5</sup> (Hughes, 2008: 48)<sup>6</sup>. As with the script for *Jurassic Park IV*, the *Night Skies* script also surfaced online in 2016 (and was disseminated on *Reddit*, the *Internet Archive* and elsewhere). As Hughes notes (Ibid: 49), Spielberg had first turned to Lawrence Kasdan to write the script but Kasdan had, however, already committed to *The Empire Strikes Back* (Lucas, 1980).

Just as *Jurassic Park IV* would provide a framework for the *Jurassic World* franchise, story aspects of *Night Skies* would find their way into the Spielberg-produced horror film, *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), as well as into his second foray into the world of UFOs, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) — his second most successful film after *Jurassic Park*<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, *Night Skies* was initially conceived by Spielberg as a darker counterpart to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and while not intended as a sequel per se, it was intended as a spiritual successor (primarily in order that Spielberg could maintain control of the property). It was developed, for a time, along-side *E. T.* feeding into its development, providing story beats for the film<sup>8</sup>.

Speculation that work on *Jurassic Park IV* began in 2001, almost immediately after *Jurassic Park III* — for which Spielberg had handed over the directorial reigns to Joe Johnston (whose previous work had included *Honey I Shrunk the Kids* [1989] and *Jumanji* [1995]) and which performed underwhelmingly at the box office. Online discussion and conjecture around *Jurassic Park IV* started almost immediately after the completion of *Jurassic Park III*. Initially Johnston had been keen to dispel rumours of his involvement with the production, refuting any such idea to Dan Finkelstein as reported on the early-internet, fan-made, film news website (now archived), *Dan's JP3* page. In an email to the site author Johnson claimed the idea of him directing a sequel was “Totally crazy” and that “I know how this particular rumour got started. Steven and I were discussing and idea for a fourth film and I said (with heavy sarcasm) ‘I can’t wait to get started on that’. I guess whoever heard me didn’t pick up on my tone” (Finkelstein 2001).

5. Notably referencing John Ford’s, *The Searchers* (1956).

6. Its narrative framework is echoed in the 1989, proto ‘found footage’ horror film *The McPherson Tape*.

7. For which the treatment yet another unmade sequel (this time written with Melissa Mathison), *E.T II: Nocturnal Fears* (1982) would also emerge online in 2012 by *The Bearded Trio*.

8. A more detailed analysis of *Night Skies* will form part of the forthcoming *The E.T. Book: New perspectives on the Classic 1980s Blockbuster* (Bloomsbury, date: TBC).

It has been well documented that Spielberg had begun to lose faith in the franchise early on during the filming of *Jurassic Park: The Lost World*. In an interview with the New York Times while promoting *The BFG* (2016), Spielberg was self-critical, stating

My sequels aren't as good as my originals because I go onto every sequel I've made and I'm too confident. This movie made a ka-zillion dollars, which justifies the sequel, so I come in like it's going to be a slam dunk and I wind up making an inferior movie to the one before. I'm talking about "The Lost World" and "Jurassic Park" (Dargis 2016).

He revealed to Joseph McBride, his biographer, that making *Schindler's List* had caused a shift in his attitude to film making. *Schindler's List* had, famously, gone into production in Poland as *Jurassic Park* was going into post-production in Hollywood. In a subsequent interview Spielberg admitted he felt the incompatibility of working on the two projects together and a sense of anxiety in tackling such a serious subject as the Holocaust during the day and then calling in to check up on postproduction on his fun dinosaur film at night. It appears, also, that in the wake of *Schindler's List*, Spielberg started to feel increasingly dissatisfied with making popular commercial blockbusters like *The Lost World* (for which he was also absent for a substantial period of the shoot):

I beat myself up, growing more and more impatient with myself. It made me wistful about doing a talking picture, because sometimes I got the feeling I was just making this big silent-roar movie. I found myself saying, 'Is that all there is? It's not enough for me.'

His next two films, *Amistad* (1997) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) would see him turn again to serious and often harrowing historical drama — a form to which he would subsequently return to with *Munich* (2005), *War Horse* (2011), *Lincoln* (2012) and *Bridge of Spies* (2015) (as well as producing the wartime HBO docu-drama TV series *Band of Brothers* [2001]).

