

JURASSIC PARK, STARRING JIM CARREY

Some roles are so closely associated with a specific actor that it's hard to imagine he or she wasn't the first choice. But it happens all the time. Can you imagine, for example...

JACK NICHOLSON AS ROY NEARY

(CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, 1977)

While Steven Spielberg was in preproduction on *Close Encounters*, every so often someone would knock on his office door and say something like, “Nicholson is too crazy,” or “Pacino has no sense of humor.” That someone was Richard Dreyfuss, who'd had his eye on Spielberg's alien movie ever since the two had discussed it while filming *Jaws* in 1975. Spielberg's first choice to play Roy, an Indiana utility worker who sees a UFO, was Hollywood's reigning “King of Cool” Steve McQueen, but he turned it down because he couldn't cry on cue (a trait he thought was necessary for the character). Jack Nicholson was nearly cast, but he couldn't commit to a long shoot. Spielberg also considered Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffman, James Caan, and Gene Hackman. But Dreyfuss's door-knocking campaign paid off, and he got the part.

MARK WAHLBERG AND ANNE HATHAWAY AS PAT and TIFFANY

(SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK, 2012)

Writer-director David O. Russell originally had Vince Vaughn and Zooey Deschanel in mind for this romance about mental illness and positivity. But Russell was having so much trouble adapting Matthew Quick's 2008 novel that he put it aside and made *The Fighter* with Mark Wahlberg, which was a big hit with audiences and critics. So, when Russell returned to *Playbook*, he had his pick of A-listers to choose from, and cast Wahlberg along with Anne Hathaway.

Not long after, Hathaway abruptly left the project due to “scheduling conflicts with *The Dark Knight Rises*” ...or so it was reported in the press. Neither Hathaway nor Russell has given any details on what actually went down (there were rumors of creative differences), but Hathaway's departure opened up a role that several other leading ladies had been coveting—including Elizabeth Banks, Kirsten Dunst, Angelina Jolie, Blake Lively, Rooney Mara, and Rachel McAdams. But the part went to 21-year-old newcomer Jennifer Lawrence. “She shares with the character a degree of confidence and a degree of directness about her,” explained Russell, “that is really refreshing and unencumbered by preciousness or neuroticism.”



Before he made cookies, Famous Amos was a talent agent who signed Simon and Garfunkel.

But there was a problem: Lawrence still had to finish filming *Hunger Games*, and Wahlberg had already signed on to star in the crime drama *Broken City*, so he had to leave before filming could begin. At that point, Russell already had someone else in mind to play Pat: Bradley Cooper. The following year at the Academy Awards, Lawrence took home the Best Actress Oscar for *Silver Linings Playbook*, and Hathaway won Best Supporting Actress for *Les Misérables*. Wahlberg's cop movie flopped.

JENNIFER LAWRENCE AS ALICE

(*ALICE IN WONDERLAND*, 2010)

"The only time I've ever been truly devastated by losing an audition," admitted Lawrence, "was Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*." When she read for the part in 2008, she wasn't a big star yet, and she couldn't really do a British accent, so she didn't get it. (Not long after, Lawrence auditioned for the lead in *Winter's Bone*, which she did get.) Mia Wasikowska, the Australian actor who Burton did cast as Alice, wasn't his first choice. Burton's first choice: Frances Bean Cobain (daughter of Courtney Love and Kurt Cobain). But Cobain was only 17 years old—and she'd never acted—so she chose to go to college instead. Anne Hathaway was offered the part of Alice at one point, but she thought it was too similar to other roles she'd played, so Burton cast her as the White Queen. Amanda Seyfried and Lindsay Lohan were reportedly interested in Alice, too, but they all lost out to Wasikowska, whom Burton chose for her "gravity." *Winter's Bone* made Lawrence a star, and *Alice* made a billion dollars, so it worked out pretty well for everyone involved.

WESLEY SNIPES AS T'CHALLA

(*BLACK PANTHER*, 2018)

Thanks to standout performances in *Major League*, *Passenger 57*, *Demolition Man*, and *White Men Can't Jump*, Snipes was one of Hollywood's most bankable stars in the 1990s. And he wanted his next movie role to be the comic book superhero T'Challa, the Black Panther. Snipes assured the folks at Marvel Comics, which was close to bankruptcy and desperate for a hit film, that *Black Panther* would be huge. Columbia Pictures green-lit the project and brought in John Singleton (*Boyz n the Hood*) to direct, but Singleton wanted the movie to take place in the United States during the civil rights movement, whereas Snipes wanted it set in the futuristic African city of Wakanda, which would have cost a lot more money. That disagreement, and others, put *Black Panther* in "development hell." So Snipes found another superhero to play: Blade the vampire-hunter.

