

and they need to figure out how to return home. The boys never seem all that concerned about their predicament. They enter a strange fog and suddenly the temperature plummets and they hit floating ice – completely out of place for the river and the time of year. On pg. 23 Michael asks if they should go further and Jacob – the brains of the operation – says to continue on. Jacob also says he thinks the snow and ice will vanish soon. Why does he think that? This seems to be an underwhelming response to some pretty strange phenomenon. Shortly thereafter, pg 24-25, Jacob alone witnesses a mastodon and a female huntress, but lies to his companions about what he saw.

This sequence is problematic for a few reasons. Firstly, the group seems to under react to their situation – a weird fog, an unexplained drop in temperature, ice in the river, strange animal noises. All that happens is Michael asks if they should go back. Instead of Michael just asking if they should turn back, I would suggest one of two options: 1) the group does indeed try to turn back but they are unable to or 2) what I think is the better choice – they collectively decide continue on with the sense of adventure and invulnerability that only young boys have. Perhaps something is said about how boring and uneventful life in Foley is i.e. (this is meant to be illustrative only) maybe Michael could say something like, “Finally something interesting happens in Foley and you want to run away?” The point being, that the strangeness needs to be directly addressed, otherwise your audience/reader will feel the characters aren’t behaving realistically.

The next strange thing is Jacob’s decision to lie to his friends about what he has seen (the huntress and the mastodon.) Why does he do this? It seems both out of character for him and is unlikable. He seems to offer an explanation to Lucas on pg. 26 “I did, but I’d rather not say until I’m sure what’s taking place....” but frankly this explanation is not satisfying. What is Jacob waiting for? (Whatever it is never comes, by the way.) Why does Jacob think it is up to him alone to make sense of their situation? He saw a mastodon – a prehistoric creature long extinct – wouldn’t he run back to his friends excited/scared to share this news? I don’t think the script benefits whatsoever from any delay in the boys realizing they are back in time, especially an “artificial” delay imposed by one of the characters. Especially since they make that discovery in the very next beat – when they see the woolly rhino. One easy fix would involve mostly cutting - have Jacob running back to tell his friends what he saw, but by the time he arrives at the canoe, the woolly rhino is looking at them – therefore rendering his explanation and disclosure obsolete.

Once they realize they are in a different time, what they do next needs to be addressed much more directly. Right now, this realization/discussion continues on in a diffuse way over several scenes and many pages. On pg. 27 Jacob says they are “lost.” This is unsatisfying and doesn’t address the enormity of their true situation – “lost” does not adequately address that they are somehow back in time! That’s the point of the movie – why underplay it? Also, take a step back – what would you do if you were back in time?

I think most people would want to look for their families. I realize getting them out of the river and back into Foley is a major rewrite which is not something the writer wants to do (unless being paid to do so!), so there needs to be a believable reason that they stay in the river, as opposed to doing something else. I would advocate that, now at this point (after mastodon and woolly mammoth) they do try to turn back (canoe back up the river) but some weird phenomenon prevents this – perhaps there appears a deadly falls where there was none previously on the way down river – something that makes the decision to keep going down river not only plausible, but the only choice.

Goal

That being said, it would be even better if they had a definable goal – is there something at the end of the river that gives them tangible hope of getting out of the past and back to the present? Is their destination the site of something significant – a dinosaur find, a crater made by a prehistoric meteor, a weird magnetic field – something that is established prior to their trip and is something tangible that makes getting to the end make sense? Jacob’s speech on 36, “There must be a purpose behind all of this... I can’t explain how or why, but I’m sure it’s no accident,” isn’t enough.

Also, the movie would be helped if there were more of a ticking clock – more urgency – do they need to get to their destination in a certain amount of time? Is there an important event? A full moon? A once in a millennium alignment of planets? The closest appearance of a meteor shower? Right now everything is open-ended, which really reduces the stakes in the film.

Movies such as these need a defined goal on which you can hang everything. In King Kong, Faye Wray (later Jessica Lange then Naomi Watts) needs to be rescued – the men aboard the ship enter the prehistoric land of the island to find her. That narrative engine is clear – so all the various encounters with prehistoric creatures can unfold along the way. Our boys need to have a clear and believable goal in mind – once that’s established, the events along the way can unfold naturally.

Smaller notes about this include: they don’t try their cell phones until pg. 34. Again, this doesn’t feel realistic – they should perhaps try their phones when they first encounter something strange – like the ice in the river. Maybe they are calling a weather service. The phones not working I think works better as yet another unexplained event until they realize the reality of what is happening. Once they know they are back in time, it seems silly to try the phones then.

Observers not Participants

With a few really well executed exceptions, the boys are passive observers of much of what is happening on land. They are literally floating by and commenting on what they see. They need to be much more engaged in the action and involved in what they are seeing. They have way too much time to wax philosophical about creationism versus evolution. Also, (to be discussed in more detail later) this dialogue diminishes the level of peril they are actually in. Michael “What a day that was,” pg. 40 is the understatement of the year.

