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Faith Under the Fedora: Indiana Jones and the Heroic Journey Towards God

Abstract

This essay explores how the original Indiana Jones trilogy (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Temple of Doom*, and *The Last Crusade*) work as a single journey towards faith. In the first film, Indy fully rejects religion and by the third film he accepts God. How does this happen? Indy takes a journey by exploring archeology, mythology, and theology that is best exemplified by Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Like many people who come to find faith, it does not occur overnight. Indy takes a similar path, using his career and adventurer status to help him find Ultimate Truth.

Keywords

Indiana Jones, Steven Spielberg, Hollywood, Faith, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

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Introduction

It is impossible to think of contemporary Hollywood without the influence of Steven Spielberg, a name often associated with blockbuster films. However, the filmmaker is much more than a big budget showman. By the 1980s, Spielberg had “become a brand name.”¹ The success of his films allowed the director to make whatever project he desired. The problem was that Spielberg’s financial success led to criticism over the intellectual and personal depth of his work. Lester Friedman writes, “it still seems quite odd that erudite books appear each year which elaborate upon the works of obscure silent film directors or examine hip filmmakers with a handful of movies to their credit, while the most successful director of all time receives scant sustained critical attention.”² Maybe Spielberg is just not stylish enough for the indie-loving hipsters or some academics that peer down their noses at popular and successful filmmakers. This attitude is not easy to understand towards a filmmaker who has a wide range of proven abilities as seen in two successful and disparate 1993 films, *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler’s List*.

After interviewing Spielberg in 1994, Stephen Schiff compares Spielberg to legends like Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles. Schiff argues that one of Spielberg’s most important skills is the ability to “add information unobtrusively” into his films.³ The unobtrusive feeling of many films in Spielberg’s canon may lead some to overlook key elements in his movies. Introducing a series of essays

on the director, Dean A. Kowalski writes, “no film director has had more impact on popular culture than Steven Spielberg.”⁴ It is difficult to argue with that, but unfortunately none of the essays in the volume focus on Indiana Jones. Understanding that Spielberg’s work is an essential ingredient for American popular culture, this paper will focus on the famous and arguably important adventure franchise. While there has been some recent scholarly interest in the director, such as Elissa Nelson’s essay in *The Journal of Popular Culture* about criticism towards Spielberg’s films, virtually no serious scholarship has focused on his Indiana Jones franchise.⁵

There is more significance to the Indiana Jones movies than some, including the director, may even realize. This paper will explore how the original Indiana Jones trilogy⁶ (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Temple of Doom*, and *The Last Crusade*) work together as a version of the Joseph Campbell inspired Hero’s Journey. Instead of each individual film as a single journey, this study will look at Indiana himself as he goes on a single journey. The focus shifts throughout the three films from archeology, to mythology, and eventually to theology where Indiana finds comfort in the faith he so easily rejected in the first film. As a single journey, the first three Indy films are an example of a heroic journey that ultimately ends with a newfound faith in God along with a reconnected family.

Background of the Hero's Journey

Before analyzing the Indiana Jones trilogy, one must be familiar with The Hero's Journey that has been transformed and adapted numerous times, based on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Building on a long history of mythology, Campbell suggests, "it would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation."⁷ Therefore, any sense of truth or relevancy, part of what Campbell refers to as energies of the cosmos, behind any mythological story comes through to us in the form of our surrounding culture. This is the basis for Campbell's hero as mythological figure.

The hero has changed and evolved over time; however, the structure of the hero's story has followed a similar path. Campbell outlines the hero's journey at length, with all of the stages and possibilities throughout the journey in the form of departure toward the journey, initiation of conflict and problem resolution, and return home. Campbell concludes his book, "it is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse."⁸ Heroes serve an important purpose in our culture as they can stand as role models or represent cautionary tales all while providing an avenue for people to assign meaning and purpose to their lives. Campbell's work also helps us understand why audiences may be fascinated with a specific hero, such as Indiana Jones.