Blade (1998) was Marvel's first big-screen hit, and marked the beginning of its reign on Hollywood. Feeling empowered, Snipes wanted to return to *Black Panther*. "But ultimately," he told the *Hollywood Reporter* in 2018, "we couldn't find the right combination of script and director and at the time, the technology wasn't there to do

The Battle of Hastings (1066) took place in a town called Battle, seven miles from the town of Hastings.

what they had already created in the comic book.” (His Black Panther suit was going to be a “leotard with cat ears.”) By the time the Marvel Cinematic Universe got around to introducing Black Panther in 2016, Snipes had aged out of the role. But he says he’s very supportive of Chadwick Boseman’s take on the character and Marvel’s depiction of Wakanda, which is pretty close to what Snipes had envisioned 25 years earlier.

JAMES STEWART AND BARBARA STANWYCK AS NORMAN AND ETHEL

(*ON GOLDEN POND*, 1981)

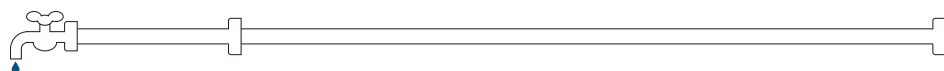
Ernest Thompson’s play about a cantankerous “old poop” and the wife who puts up with him was so well received when it premiered off-Broadway in 1979 that it was only a matter of time before some Hollywood big shot scooped up the rights. That big shot was nearly James Stewart, who at 70 years old really needed a hit after his 1978 flop *The Magic of Lassie*. But the *It’s a Wonderful Life* actor wasn’t fast enough, and Jane Fonda bought the rights so she could star in *On Golden Pond* with her father, Henry Fonda...who happened to be Stewart’s best friend. Katharine Hepburn was cast to play wife Ethel, but she broke her arm playing tennis a few weeks prior to filming. Just in case Hepburn wasn’t able to heal in time, Barbara Stanwyck (who’d been in three previous films with Henry Fonda in the 1930s and ’40s) was called in to replace her. After a pep talk from Fonda, Hepburn showed up on day one with a very sore arm (and was reportedly upset that a scene in which she picks up a boat with that sore arm was cut from the film).

On Golden Pond was the second-highest-grossing film of 1981 (after *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). Hepburn and Fonda, who’d never met prior to that fateful pep talk, won that year’s Oscars for Best Actor and Best Actress. And Henry and Jane Fonda became the first (and so far only) father-daughter acting team to be nominated for Oscars. As for Stewart, he took a break from acting and invested his *Lassie* money in “real estate, oil wells, and a charter-plane company.” (He became a multimillionaire.)

WILL SMITH AND BEYONCÉ AS JACKSON AND ALLY

(*A STAR IS BORN*, 2018)

Previous versions of *A Star Is Born* had left some pretty big shoes to fill: Janet Gaynor, Judy Garland, and Barbra Streisand as the up-and-coming performer; and Fredric March, James Mason, and Kris Kristofferson as the aging alcoholic who falls in love with her. So it was big news in 2002 when Warner Bros. announced that Joel Schumacher would direct Will Smith as the aging alcoholic (Smith also considered playing the up-and-comer) and Alicia Keys as the singer. But Keys turned it down because her agent thought that a singer playing a singer wouldn’t be challenging enough. Jennifer Lopez was close to taking the part, but then, as often happens, the project fizzled due to scheduling conflicts.



Dinosaurs roamed the earth for about 800 times as long as humans have been around.

A Star Is Born picked up steam again in 2010 when Nick Cassavetes was hired to direct Will Smith and Beyoncé. Then Smith left (it's unclear why) and Russell Crowe was brought in, and then Cassavetes was out (also unclear why) and Clint Eastwood took over to pilot the film. Eastwood's first choice for the male lead: Leonardo DiCaprio, who considered it but decided instead to do Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*. Also considered were Eddie Murphy, Robert Downey Jr., Christian Bale, and Jon Hamm. Next glitch: Beyoncé got pregnant in 2012, further delaying the project. Two singers were considered to replace her—Esperanza Spalding and Rihanna. There was still no male lead, so Eastwood looked at Tom Cruise (who showed off his singing chops in *Rock of Ages*), Eminem, Hugh Jackman, and Johnny Depp.

