



Clockwise from top: *Back to the Future*; *Grease*; *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*

COURTESY: UNIVERSAL HOME ENTERTAINMENT; PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT; BUENA VISTA HOME ENTERTAINMENT



# Legendary Summer Blockbusters

Since this issue of *Script* is all about the blockbuster, we thought it might be fun to take a look back at the biggest hits of summers past and the writers who penned them. The summer season (which from the pre-air-conditioning era on had always been considered a slow period) became a key time for movies starting in the mid-1970s.

In the wake of the successes of *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, the weeks between Memorial Day and Labor Day proved they could be lucrative ones indeed. Since then, studios have commissioned writers to create screenplays (often in the sci-fi or fantasy genres) for films that have the potential to empty the beaches, fill the coffers, and possibly even become worldwide cultural phenomena—and writers have complied at an astoundingly successful rate. Since *Jaws* is considered the first real summer blockbuster, we'll start back in 1975 and find out who wrote the highest-grossing films (in the U.S. and Canada) of the past 32 summers.

**1975 *Jaws*:** Peter Benchley adapted his 1974 novel into a screenplay that was then reworked by an uncredited Howard Sackler and a credited Carl Gottlieb. Hal Barwood & Matthew Robbins, John Milius, Robert Shaw, Steven Spielberg, Richard Dreyfuss, and Roy Scheider (who improvised the classic line “You’re gonna need a bigger boat”) also made significant (if uncredited) contributions.

**1976 *The Omen*:** The saga of the adopted child from (literally) hell, Damien Thorne, began as a spec script called *The Antichrist* written by David Seltzer (*Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*), who also turned it into a best-selling novel.

**1977 *Star Wars*:** It took George Lucas three years and countless drafts to craft the workable script for his landmark space opera, which later received an uncredited dialogue

polish from his *American Graffiti* collaborators Gloria Katz & Willard Huyck.

**1978 *Grease*:** Producer Allan Carr adapted Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey’s book for their 1971 stage musical (changing the location from Chicago to Los Angeles and the nationality of the female lead from American to Australian to accommodate star Olivia Newton-John, among other things) and then hired Bronte Woodard to write the script.

**1979 *Rocky II*:** Screenwriter/director/star Sylvester Stallone based the story of how the Italian Stallion coped with the ups and downs of fame and fortune in the aftermath of his bout with Apollo Creed on his own experiences following the success of the original *Rocky*.

**1980 *The Empire Strikes Back*:** George Lucas wrote the story for the second (and what many consider the best) *Star Wars* episode, which was then turned into a screenplay by veteran screenwriter Leigh Brackett (*The Big Sleep*) and newcomer Lawrence Kasdan.

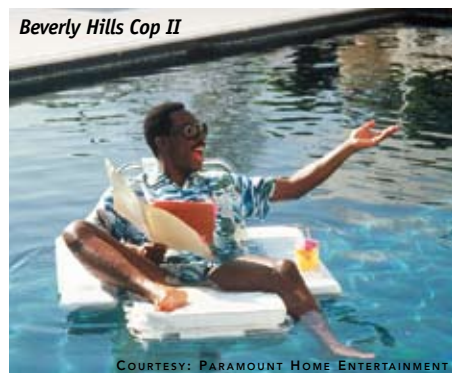
**1981 *Raiders of the Lost Ark*:** George Lucas (that name does seem to pop up a lot, doesn’t it?) dreamed up the character of Indiana Jones, and the film’s original director Philip Kaufman contributed the idea that the notorious obtainer of rare antiquities should go on a quest for the lost Ark of the Covenant. After lengthy story conferences with Lucas and new director Steven Spielberg (another name that pops up a lot on this list), during which many of the film’s legendary set-pieces were dreamed up, Lawrence Kasdan penned the screenplay.

**1982 *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*:** Director Steven Spielberg asked screenwriter Melissa Mathison (*The Black Stallion*) on a character from an unproduced script called *Night Skies* that John Sayles had written for Spielberg as a follow-up to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Although Spielberg eventually decided that the story—about a group of hostile aliens that take a farm family hostage—was too grim, he became enamored of a subplot in which one of the aliens (the only nice one) befriended a young boy and decided to make it into a movie all its own.

**1983 *Return of the Jedi*:** George Lucas devised the story for the final chapter of his original trilogy, which he and Lawrence Kasdan then turned into a screenplay.

**1984 *Ghost Busters: Saturday Night Live*** alumnus Dan Aykroyd created the famous team of paranormal eliminators in a 300-page epic that sent the team on adventures through space, time, and a number of alternative dimensions. Harold Ramis (*Animal House*) came on board to help Aykroyd streamline the concept and turn it into a producible comedy, and star Bill Murray contributed a number of priceless ad libs during filming.

**1985 *Back to the Future*:** Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale’s original first draft of the comic time-travel adventure was subtitled “I Was a Teenage Oedipus.” Executive producer Steven Spielberg contributed a number of key ideas, including the notion that the time machine (a stationary object in the original) should be



housed in a DeLorean.

**1986 *Top Gun*:** Jim Cash and Jack Epps Jr. adapted Ehud Yonay's *California* magazine article "Top Guns" into a screenplay that was then reworked by a number of other writers. Warren Skaaren (*Fire With Fire*) did the final production draft.