The imagination of Americans has long been shaped by Hollywood's depictions of heroic figures, most recently in the post-9/11 superhero cycle. Mike Alsford, author of *Heroes and Villains*, writes, "It is...in the imagination that we encounter heroes and villains in their most idealized form representing our purist heroic ideals and villainous fears."⁹ The continued success of heroic figures in film and other mediums is no surprise. After all, who does not want to see their unobtainable ideals (absolute evil triumphed by absolute good) played out on the big screen? While more complex heroes can be found in recent films, truly good heroes like Indiana Jones still retain a place in popular culture.¹⁰

Christopher Vogler, using Campbell as inspiration, famously put together his Hero's Journey that is now part of a larger text titled *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. In relation to the concept of the hero's journey, Vogler writes, "in any good story the hero grows and changes, making a journey from one way of being to the next: from despair to hope, weakness to strength, folly to wisdom, love to hate, and back again. It's these emotional journeys that hook an audience and make a story worth watching."¹¹ For Vogler, the journey occurs through a succession of the following stages: ordinary world, call to adventure, refusal of the call, meeting with the mentor, crossing the first threshold, tests/allies/enemies, approach to the inmost cave, ordeal, reward, the road back, resurrection, and return with elixir. Of course, not every story follows

this set of stages perfectly. Variations of these stages can be seen in each individual Indiana Jones film.

The next section will examine the methodology that will be used to trace one single journey of Indiana's growth through the original trilogy. The goal here is to read the films through a version of the Hero's Journey, where Indiana himself is on a single journey that can be tracked through the first three films. While the Indiana Jones films are popular, they are not common for scholarly analysis. In "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," Wayne Brockriede argues that the explanatory critic "looks at what he is analyzing and chooses the perspectives and ideas that best help him understand the object of his criticism."¹² Following Brockriede's advice, the best perspective towards taking these films seriously is to trace the influence of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey mythology and its influences in the films.

Methodology: Indiana's Journey

While the Hero's Journey is not a new methodology, this project will explore an application of it for popular films not regularly discussed in scholarly settings. The analysis will be drawing from Voytilla and Vogler, as well as numerous studies and interviews dealing with Spielberg. Voytilla's *Myth and the Movies* outlines journeys for adventure films with the following criteria: historic time

period, exotic setting, the hero's quest that will bring good to his ordinary world, hero with a specialty that qualifies him for the journey, the journey is overshadowed by a major world conflict, the elixir obtained may help solve a world conflict, and finally allies and love interests.¹³ These stages will be applied as they fit into the three films examined below. It should also be noted that the hero's journey in the Indiana Jones films has many levels, too many to discuss in a single paper. Therefore, the focus here will be only on the elements that propel Indy's journey towards God. Using religious studies as only part of the perspective, the method here is based in philosophy (Hero's Journey), theology (Indy's journey to God), and film genre (the adventure film).

Voytilla, who applied the Journey to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, also outlined the Journey of another hero; Luke Skywalker in the first three *Star Wars* films. Skywalker's journey through these films is seen as an "acceptance of his legacy," "beginning of a test phase," and a complete "transformation."¹⁴ Indiana's journey follows a similar trajectory to Skywalker's. With each film Indiana grows and learns important lessons that ultimately lead the hero to reconnect with his father. However, instead of accepting a legacy like Skywalker did it is Indiana's journey-solidifying decision to accept his faith in God. This reading of the Indiana Jones trilogy, while being useful for academic fans of the franchise, should also work as an example to dive deeper into other overlooked films that may interest scholars

in the field. The next section will summarize differing perceptions of the director, which will be followed by a close reading of the first three Indiana Jones films.

Background on Spielberg Scholarship

Those critical of Spielberg tend to write him off on the grounds of oversimplification. Robert Kolker asserts that Spielberg's films "offer nothing new beyond their spectacle, nothing the viewer does not already want, does not immediately accept."¹⁵ Such a shallow reading of Spielberg purposely overlooks the filmmaker's influence. In his follow up to an anthology of Spielberg interviews, Friedman writes in *Citizen Spielberg* that out of all the influential filmmakers of the 1970s "only two still function at the height of their powers: Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg."¹⁶ The importance and influence of each filmmaker has continued to grow for over three decades. At the risk of offending the anti-Spielberg academic circles, this project will work on the premise that Spielberg is a respectable *auteur* filmmaker.