Despite his initial refusal of the idea over 2002 Johnston talked more vociferously about ideas for a fourth *Jurassic Park* film in the media, with his involvement seeming ever more likely. Another early internet source, the archived website, *The Z Review*, quoted Sam Neill, confirming the film was in development and that he also would likely be returning as Alan Grant (Anon 2002) This was followed by an update in 12<sup>th</sup> June 2002, with a quote from Spielberg's own interview with *Starlog* magazine:

At this point I've pretty much decided to do a 'Jurassic IV'. Similar to the third Jurassic, I will not direct it. I would hope that I could get Joe Johnston to direct this one, too, but it's up to him. I'll certainly offer it to Joe before I offer it to anyone else. We actually have a wonderful story that I think is the best story since the very first movie. In fact, I wish it were the third story instead of the fourth one. It came late, but it is actually the best story I've heard for a dinosaur movie since the Michael Crichton book. And I'm not going to tell you anything about it. My lips are sealed (Ibid).

The first draft of the script was not completed however until 2004 by William Monahan. Monahan however departed the project to work on other projects (specifically Ridley Scott's Crusader epic *Kingdom of Heaven* [2005]) with the website IGN reporting that Spielberg was also dissatisfied with the scripts imbalance 'between science and action'. As quoted on *IGN* in 2012, much later in the development process, special effects designer Stan Winston told *Cinemanía*,

Things have somewhat slowed on the development of the film, as Steven [Spielberg] wasn't very enthused with the first couple of screenplay drafts. I think he felt neither of them balanced the science and adventure elements effectively. It's a tough compromise to reach, as too much science will make the movie too talky, but too much adventure will make it seem hollow (Davidson 2012).

Monahan's script contrived to bring back the characters of Alan Grant and Ian Malcom with both Sam Neill and Jeff Goldblum expressing an interest in returning (again) to the franchise (as confirmed also in an interview with Goldblum in *Cinemanía* [Typhon24 2003]). Furthermore, media reports also suggest that, among other cast members, Richard Attenborough was ready to reprise his role as John Hammond for the film. Neill had previously returned for *Jurassic Park III* where an original script idea from Spielberg for the film was that



“Sam Neill’s character [is] discovered living on the Island. He’d snuck in after not being allowed to research the dinosaurs and had been living in tree like Robinson Crusoe” (Finkelstein 2001b).

Monahan’s story would, reportedly, have dealt with the migration of the dinosaurs to the Costa Rican mainland. A report on the movie news website *Dark Horizons* appears to have broken the news of the plot details back in 2003. Quoted on *Movieweb* in the same year, it reported that

12 years after the first movie, John Hammond’s dinosaurs have apparently become urban legend. Most of the public has become sceptical they ever existed. Part of the plot involves the discovery of previously unidentified lizard-like animals showing up on mainland Costa Rica and conflicting with the locals (killing them?). To find out what the heck is going on, a team of experts chart an expedition to one of the offshore islands. They find out the dinosaurs are thriving and breeding at an uncontrollable rate, so much so that it poses a threat to the nearby continent. They must find a way to curb the spread of the dinos or face an ecological disaster (Brian 2003).

The plot-point regarding public scepticism about the existence of the dinosaurs stands, interestingly, stands in direct contrast to the plot of *Jurassic World* in which the public have become inured to the thrill of the dinosaurs and want something “cooler, scarier...with more teeth”.

By 2004, IGN reported that Alex Proyas (*The Crow* [1994]; *Dark City* [1998]; *I, Robot* [2004]) was rumoured to be in contention to direct. He would deny such speculation, and according to various media reports by 2005 (by which time two more screenwriters were revising the script — the actor and actress Jeremy Piven and Emily Rossum) the project had been put on hiatus.