Rather than talking about what is happening, the characters need to be more active, more involved. The scene starting on pg 42 is great! Really scary, very vivid. Honestly, the movie can stand 4-6 more action scenes like this – the crocs fighting pg. 48 is good but might be better if one of the boys falls out of a canoe, for example. Again, with the raptors, it would be better if one of the guys was out of the canoe, gathering provisions (wood, fruit, whatever) and was actually in danger during this fight.

Also, one well-place reference to Jurassic Park might be a fun comedic button at the end of a tense action scene – but there are far too many references to Jurassic Park now. All they do is to take the audience out of the action and remind them they are watching a film – never a good thing.

More action less talk

Much of what the boys discuss about the creatures they are seeing should be cut and this information could be dramatized instead. It's also worth thinking about what our present day assumptions are about prehistoric times and thinking about how to turn those on their heads. You've done a good job with the feathered dinos – I believe this is a recent discovery. Are there any other common tropes about dinos and prehistoric times that the script can play with? Let your imagination run wild – what do you think we've gotten wrong? (I'm thinking of the scene in Jurassic Park when the brontosaurus like dino stands on his hind legs to eat leaves off of a tree.)

Differentiating Characters

Jacob is clearly the nerd/smart one. Michael is the good-looking jock who is not so bright. Lucas is the eager younger brother. Keeping Richard aside for now, each character needs to have a problem he is trying to solve. You've established that Jacob is insecure and hesitant. He learns to act over the course of the script. What are Michael's issues? He seems to disappear over the course of the script. As he is written, Michael is a good-looking guy who seems to use his charm to skate by in life – he is friends with Jacob and therefore (at least in bio class) benefits from Jacob's smarts. It might be satisfying to see him for the first time in his life in a situation where being charming and good looking doesn't matter – he needs to work hard to get what he wants. It would be nice to see Michael rise to the occasion of some challenge.

Richard

As written, Richard is a very intellectualized character – he is a creationist who doesn't believe in evolution. With mastodons and dinosaurs walking around, this point would seem to be moot. I don't think the script benefits from Richard's point of view; he is a downer, and his point of view never has any real credence. Play it out – what if Richard is right? What does that mean for our boys? If this isn't the past, but is actually the work of the devil, this would need to be addressed (and I think is a very bad idea.) Instead, perhaps he could be a much more fun character – and offer some comic relief. Richard could be a total goofball, in the way that Zach Galifinaikis has been in many recent films.

Logic

One of the most powerful sequences of the script is pg. 84 – 86 where Jacob seems to be on his own (even though Michael is there) approaching the dawn of life on earth. It's a scary landscape, and his isolation is palpable. Suddenly, he is back home, recovering from a camping accident. Everything we've seen, everything we've invested in, isn't real.

Lucas has no memory of the events. So what really happened? How did it happen? Since Jacob gives Lucas the pendant, does this mean that only the wearer of the pendant goes back? So Michael never went back? (He certainly has no memory of it when he visits Jacob post hospital.)

Charles comes back (vision? real?) and Luke ends up unconscious (comatose_ and seemingly back in the past, with his burn mark from before. This needs to be clarified. Is it like the Matrix? Our bodies are only one level of reality? Was Luke in the past before or not? Why does the burn appear

(or was it always there?) The logic needs to be made clear and relatable. In most films, the “it was just a dream” is not a satisfying ending. Is there any way for Jacob, Lucas, and Michael to end up all sharing the memory of their amazing trip?

Somehow, the trip needs to be real and the boys need to have been on the trip for a reason. Did they change something, fix something, that allowed mankind to prosper?

MICRO

The micro aren't necessarily unimportant issues – they simply are more contained and can be dealt individually.

Jasmine

Rather than see Jacob's relationship with Jasmine in flashback a present-time interaction should occur on the last day of school. This should give us all we need to know about them and eliminate the need for flashbacks.

Dissection Scene

You wrote that you were advised to lose this scene by previous reviewers. I think the issue is not that the scene needs to go, but that this scene needs to pay off more, and more directly, than it does now. It works fine as establishing Jacob as insecure but knowledgeable, and Michael as more daring and confident. But it eats up a lot of screen time. One of the cardinal rules of screenwriting is that EVERYTHING needs to be there for a reason. So... if you spend time showing the audience that Jacob knows where a frog's heart lungs and pancreas are – we should see this knowledge pay off down the road. Actually, this is a great idea that is already mostly set up. Jacob should defeat a prehistoric ancestor of a frog by knowing something about its anatomy. This solves several problems – it adds an action scene as well as pays off this earlier scene. You could even echo the earlier scene in its entirety – Jacob could instruct Michael exactly where to stab this frog-like creature – just like they did in bio.

Dialogue

Many of the dialogue issues have already been addressed – the boys talk too much in general and need to be more involved in the action of the movie. But the dialogue itself is heavy handed, much too expository, overwritten and not realistic. The dialogue is a major issue in this script and needs to be discussed separately.

References

Several times in the script the scientific names of dinosaurs are used without explanation or adequate description. Scientific names should only be used by Jacob in dialogue, if applicable. Description shouldn't have any jargon – it should be descriptive only.