Spielberg's personality is seen and felt in every single one of his films. As a filmmaker who cut his teeth at a Universal Studios that was still running like a Golden Age production facility in the late 1960s, Spielberg has a tendency for traditional storytelling but that does not mean his films are not worth thinking about critically. Film historian and biographer Joseph McBride writes, "No other

filmmaker has mined his childhood more obsessively or profitably than Spielberg.”¹⁷ Channeling his parents’ rocky relationship throughout his youth, Spielberg has a tendency to use broken families or absent father figures in his films.¹⁸ Auteur theorist Peter Wollen argues that a director makes the source material his own through the filming process.¹⁹ Spielberg is one of the few filmmakers who can tell mature stories while keeping a youthful sense of imagination (e.g., *Jurassic Park*). In addition, Spielberg’s spectacle always has ties with either current events or his personal life.

It would not be fair to write off Spielberg as a maker of simple, escapist, blockbusters. “I love anyone who thinks beyond the butter and the popcorn,” said Spielberg, “I really do.”²⁰ This statement should be refreshing for anyone hoping to dig deeper into the director’s work. Film history has shows that classic films may look simplistic at first glance, but serious close reading will find that many movies were more complicated than expected.²¹ The same can be said for Spielberg films, especially the original Indiana Jones series. The next section will begin analyzing Indy’s journey specifically.

Indy’s Journey

Indiana’s journey can be classified as dealing primarily with three levels: archeology (*Raiders*), mythology (*Temple of Doom*), and theology (*Last*

Crusade). Each film has a clear call to adventure, mentors, thresholds, allies, enemies, and ordeals. However, there are some differences from the traditional journey. Each film takes minimal time in the ordinary world, where the hero originates, with the majority of the story occurring in the special world where the hero's adventure is made. In addition, we do not always see Indiana return to his ordinary world of a university professor at the end of the three films. The films end with the acquired elixir and resurrection that act as the final reward.

The Indiana Jones films have excited viewers of all ages for decades. Voytilla explains this phenomenon in a broader spectrum, "action adventure satisfies the armchair adventurer in all of us, transporting us into exotic worlds where we accomplish unimaginable feats, win true love, cheat death and finally vanquish the Shadow, affirming our faith that, in the end, Good does triumph over Evil."²² Our desire to see Good prevail keeps our interest in these types of narratives. Spielberg has perfected telling such stories, which probably has to do with the major influence that filmmakers of the Golden Age had on him.

Even as a young kid making films, he followed the major players of the Studio Era in Hollywood. While making *Firelight*, an amateur film that won him a filmmaker award in Arizona just before his family moved to California, Spielberg told his friends, "I want to be the Cecil B. DeMille of science fiction."²³ As history has shown, Spielberg ended up becoming more like DeMille than he could have imagined.²⁴ The following sub-sections will take a closer look at the

first three *Indiana Jones* films, each film representing another element of this journey towards God.

Raiders of the Lost Ark

Audiences are often enthralled with adventure films because it allows them to become a part of something extraordinary not found in everyday life, such as fleeing the rolling boulder in the opening scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. This first scene is Spielberg on every level, invoking big action with spectacular settings. Interest in the impressive can be traced back to ancient philosophy, such as Longinus who argues, “The influences of the sublime bring power.”²⁵ If a movie is attractive, fun, and keeps the audience’s attention, it does have a power that justifies a serious response. Vogler writes, “stories invite us to invest part of our personal identity in the hero for the duration of the experience. In a sense we become the hero for a while.”²⁶ *Raiders of the Lost Ark* begins by setting the viewer in the middle of Indy’s (Harrison Ford) current adventure where he is leading a group of treasure seekers through the South American jungle. Indy’s calm demeanor shows the audience it is not his first adventure. The story prompts us to sympathize with Indy after two of his team’s members try to double cross him, leading to the famous boulder sequence.