## 4 The Script

It was Monahan’s script, however that Sayles was called on to rework and complete. He would produce two drafts, only one of which would make it into circulation (allegedly a result of Spielberg’s email being hacked). Sayles would present a radically new version that would potentially lead the franchise in a new direction and which would discard the previous story created by Monahan. Prior to the online emergence of the Sayles script (confirming speculation around a dino-human hybrid plot) Ben Child reported on the potential film in *The Guardian* in 2013, conflating both Monahan and Sayles’s work on the film:

Little is known about the storyline for *Jurassic Park IV*, but the \$1.9bn franchise has languished in development hell for more than a decade. One famously barmy abandoned script was due to eschew the format of the first three films in favour of a story centring on hyper-smart dino-human hybrids with guns who are created to rid a dinosaur-infested north America of the giant reptile menace. Concept art for the canned film, which would have been written by *The Departed*’s William Monahan and *Lone Star*’s John Sayles, emerged in October (Child 2021).

The online emergence of the script allows us to clarify some of the speculation around the plot of *Jurassic Park IV* and to map its story beats against those of *Jurassic World* and the subsequent films in the franchise — establishing its importance in the evolution of the franchise. In an online interview for *ScreenCrush*, *Jurassic World* director Colin Trevorrow revealed that he *had* read Sayles’s script, after reading the subsequent script by Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver, ahead of coming on board with *Jurassic World* (2015). In the interview he observes that

I had only read Rick and Amanda’s once and read [the Sayles] script once a little later down the line because I was so curious. Honestly man? I liked it in a lot of ways. I knew what was going on. What was going on was *bananas*, but that’s not a bad thing! My movie is bananas. There’s a lot in there to like. It’s nuts in a lot of the right ways (Sampson 2015).

Furthermore, and adding to often conflicting information, Trevorrow claims he only read Sayles’s script after the completion of Jaffa and Silver’s indicating that it was *those* screenwriters who are responsible for incorporating aspects of Sayles vision (not him).

While it is true that a bio-engineered group of hybridised Raptors lie at the centre of the plot, Sayles script also hybridises elements of *Indiana Jones*, *James Bond* and *Mission Impossible* (the latter two are namechecked and referenced in the script directions themselves). The script discards all previous story ideas and leans much more into genre film making and, at times, pastiche. It begins with a prologue, opening on a local 'Little League' baseball game and family barbeque. It's an image of quiet suburban, peaceful Americana. This peace is then shattered by an invasion from above as a flock of monstrous *Pterosaurs* descend en-masse from the skies, attacking the gathered community and almost carrying of a young pitcher called Timmy. This opening set piece is the first of several story elements taken forward by Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver and then worked on by Trevororrow and Derek Connolly. It is re-staged in *Jurassic World* as the spectacular sequence in which the escaped *Pterosaurs* violently attack the gathered theme-park visitors (leading to the horrible and untimely demise of Zara the PA [Katie McGrath], as she is fought over in mid-air by a flock of *Pterodactyls*, flung from one beak to another *then* devoured by the park's enormous *Mosasaurus*).

We subsequently cut to TV reportage of the event, establishing that flocks of *Pterosaurs* have become a global menace, an invasive species, after the *Jurassic Park* 'disaster'. In terms of franchise continuity this reference to *Jurassic Park* is slightly confusing given the absence of the *Pterosaurs* in the first two films. They make their initial franchise appearance in *Jurassic Park III* (in a sequence adapted from Michael Crichton's initial novel), which Sayles's script ignores entirely (as it does *The Lost World*) and appear again 14 years later in *Jurassic World*.

Sayles's script connects itself to Spielberg's initial film through the character of Nick Harris, a mercenary and ex-soldier who is hired by John Hammond to retrieve Dennis Nedry's Barbasol can containing stolen dinosaur embryos (last seen sinking into the dirt in *Jurassic Park*)— in order to harvest the stolen embryos so to create an 'aggressive but reproductively neutered' set of individual animals in order to bring down the wild population (a 'Judas Strain') and prevent the further global spread of the dinosaurs. The script provides us with a sequence involving a conversation between Hammond and Harris in which Hammond, declares himself to be recorded in the Guinness Book of records as the most sued man on earth and which is interspersed with flashbacks to the first film and Nedry's death in the jaws of the spitting *Dilophosaurus*. The dissemination of the dinosaurs into the wild and among human civilisation at the end of *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* and *Jurassic World: Dominion* develops from this key story element in both Monahan's and Sayles's iterations of the screenplay.