The first piece finally fell into place in 2015 when Bradley Cooper landed the part of Jackson. Then Warner Bros. decided to mold Cooper as a leading man/director à la Ben Affleck, so all of a sudden Eastwood was out and Cooper was given the helm. Next glitch: by that time, Beyoncé was the biggest star in the world and Warner Bros. could no longer afford her. But the producers already had someone else in mind for the role of Ally: Lady Gaga. The studio heads weren't convinced that Gaga—known for her over-the-top stage performances—could play a humble young singer. “It wasn't unanimous until we did the screen test,” said producer Bill Gerber, “and when they saw it, it took them seconds to say yes.” All that waiting was worth it, as *A Star Is Born* was a critical and box office success, and left even bigger shoes to fill for the next *Star* reboot.

SIMON PEGG AS SCOTT LANG

(*ANT-MAN*, 2015)

British writer-director Edgar Wright had wanted to bring Marvel's littlest Avenger to the big screen since 2003, when he was making *Shaun of the Dead*. Wright spent much of the next decade developing *Ant-Man*, and rumors were swirling that he'd be making it with his longtime collaborator, Simon Pegg. After years of speculation, in 2013 Pegg officially took himself out of the running, for two reasons: “[Wright] has to spread his wings as a director and be seen not to just come with me as a package,” and “Ant-Man...has to be a lot younger than me. If Edgar asked me, I'd think about it. But as his friend and his lawyer, I would advise strongly against asking me.” (His lawyer?)

Wright didn't ask Pegg. He considered Ewan McGregor, who's never showed much interest in playing a superhero, and Adrien Brody, who was reportedly very interested. But in the end, Wright didn't want a typical Hollywood hunk; he wanted an “everyman” comic actor. It came down to Joseph-Gordon Levitt, who'd previously turned down *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and Paul Rudd, best known for his comedic turns in *Anchorman* and *40-Year-Old Virgin*. When Rudd got the part, his nine-year-old son said, “Wow, I can't wait to see how stupid that'll be.” (Also, Rudd was 44 when he was cast, a year older than Pegg.)

Wright, however, was losing passion for the project, especially after Disney bought Marvel and started making changes to his script. They wanted to include other superheroes, but Wright wanted it to be a stand-alone film. They wanted it to have a Hollywood feel, whereas Wright wanted to use his trademark quick-editing style. By that point, Wright felt like a “director-for-hire” and reluctantly abandoned the movie he’d been working on for ten years. (Wright’s next film: *Baby Driver*.) Adam McKay, who’d worked with Rudd on *Anchorman*, was offered the job, but declined out of respect for Wright. At the last minute, the job went to longtime Marvel fan Peyton Reed, who’d directed Jim Carrey in *Yes Man*. Reed kept much of Wright’s script and all of Wright’s major casting choices, but he made it the typical Marvel film that Disney wanted. Has Wright ever seen *Ant-Man*? “No,” he said in 2017, “It would kind of be like asking me, ‘Do you want to watch your ex-girlfriend have sex?’”

JIM CARREY AS DR. IAN MALCOLM

(*JURASSIC PARK*, 1993)

When *Jurassic Park*’s casting director Janet Hirshenson read Michael Crichton’s dinosaur novel, she envisioned Jeff Goldblum as Dr. Malcolm, the snarky mathematician. But director Steven Spielberg wanted to look at a range of actors, so he also screen-tested Ted Danson, Michael Keaton, Johnny Depp, Steve Guttenberg, Michael J. Fox, Bruce Campbell, and Jim Carrey. It was down to Goldblum and Carrey, whom Hirshenson said “did terrific, but I think pretty quickly we all loved the idea of Jeff.” Merely getting a part doesn’t mean it’ll end up on the screen, though. Just before filming, Spielberg told Goldblum that they were thinking of writing Malcolm out of the movie. Most of his lines would be given to Sam Neil’s character. Goldblum argued that the Malcolm character was pivotal, and Spielberg ultimately decided to leave him in.

EXTRAS

- **Bette Midler**’s biggest career mistake: “There was *Sister Act*, which was written for me, but I said: ‘My fans don’t want to see me in a wimple.’ I don’t know where I got that from. Why would I say such a thing? So Whoopi [Goldberg] did it instead and, of course, she made a fortune. I also didn’t do *Misery* and Kathy Bates won an Oscar for it. That’s not to say I would have. It was so violent and I had no relation to it. I was afraid.”
- **Nicolas Cage** said the biggest roles he ever turned down were Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings* and Neo in *The Matrix*. But he’s glad he said no. Why? “I get to enjoy those movies as an audience member, because I don’t watch my own movies.”



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