We know Indy is the hero by the way he is photographed. The camera is usually looking up at the character, which shows him as a strong figure. It is also

clear Indy is a cut above his competitors because we learn that nobody has gotten out of the cave alive. Of course, this does not stop Indy from getting out with the valuable Golden Idol. While the audience is led to believe Indy is the hero or at least the protagonist from the start, he is officially established as such when we meet the villain, Belloq (Paul Freeman). After Indy narrowly escapes the rolling boulder, Belloq has a tribe of natives pointing arrows at Indy. Before anyone speaks, there is a shot of Indy's colleague falling to the ground dead with a back full of poison darts.²⁷ Belloq becomes Indy's shadow. Each hero must have a shadow, "a function or mask which can be worn by any character."²⁸ Belloq is a personification of the mythological shadow, representing the darkness in the film that will challenge Indy.

The opening sequence also lets the viewer in on one of Indy's weaknesses, his fear of snakes. After Indy gets away from the natives he swings from a vine into a river where his friend is waiting in a seaplane.²⁹ Indy is terrified of his friend's pet snake sitting near his seat, "I hate snakes Chuck, I hate 'em!!!" This scene ends with the plane flying into the sunset as the iconic Indiana Jones theme booms. Therefore, from early on in this trilogy Indy gets a hero's sendoff that is reminiscent of the countless times the cowboy rode off into the sunset. This is followed by Indy's return to his ordinary world, that of an archeology professor. Indy, or Dr. Jones as many know him, is shy and reserved in his ordinary world. Marcus Brody (Denholm Elliott), a colleague, is Indy's mentor, or "positive

figure who aids or trains the hero,” who establishes the call to adventure that sets the rest of the film in motion.³⁰ Marcus and Indy meet with government intelligence that describe Indy as an “expert on the occult and obtainer of rare antiquities.” These are the special powers, in a sense, that qualify Indy for the journey that he accepts willingly.³¹

The call is for Indy to beat the Nazis (i.e., the shadow) in their drive to find the Ark of the Covenant that holds the original Ten Commandments. Hitler, as the audience is told, has an obsession with the occult and is hiring a team of archeologists to find the Ark. As Indy explains the significance of the Ark, the audience quickly sees his expertise but also learns of his skepticism about Christianity. Indy ends his mini Biblical history lesson by saying, “if you believe in that sort of stuff.” This is important because we know by the third film he is forced to confront this theological skepticism. Indy accepts the call to adventure, this time focused on archeology with religious implication, but also gives the viewers more insight into his hero status when he explains to Brody that he will find the Ark and put it in a museum. Here, we see that Indy is not on a personal journey but instead one for a greater good, propelled by the iconic score.

After seeing Indy in the opening adventure, then in the classroom as a shy professor and later speaking with Brody about the next adventure, it is clear that Indy is much more comfortable in the special world of the heroic archeologist than in the ordinary world of the professor. Indy’s passion for adventure, as

opposed to his passivity in the university, is also emphasized in the score used in the ordinary world (subdued sound) versus special world (roaring sound) of the hero. This is likely why the entire trilogy spends the majority of screen time in the special world. Indy's journey takes him from California to Nepal where he finds his ex-lover, Marion (Karen Allen), who decides to tag along on the journey. The two fly to Cairo where they meet up with an old friend and ally, Sallah (John Rhys-Davies), who provides important information and who has been hired by the Nazis. Importantly, Belloq is leading the Nazis in their dig for the Ark.

As the story progresses, Indy gets closer to his goal and slowly starts to see the power of what he is looking for. Indy's phobia of snakes comes to the fore again, reminding the audience that he is not a perfect hero. While Indy is usually presented as a powerful figure, this scene has many high angles as we see the hero in a vulnerable situation. The snakes must be dealt with before Indy and Sallah can get the Ark from the underground tomb. Vogler contends, "weaknesses, imperfections, quirks, and vices immediately make a hero or any character more real and appealing."³² Having an imperfect lead character helps audiences relate to Indy and encourages them to root for him throughout the film. After Indy and Marion are left for dead in the tomb, the snakes (a threshold guardian) must be overcome in order to survive. Indy cheats death, a common hero trope, by crashing a large statue through a wall.