The Barbasol can provides a sort of *Indiana Jones*-esque McGuffin, for the film's first act in which Harris is tasked with venturing back to Isla Nublar (site of the first *Jurassic Park*). The script itself declares the action to be 'very Mission Impossible' — written in 2004, the *Mission Impossible* franchise was two films in and we may speculate that Sayles was aiming to reset the franchise in order to be more competitive with other franchises that had gathered pace since the 2001 and the failure of *Jurassic III*<sup>9</sup>. The Barbasol can makes a return to the franchise in *Jurassic World: Dominion* (Trevorrow, 2022) where it has been recovered by the films villain, the CEO of 'Biosyn', Lewis Dodgson (Campbel Scott) — last seen giving the can to Nedry in 1993.

The remainder of Act 1 is dedicated to the recovery of the cannister as Nick travels to the abandoned ruins of the first *Jurassic Park* and battles both security rangers from the sinister 'Grendel Corporation' now in control of the island and a new type of burrowing Raptor previously unseen in the franchise, the 'Diggers' or *Excavoraptors* — a fictional dinosaur created by Sayles. This fabricated dinosaur was paid online fan service to be create and visualised as a 'Mod' (fan created modification) to the *Jurassic World: Evolution* computer game (Fig 3) — demonstrating that despite the films non-existence it was nevertheless adopted by fans as part of the franchise as canon, and becoming the object of paratextual fan creation. There are of course layers of meta-irony here. Sayles created a fictional dinosaur (a 'genetically' and textually modified' dinosaur) which was then modified and brought further into existence by members of the franchise fandom.

The Nick Harris character also establishes the blueprint for Owen Grady (Chris Pratt) in the *Jurassic World* Franchise — an ex-military man, whose own character DNA incorporates that of Indiana Jones (in the wake of *Jurassic World*, Pratt was also widely tipped in the media to be the next actor to put on Jones's fedora).

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9. In a similar way the James Bond film *Casino Royale* would reset the 007 franchise in the wake of the competing *Mission Impossible* and *Bourne* franchises.



Fig. 3. *Excavoraptor* mod for *Jurassic Park: Evolution* created by Siaka. Source: Youtube, 'Excavoraptor!!! Jurassic World Evolution' Orlandos Fun World: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JQqEWYDqgM>.

Furthermore, Grady's role as a wrangler and trainer of Velociraptors in *Jurassic World* finds precedence in both Nick's later involvement with the training of a pack of genetically modified dinosaurs, *Deinonychus*.

At the end of Act 1, Harris has recovered the cannister but is abducted by the Grendel Corporation and spirited away by helicopter. If the script had gone into production, the beginning of Act 2 would have perhaps seen the biggest shift in the franchise to date as it relocates the action to a gothic castle in the Swiss Alps — complete with subterranean labs for genetically modifying and hybridising dinosaurs. This location is also the base for the Grendel corporation and the home of the film's 'Bond Villain'-esque Baron Von Drax — introduced to us by his second in command, Adrien Joyce. Here Sayles is clearly pastiching the Bond franchise recalling similar locations from the bond film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969) (set in a retreat in the Swiss Alps) and including a villain whose name references Sir Hugo Drax from the film *Moonraker* (1979) — who also owns a purpose-built gothic chateau. Sinister corporations play a key role in both *Fallen Kingdom* and in *Dominion*. The former adopts a Gothic stately home for its climax (the *Jurassic* franchises and the gothic are discussed in detail elsewhere in this journal by Catherine Pugh). Matt Singer in his Screencrush article on *Jurassic Park IV* has also noted that

*Fallen Kingdom* shares even more similarities with Sayles' *Jurassic Park IV*. For one thing, their structures are nearly identical; a first half set in the overgrown ruins of Jurassic Park and a second half trapped in a wealthy eccentric's gigantic and garishly appointed mansion. There are even scenes in both where wealthy buyers come to examine the dinosaurs and bid on their services (Singer 2022).

