

Jennifer Salke (Christopher Smith for TheWrap)

PRO

‘Bond Bit Her on the Ass’: Jen Salke Exits a Changing Amazon Studios That She Helped Grow | Analysis

The TV exec helped Amazon plant a stake in mainstream pop culture but leaves as the studio plots its big screen plans

Jeremy Fuster and Umberto Gonzalez March 28, 2025 @ 6:00 AM

Amazon MGM is moving forward with an ambitious plan to release a theatrical movie slate in 2025, but as of this week it will do so without Jennifer Salke, who exited as the head of the studio on Thursday after seven years. In the brutal calculus of Hollywood moguldom, Salke arrived in 2018 with an opportunity to build a 21st century movie studio, backed by a tech giant.

But she never found her footing in building a working strategy or network of talent relationships for film – which proved fatal when the hallowed James Bond franchise landed in Amazon’s portfolio.

“The Bond thing bit her on the ass,” one producer bluntly told TheWrap, noting that Salke’s departure came the week Amy Pascal and David Heyman were announced as producers of the franchise. “This doesn’t just happen. They announce Bond producers and then send the person Barbara Broccoli called an idiot out the door.”

The producer was referring to a now-infamous meeting in December where the veteran Bond producer Broccoli met with Salke, who referred to the Bond films as “content.” The exchange was described in The Wall Street Journal as a “death knell” moment. “These people are f–king idiots,” Broccoli reportedly said.

The James Bond franchise arrived at Amazon as part of the 2021 acquisition of MGM. Once Salke lost the trust of the series’ producers, it was, insiders said, game over.



Jennifer Salke, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and producer Sam Esmail attend the Amazon Prime Video 2019 Golden Globes After Party. (Neilson Barnard/Getty Images)

Change in the air

Agents and producers who had worked with Salke told TheWrap they weren’t surprised at the exit, saying that the TV executive was getting left behind as Amazon’s priorities changed. Specifically, her inability to secure Broccoli’s trust played a major role.

Salke arrived at Amazon Studios in 2018 when it was known as a fledgling prestige outlet with movies like “Manchester by the Sea” and TV shows like “Mozart in the Jungle.” She was tasked by CEO Jeff Bezos, who planned to commit hundreds of millions of dollars in acquisition and production of “The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power,” to turn the studio and its streaming service, Prime Video, into a mainstream force.

On that front, mission accomplished. Over the last seven years, Salke has overseen the production of several hit streaming shows like "Fallout," the hit adaptation of the video game franchise of the same name which is currently in production on a second season; "Reacher," whose third season has become Prime Video's most-watched returning season to date; and "Beast Games," Prime Video's most-watched unscripted series to date.

But "Rings of Power," Amazon's biggest gamble under Salke's tenure, hasn't panned out, at least against the studio's massive investment of $700 million spent to acquire the rights to "Lord of the Rings" from the estate of J.R.R. Tolkien and produce the first season. While the show's first season viewership in 2022 was sky high with Prime reporting 25 million viewers in the first 24 hours and 150 million overall by October 2024, data firm Luminate reported this past January that the number of minutes viewed dropped 60% for Season 2.

While "Rings of Power" was not greenlit by Salke, one agent criticized the exec's decision to hire writers J.D. Payne and Patrick McKay, for whom the extremely expensive show was their first credited project as showrunners. For all its viewership and with a third season on the way, "Rings of Power" hasn't been fully embraced by hardcore Tolkien fans, who have criticized the series' plot and handling of its source material.

The agent also noted another more recent TV misfire under Salke: "Citadel," the 2023 six-episode spy action series that cost a reported $300 million to produce but failed to crack the Nielsen Top 10 for streaming shows.

"She made some irresponsible decisions on the TV side, between 'Citadel' and 'Rings of Power.' If anyone else made those decisions they would be fired," the agent said.

The fatal Bond meeting

However, it was probably James Bond that did Salke in. Late last year, The Wall Street Journal reported that development on the Bond franchise under Amazon had stalled out. While Amazon was eager to find a new Bond to replace Daniel Craig and to get moving on a 26th film in the decades-old property, Salke ran into major philosophical differences in how to handle next steps with Barbara Broccoli, the daughter of Bond founding father Albert R. Broccoli who was known for being fiercely protective of the franchise.

"Well, the Bond thing was a microcosm of her problem," the agent said. "Barbara Broccoli did not like her, which was obviously a big problem for Amazon MGM. Enter Courtenay Valenti, who is seasoned and well respected by the highest level of film talent in this business for decades. Once Valenti was hired, Salke's days were officially numbered."

According to a top talent agent, Salke's ouster was "inevitable" as "the feature film community was never comfortable with her." Salke even developed a reputation as someone who didn't really read scripts or coverages.

By contrast, a studio insider says that Valenti, who joined Amazon MGM as its film chief in early 2023, quickly built a rapport with Amazon MGM/Prime Video chief Mike Hopkins, who was hired in 2020 and to whom Salke reported.



Producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson accept the Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award at 15th Annual Governors Awards. (Getty Images)

Valenti had been known during her tenure at Warner Bros. as an executive with a talent for building relationships with filmmakers and stars, and whom insiders told TheWrap was key in winning over Broccoli and her stepbrother, Michael G. Wilson, enough to sign over full creative control of James Bond in a historic $1 billion deal.

During Salke's tenure, Amazon's theatrical plans took a backseat as focus was placed on big budget streaming projects like "Rings of Power." But the acquisition of MGM, complete with a domestic distribution apparatus in United Artists, signaled the studio's growing ambition to be a player in a struggling theatrical marketplace. With movie theaters calling out desperately for more titles to screen, Amazon MGM announced last year that it plans to release 12-14 movies annually.

Valenti's plans for that full slate will be unveiled at next week's CinemaCon, the first time Amazon will have a main stage presentation at the exhibitor trade show. While not all of the films on the slate will have the nine-digit budgets of a 007 movie, it marks a significant increase in investment compared to 2023 and 2024, when films like "Red One," "The Beekeeper" and "Challengers" were released in theaters primarily to boost interest in their Prime Video release.

With the pendulum swinging at least somewhat away from the hard focus on TV, Amazon is pivoting from the strategy that led Salke to be hired in the first place. In the memo announcing her decision to leave, Hopkins said that Salke's role would not be filled, with Valenti and TV chief Vernon Sanders now reporting directly to him.

As for Salke's next move, Amazon MGM says it has reached a first-look deal with her as a producer. But whether anything actually comes of that remains to be seen. Toby Emmerich, former film chairman of Warner Bros., received a prominently announced first-look deal with that studio after he resigned in summer 2022 following the merger with Discovery. Nearly three years later, no films from that deal have been announced.