After following the Ark and overcoming numerous challenges, retaining his heroic status, Indy faces the biggest challenge yet. When the Nazis decide to open the Ark of the Covenant, Indy's special knowledge (which aid his position as the hero) informs him not to look at the Ark because doing so could yield tragic consequences. Indy makes sure Marion does not look, just before everyone else melts away as the Ark seals itself back up. While Indy was suspicious about any supernatural power from the Ark, he has learned not to underestimate any possibilities of Divine power. Vogler states, "heroes overcome obstacles and achieve goals, but they also gain knowledge and wisdom."³³ Indy has grown from the beginning of the film where he wrote off such power as theories or fairy tales. This character growth will become extremely important in the third film.

Indy returns to the university, though it is not the traditional return with elixir. Marion and Indy's relationship appears to have been rekindled, but Indy is far from satisfied as his heart is clearly in his work. The problem is that government bureaucrats have seized the Ark, which understandably upsets Indy and Brody. The audience feels the tension and can assume this is not the last that will be heard from Indy. The heroic view of Indy is still sustained by the audience in that taking the Ark also seized its power from the evil Nazis. Voytilla writes, the Hero's Journey "may also contribute to solving the greater world conflict."³⁴ The last scene of the film provokes questions, as the camera pans away from the ark in the massive government storage facility reminiscent of the last shots of the

millionaire's loot in *Citizen Kane*. Taking a destructive tool from the Nazis in this film aids the battle against evil, something that will also be seen in the third film. Next, the sequel to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* will be examined where Indy takes another journey that will test his knowledge and put him in harm's way, again, for the greater good.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

During the 1980s, Spielberg made two sequels to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Hollywood sequels often reek with studio pressure for box office receipts and even Spielberg has stated that some of his motivation for the second two Indy films was financially motivated.³⁵ In addition, both critics and the director were not happy with *Temple of Doom* specifically.³⁶ Discussing the 1940s era of the Indy films, Spielberg says, "I like the period because it was naïve and it was somewhat innocent and it represented the growing pains of the 20th century. And it's a very fertile time for movie stories."³⁷ If the director is drawn to the period warts and all, it may explain why he is not afraid to invoke the stereotypes of the period. That being said, the film is still problematic, and its violence and racial depictions led to the creation of the PG-13 rating.³⁸ More attention was placed on the story, action, and development of the Indy character. The drawbacks involved the racist representation of the natives.

The film was, for a time, banned in India due to the one-dimensional, savage depiction of Hindus.³⁹ It is possible that Spielberg unintentionally overlooked this issue since he was dealing with the aftermath of a grisly accident, which killed three people, in his production of *Twilight Zone – The Movie*.⁴⁰ While frustration with *Temple of Doom* is understandable, sweeping it under the rug is no different from ignoring Hollywood’s great early Westerns for their negative depiction of Native Americans. Therefore, we should not be so quick to write off an imperfect film if it is worthy of analysis. It is worth noting that the entire trilogy has stereotypes (including those of the Nazis, and the natives in the first film), but Indy himself transcends the usual masculine codes and is instead a vulnerable adventurer. *Temple of Doom* is generally accepted as the weakest of the Indy films, but it still has its place in this Hero’s Journey. While the racist depictions mar the film, the story still has importance as we see Indy develop throughout this journey.

Contrary to the first film, we never see Indy in his ordinary world of the university. *Temple of Doom* relies on imagination more heavily than the other two films. Most of Spielberg’s films build on the filmmaker’s imagination and require an imaginative response from the audience. This relates to the director’s child-like sense of fascination and in order to gain the most from his films, the audience should relate to that. In “The Pleasures of the Imagination,” Joseph Addison argues that gratification of imagination comes from the “Sight of what is *great*,

uncommon, or beautiful.”⁴¹ Each time Indy finds something great or uncommon, he shows a sense of gratification of finding something he could only have imagined to find. The darkest of the three films, the cinematography here invokes looming shadows to provide a constantly ominous vibe. In this film, a vulnerable Indy is forced to rely on quick and innovative thoughts about mythology in order to fully comprehend and defeat the villains.