Furthermore, *Dominion*'s plot involves another fiendish corporation who are attempting to corner the world's food markets through the application of all-devouring genetically modified locusts, at the same time producing their own branded strain of grain that is resistant to them. In Sayles' script for *Jurassic Park IV*, we learn that as, a side-line, the Grendel Corporation are developing an insect-resistant super strain of rye, barley and hops.

The Sayles *Jurassic Park IV* script details how the Grendel Corporation are genetically creating a new strain of dinosaurs, *Deinonychus Draxi*, hybridised from the egg-stealing *Oviraptor*, dog and human DNA (to increase dexterity, obedience and problem-solving). These creations pre-empt *Jurassic World*'s artificially created *Indominus Rex*, and that film's group of trained raptors. *Jurassic Park IV* presents a squadron of these new creatures named 'Achilles', 'Hector', 'Perseus', 'Orestes' and 'Spartacus'. These are controlled via hormone injection. Drax needs the Barbasol can and Nick is coerced into training the raptors under threat of death. Like the dinosaurs of the later franchise these hybridised dinosaurs are able to camouflage themselves.

There are two key set pieces which anticipate those in *Jurassic World*. The first sees them sent into action on a rescue mission to retrieve the young daughter of a French financier — and to, to test their potential as

a weapon. This pursuit sequence anticipates that of *Jurassic World*, in which the trained Raptor's under the stewardship of Owen Grady are sent into action to hunt down the *Indominus Rex*. The plot to weaponize the dinosaurs also reappears in *Jurassic World*, via the character of security agent Vic Hoskins (Vincent D'Onofrio). In the second major set piece the *Deinonychus* are used to infiltrate a south American drug lords compound (parachuted in like soldiers no less) for a rival cartel (unbeknownst to Harris), the dinosaurs finally turning on their captors in Act 3.

The script's female lead, Maya, a scientist (unwillingly forced to help facilitate Drax's plan) has an affinity and relationship with the dinosaurs (again, not unlike Grady in *Jurassic World*) and we learn, in a previous life, she has worked with big cats in a circus. At one point in the script, she comments that her interest in dinosaurs was provoked by almost being taken to the original *Jurassic Park* as a child. This sort of embedded meta-nostalgia manifests itself in *Jurassic World* as we are re-introduced to the ruins of the old park with its still intact and abandoned merchandise stall.

## 5 Concept Art

After the re-booting of the *Planet of the Apes* franchise and the success of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Wyatt, 2011) Hollywood again found a taste for CGI screen monsters with the return of *Godzilla* (Edwards, 2014) (as well other Kaiju monsters), and King Kong in *Skull Island* (Vogt-Roberts, 2015). In 2016, the same year that, the Sayles's 2004 script leaked online, concept art for that version of the film by visual creature artist Carlos Huante also emerged online, adding another authorial dimension to the potential project. Huante had begun his career designing creatures for the animated series *The Real Ghostbusters* (1986-1991) and he would go on to design monsters and fantastical creatures for films such as *Men in Black* (1997), *Hellboy* (2004), *Blade: Trinity* (2004) and *War of the Worlds* (2005) (among others). Huante, who (due to time constraints and professional commitments) was unable to provide information for the purposes of this article is currently part of creature development at Lucas Digital. Post *Jurassic Park*, and post the digital turn in cinema at the end of the 1990s, visual concept artists took on an increasingly important role in Hollywood providing designs and creations to be brought to life via digital FX teams, with Huante at the cutting edge of such creative practice. His Instagram account ([Galleryanatom](#)) exhibits a huge arrange of creature designs and sketches for various major projects including Ridley Scott's *Alien* prequel *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017). The re-emergent *Jurassic* franchise was at the centre of this creature renaissance, and Huante's concept art further develops Sayles's script ideas and fuelled internet speculation over the way Sayles's script was intended to be developed. In Sayles's script, the squad of Raptors are very much, aesthetically speaking, dinosaurs despite their human and dog DNA. Huante's designs take this a step further, anthropomorphising them as monstrous, weaponised mix of human and dinosaur (Figs 4 and 5).

