

# Treasures from the Yale Film Archive



## *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*

Tuesday, January 23, 7 p.m.  
Humanities Quadrangle Alice Cinema

Directed by **Steven Spielberg**  
Screenplay by **Jeffrey Boam**  
Story by **George Lucas and Menno Meyjes**  
Cinematography by **Douglas Slocombe**  
Produced by **Paramount Pictures** (1989), 127 mins.  
Starring **Harrison Ford, Sean Connery, Alison Doody, Denholm Elliott, John Rhys-Davies, Julian Glover, River Phoenix, Michael Byrne, Kevork Malikyan, Robert Eddison, Alexei Sayle, and Alex Hyde-White**

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A SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

The origins of the character of Indiana Jones, created by writer-producer George Lucas, date back to 1973, just after his breakout film that year, *American Graffiti*, and well before the first *Star Wars* (1977). Development only took off, however, when Lucas and his friend Steven Spielberg, vacationing together in Hawaii in May, 1977, to avoid potential bad news about the premiere of *Star Wars*, discussed their next projects. Spielberg recalled saying, “I wanted to direct a James Bond movie when I’d just gotten started making movies. And I went to George Lucas one day and he asked me ‘What do you want to do next?’ and I said ‘I want to direct a James Bond movie.’ He said ‘I’ve got something like James Bond, and it’s called Indiana Jones.’”

Lucas and Spielberg’s answer to the international super-spy made his debut in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), an update of Republic Pictures adventure serials and pulp magazine tales of characters like Doc Savage. Indiana Jones was a professor who taught theory in the classroom and hunted treasure – which belongs in a museum! – in the field. After the phenomenal success of that film, the highest grossing movie of the year, the team brought the character back for a prequel, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, in 1984. Also a major success, the film’s darker themes and heightened violence were to a certain extent a reflection of personal struggles the two men were facing. As Lucas commented in a 2008 interview, “Part of it was I was going through a divorce, Steven had just broken up and we were not in a good mood, so we decided on something a little more edgy.” The resulting film, along with the Spielberg-produced *Gremlins*, which was released two weeks later, led Spielberg to lobby the MPAA to create a new rating between PG and R; later that summer, PG-13 was introduced with John Milius’ *Red Dawn*.

While it is a challenge for a sequel (much less the third film in a trilogy) to outdo the original, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* makes a strong case for consideration as the best film of the three. The quest to find the Holy Grail may not promise as much of a special-effects laden climax as the hunt for the Ark of the Covenant or human sacrificing cult of *The Temple of Doom*, but it is doubly effective as a metaphor for a father and son who seek reconciliation with one another. Bringing his fascination with James Bond full

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**DID YOU KNOW** Academy Award-winning playwright Tom Stoppard rewrote most of the conversations between Joneses junior and senior. As Spielberg explained, “It was an emotional story but I didn’t want to get sentimental. Their disconnection from each other was the basis for a lot of comedy. And it gave Tom Stoppard, who was uncredited, a lot to write. Tom is pretty much responsible for every line of dialogue.”

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circle, Spielberg cast Sean Connery as Jones Sr., and it is the relationship between father and son, with Connery and Ford matching wits and trading barbs, that elevates the film.

At the same time, its iconic action set pieces rank among the best of the series, if not of all of 1980s action cinema. The film begins with a prologue featuring a young Indiana Jones (played by River Phoenix) that masterfully introduces key elements of the character’s iconography – the hat, the whip, the scar on his chin, his fear of snakes – while getting the film off to an electrifying start. The heady mixture of action and wit stretches from a cave in the Utah desert to a circus train full of animals and antiquities thieves in a relentlessly entertaining chase. This opening sequence even inspired the short-lived television series, *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* (1992-93), though Phoenix turned down an offer to continue in the role on the small screen.

Thirty-five years on, from the vantage point of our current sequel/IP-heavy movie-going landscape, this film may feel like a beloved and relatively original classic, but it’s worth noting that it launched the summer movie season of 1989, referred to at the time as the “summer of sequels.” Between the film’s May release and Labor Day, sequels to the original *Ghostbusters* and *Lethal Weapon* films, a third *Karate Kid*, fifth *Star Trek* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* films, eighth *Friday the 13th*, and 17th James Bond film, *Licence to Kill*, would all be released. And despite promises made at the time, the Indiana Jones films themselves did not stop with this third part of the trilogy, but ended up as a five-part series that stretched 43 years from its debut in 1981 to last year’s *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*.

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*Film Archive*

**NEXT UP** “No fighting in the war room!” Stanley Kubrick’s cold war satire *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1960) screens in a brand new 35mm print on Thursday, January 25 at 7 p.m.