**1987 *Beverly Hills Cop II*:** Star Eddie Murphy and his then-manager Robert D. Wachs devised the story for this follow-up to the 1984 action-comedy smash, which was then turned into a screenplay by Larry Ferguson (*Highlander*) and Warren Skaaren. David Giler (*The Parallax View*), Dennis Klein (*Buffalo Bill*), and Chris Thompson (*Bosom Buddies*) also contributed.

**1988 *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*:** Jeffrey Price and Peter S. Seaman (*Trenchcoat*) based their script for this groundbreaking combination of live action and animation on Gary K. Wolf's 1981 novel *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?*

**1989 *Batman*:** In consultation with director Tim Burton, *Pulitzer Prize* screenwriter Sam Hamm brought the legendary comic-book character created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger to cinematic life in a brooding, action-packed screenplay that was then reworked by a credited Warren Skaaren and an uncredited Charles McKeown (*Brazil*).

**1990 *Ghost*:** This surprise hit supernatural romance was based on an original screenplay by Bruce Joel Rubin, who used his interest in the afterlife to good advantage in several other screenplays (*Brainstorm*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and *My Life*), as well.

**1991 *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*:** Original *Terminator* writer-director James Cameron enlisted his good friend William Wisher Jr. (who received an additional dialogue credit on the first film) to help craft this epic follow-up, a task

they accomplished in just a few short weeks of near around-the-clock writing.

**1992 *Batman Returns*:** Sam Hamm wrote the first draft of this sequel, which featured a relatively straightforward story in which the Penguin and Catwoman teamed up to commit a series of robberies. *Heathers* author Daniel Waters came on board to turn the piece into something more appropriately bizarre and Burton-esque. Wesley Strick (*Cape Fear*) did a production rewrite.

**1993 *Jurassic Park*:** Michael Crichton wrote the initial drafts of this adaptation of his 1990 novel. Malia Scotch Marmo (*Once Around*) did some work on the characters, and David Koepp did the final production drafts.

**1994 *The Lion King*:** Irene Mecchi, Jonathan Roberts, and Linda Woolverton were credited with writing the screenplay for Disney's animated musical smash, although an astounding 17 other writers were credited with helping to devise the story and eight more were given "additional story material" credit.

**1995 *Batman Forever*:** *Smoke & Mirrors* authors Lee Batchler & Janet Scott Batchler devised the story for the Caped Crusader's third adventure, which featured the Riddler as the script's sole villain. When Joel Schumacher replaced Tim Burton at the helm, he brought in Akiva Goldsman (*The Client*) to add Two-Face to the baddie roster and to camp the whole thing up.

**1996 *Independence Day*:** This affectionate pastiche of 50s' alien-invasion films, 70s' sci-fi, and 80s' and 90s' action movies was written by its producer Dean Devlin and its director Roland Emmerich.

**1997 *Men in Black*:** *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* co-writer Ed Solomon adapted Lowell Cunningham's graphic-novel series into a script that was lauded as much for its wit as for its set-pieces. The complex storyline was radically streamlined during the editing process.

**1998 *Saving Private Ryan*:** Robert Rodat's original screenplay for this intense World War II drama was reworked by Frank Darabont (*The Shawshank Redemption*), Scott Frank (*Get Shorty*), and others.

**1999 *The Phantom Menace*:** George Lucas wrote the script for the first installment of his lightsaber-and-sorcery trilogy and allegedly brought original trilogy star-turned-script-doc-tor Carrie Fisher in to do a dialogue polish.

**2000 *Mission: Impossible II*:** Numerous writers, including William Goldman, worked on various versions of this second big-screen iteration of Bruce Geller's classic TV series. The final version was credited to Ronald D. Moore and Brannon Braga (story), and *Chinatown* author Robert Towne (screenplay).

**2001 *Shrek*:** Screenwriters Ted Elliott & Terry Rossio and Joe Stillman and Roger S.H. Schulman adapted William Steig's classic children's book for the big screen. Cody Cameron, Chris Miller, and Conrad Vernon received credit for additional dialogue.

**2002 *Spider-Man*:** A large number of writers labored to bring the comic-book character created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko to cinematic life over a protracted 16-year development process. The final version began with a detailed "scriptment" by an uncredited James Cameron, which was then adapted by David Koepp. Scott Rosenberg (*Beautiful Girls*) and Alvin Sargent (*Ordinary People*) did uncredited rewrites as well.

**2003 *Finding Nemo*:** Co-director Andrew Stanton devised the story for this animated underwater classic and also wrote the screenplay along with Bob Peterson and David Reynolds.

**2004 *Shrek 2*:** The story for the big green ogre with a Scottish burr's second feature outing was devised by director Andrew Adamson, who then wrote the screenplay along with Joe Stillman, J. David Stem, and David N. Weiss.

**2005 *Revenge of the Sith*:** In his last appearance (to date, anyway) on our list, George Lucas wrote the final installment of his epic saga and then (allegedly) brought Tony® Award-winning playwright Tom Stoppard (*The Real Thing*) in to do a final dialogue polish.

**2006 *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*:** *Shrek* vets Ted Elliott & Terry Rossio expanded the story they created (along with Stuart Beattie and Jay Wolpert) for the first *Pirates* adventure into a multi-part epic that found buried treasure at the box office.

**2007 *Spider-Man 3*:** The story for Spidey's third big-screen outing was written by director Sam Raimi and his brother Ivan, who also wrote the script along with Alvin Sargent.

It remains to be seen who has written the biggest film of summer 2008, but with dozens of potential blockbusters on the way, it's certain that we're going to have a great time at the movies finding out. 🎬