This story opens in a Shanghai nightclub and ends in a small foreign village. One might notice that the opening of the film has Indy, an American in a foreign nightclub, wearing black pants and a white jacket with a bowtie. This image should be reminiscent of the attire worn by Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) in the 1942 classic *Casablanca*. Here it is important to remember how Spielberg’s deep influence from Hollywood’s Golden Age made its way onto the screen, best seen in the opening scene of *Temple of Doom*. Like the opening of *Raiders*, this film lands viewers in the middle of another one of Indy’s adventures. Again, Indy is against all odds when he accidentally drinks poison. After acquiring the antidote and narrowly escaping death, Indy, Willie (Kate Capshaw), and Short Round (Jonathan Ke Quan) board a plane that flies off into the sunset (again giving Indy a heroic sendoff early in the film). From here, the audience leaves the *Casablanca*-esque location for an unfamiliar place full of mythological traditions.

While *Raiders* had an emphasis on archeology, *Temple of Doom* is focused on mythology (building on Indy's fascination with the occult established in the first film). Joseph Campbell, in *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*, contends that the definition of a myth is not a search for meaning but an experience of meaning.⁴² In *Temple of Doom*, Indy goes through a transition from defining to experiencing the myths of the temple through the sacred Sankara stones. After his plane crashed, Indy and his companions wound up in a village where the people have lost their sacred stones as well as all of their children. They call upon Indy for help. Indy's skepticism drives his decision to refuse the initial call to adventure, referring to the village's ordeal as a ghost story.⁴³ Vogler writes, "Even the most heroic movie heroes will sometimes hesitate, express reluctance, or flatly refuse the call."⁴⁴ Indy is skeptical about the power of the story's artifact (stones) but throughout the film he learns to respect such power.

The Sankara stones, according to legend, have diamonds in them and those who acquire the stones will gain fortune and glory. At first, Indy "seeks the stones only for their monetary value. Yet, as the film progresses, he comes to perceive that they must be given back to the villagers, in spite of the high price he can sell them for."⁴⁵ Another turning point for Indy's motivations is when he realizes that Mola Ram (Amrish Puri) has enslaved children to mine the temple for the last two stones. Indy cannot help himself when he first sees the children, chained and digging. One child is being whipped and Indy heaves a rock at the

aggressor, exposing himself to the enemies. These are also the children that are missing from the village where the stones belong. From this point on, Indy understands that this entire journey is bigger than his aspirations for fortune and glory.

With any story that follows the Hero's Journey, the hero must face death. Vogler states, "true heroism is shown in stories when heroes offer themselves on the altar of chance, willing to take the risk that their quest for adventure may lead to danger, loss, or death."⁴⁶ Indy deals with death numerous times in this film. The opening scene, as mentioned, has Indy overcome death but shortly thereafter he survives a plane crash, and a wild ride down a dangerous river, as well as dodging murder one night in a palace. These scenes signify what Vogler calls the "approach to the inmost cave" where the hero will "make final preparations for the central ordeal of the adventure."⁴⁷ Once in the temple, Indy cheats death numerous times trying to get his hands on the stones. Mola Ram captures Indy and tries to turn him, eventually forcing him to sacrifice Willie, although the heroic Indy would not allow it. Indy's brief possession by Mola Ram and his snap back to reality represent a type of death and rebirth, an element of the journey that Vogler feels is necessary because the rebirth refocuses the hero.⁴⁸

Indy's resurrection catalyzes a series of showdowns, what Vogler refers to as something that "pits the hero and villains in an ultimate contest with the highest possible stakes, life and death."⁴⁹ Indy, Willie, and Short Round are pursued

constantly while trying to free the children and escape with the stones. One villain even has a voodoo doll of Indy, which hinders him throughout the climax. With a little help from Short Round, Indy overcomes and prevails. In the last standoff, on the wooden foot bridge sitting high above a river, Indy not only outsmarts and fends off an army of villains but also defends himself against Mola Ram one last time as he tries to rip out Indy's heart with his bare hand (as was seen earlier in the film with a different victim).