Chris Pugh reported on *The Jurassic Outpost* website in 2016 that these designs were (reportedly) rejected by Spielberg who then decided to take the project back to year zero. However, as Pugh also reported, the designs were never fully abandoned and in 2006 prototypes for a new *Jurassic* toy line of dino-soldiers influenced by Huante's design were commissioned by Universal and Art Asylum — this line of merchandising never came to fruition.



Fig. 4. Carlos Huante's Concept Art for *Jurassic Park IV*. Source: JurassicOutpost.Com  
<https://www.jurassicoutpost.com/new-art-cancelled-version-jurassic-park-4/>



Fig. 5. Carlos Huante's Concept Art for *Jurassic Park IV*. Source: JurassicOutpost.Com  
<https://www.jurassicoutpost.com/new-art-cancelled-version-jurassic-park-4/>

## 6 Conclusion

It's interesting to note the first rumours about *Jurassic Park IV* began in the 2001, the same year the *Jurassic*-sploitation film *Raptor* was released — a film produced by Roger Corman (who had a professional working history with Sayles) and which also deal with genetically engineered dinosaurs. Much earlier in 1993, the same year as the original film's release, *Corman* had also produced the first in the exploitation series *Carnosaur*, which featured a plot to exterminate the human race by impregnating human women with dinosaur embryos. Given script-doctor Sayles's previous work with Corman and Spielberg's love of Corman's work, it's possible to speculate that these ideas filtered through to his conceptualisation of *Jurassic Park IV*. Given Sayles's previous work with Corman and Spielberg's own love of Corman's work (evidenced in *Jaws*), it's entirely possible to speculate that these ideas filtered through to his conceptualisation of *Jurassic Park IV*.

The history and evolution of the *Jurassic Park IV* project is complex and frequently difficult to substantiate. It arrived into public consciousness, largely due to the emergence of early online spaces, as part of the new digital age, with conflicting reports and timelines across different websites (many of which have now been archived or lost). The wider speculation around project, and the emergence Sayles's script allows us to observe two key things — firstly it opens out the evolution of the franchise, allowing us to chart and observe the way its story ideas filter into the *Jurassic World* franchise — providing, if not an identical plot (far from it) but a set of raw materials around which the second franchise is constructed. Secondly, it allows us to observe the relationship between Hollywood and the new age of the internet fan, with online spaces providing platforms for disseminating fan speculation, and creation — giving the consumer greater agency and investment in franchise cinema.

The complexity of getting to grips with the evolution of the project is also the result of the many scriptwriters tasked with taking the story forward and in different directions. It was the work of script doctor, John Sayles however that allows *Jurassic Park IV* to stand as a great 'what if' in contemporary popular cinema, and whose ideas provided key plot elements for the second franchise and illustrates the creative importance and agency of a production role which is often uncredited and overlooked.

I would like to conclude this discussion by returning to my initial assertion that there has been relatively little interest in Spielberg's unmade projects. Why is this? As Linda Ruth Williams observes, 'It took around 35-years after Steven Spielberg's cinematic career had launched (in the early-to-mid 1970s) for a gathering cluster of new work exploring the interest and complexity of his films to emerge (in the first decade of this century)' (Williams 2023), and that 'Spielberg remained somehow too popular to merit serious analysis, functioning more as a New Hollywood symptom than as an auteur with a singular perspective' (Ibid). Hence critical discussion of Spielberg's work is only just catching up with contemporary research trends and a fuller, more complete discussion of his abandoned work is overdue — and necessary in contextualising the director against the backdrop of 21<sup>st</sup> century American cinema.

While this article maintains that his presence (as originator, owner of Amblin and ILM, executive producer and overseer of the franchise) qualifies *Jurassic Park IV* as a Spielberg project (Spielberg is the one constant presence throughout a train of different creative voices [directors, screenwriters etc]) — detailed exploration of *Jurassic Park IV* raises questions also about his authorial and industrial control in the creation of franchise cinema more broadly. And in a similar way to recent studies on Stanley Kubrick, it has been the hope of this study to open the way for a wider study and more sustained critical enquiry into the unmade — the 'what ifs' of modern Hollywood, into the nature of Spielberg's abandoned film projects and his role in their (un) production histories and contexts, as well as his overlooked role as a producer.

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