Contrary to *Raiders*, the return with elixir in *Temple of Doom* does not require a return to the ordinary world. The children are set free along with the rocks returned to their rightful owners in the nearby village. Indy is happy to give up fortune and glory for the understanding of the true power of the stones. Unlike in *Raiders* where the Ark was meant to be in a museum, Indy figured if he kept the stones they would end up collecting dust, presumably in a museum, and they would be better off in the hands of those who truly appreciate them. This film ends with Indy still in the special world of the hero, though one could argue he left the world he was fighting in for the one he was fighting for. It is not until the next film that we see Indy back in his ordinary world as a university professor. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* continues the journey, which is arguably his most important one yet.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade

This film opens during Indy's childhood where audiences see his early sense of adventure, fear of snakes, and also get the first glimpse of his father. The depiction of young Indy is much brighter than the adult hero; there is a sense of innocence not found in the rest of the film. Each movie in this original trilogy begins with a sequence that "quickly captures the audience's attention by providing thrilling mini-adventures, teasers with truncated but definable beginnings, middles, and endings."⁵⁰ What is unique about *Last Crusade's* opener is that the audiences are treated to an adventure with a young Indy in the boy scouts (in Utah, 1912). Indy walks into a cave and finds a suspicious-looking man uncovering the Cross of Coronado. Echoing the views in *Raiders*, Indy wants to take the cross because he feels it belongs in a museum. After grabbing the cross, Indy is pursued by the other diggers. This chase establishes the origin of Indy's fear of snakes while confronting one in a circus train car. It ends at Indy's house, where we meet his overbearing father, Professor Henry Jones (Sean Connery). Eventually Indy's pursuers get the cross back, which only increases Indy's competitive drive recalled in the previous films.

The next scene cuts to the narrative's present day, 1938 off the coast of Portugal. Indy is on another adventure after stealing the cross again from the same man. Following Indy's jump into the water with the cross, the film brings the

audience back to his ordinary world as a professor of archaeology. This is the first time Indy is seen in the classroom since *Raiders*. The return also reunites audiences with Marcus Brody, Indy's mentor at the university. Audiences are reminded of Indy's discomfort in his ordinary world when there is a massive line of students and administrators outside of his office door. It is not long before he puts on his signature fedora and crawls out the window towards his next adventure. Vogler argues that sometimes the hero is called to adventure due to a lack or need.⁵¹ The call in this film comes as a need after Indy's father is kidnapped. Henry was pursuing the Holy Grail and when he got close, the Nazis snatched him.

Indy's skepticism over anything theological begins to crumble when he starts to wonder if the Holy Grail, referred to in the film as the Cup of Christ, really exists. Indy and Marcus decide to search for Henry, who must have known he was being followed because he mailed his notes to Indy. The artifact in this story marks its emphasis on theology, something Indy will have to face more directly than in any previous story. The inciting incident is the abduction of Henry. Also, the relationship between Indy and his father, as foreshadowed in the film's opening, is rocky at best. Since Indy is a hero, he understands he needs to do what is right. He may not fully believe in the divine, but his past adventures have shown him he cannot underestimate the potential power of any artifact he seeks.

Also seeking the divine power of the Holy Grail are the familiar villains from the first film, the German Nazis. This may be, as Friedman writes, because “Spielberg draws upon a history of stereotypes deeply embedded within the serial action/adventure format to fashion his villains.”⁵² Friedman goes further to argue that all of Indy’s adversaries are darker versions of himself, people Indy could be under different circumstances. This is similar to how the hero in Westerns (who represent order) is often similar to the villain (who represents chaos). The reason the Western hero can defeat his foe is because of a deep connection and understanding between them. Indy has the same drive to seek the artifacts that his adversaries do; the line is drawn between them based on what they would do once obtaining the desired piece.

After rejecting a script written by writer/director/producer Chris Columbus, Spielberg opted to turn the third film into “a quest for the father” (McBride 401). This journey suggests Spielberg’s personal life and the division between himself and his absent father throughout Spielberg’s childhood. Schiff states, “In Spielberg movies, fatherhood has a mystical shimmer.”⁵³ In the *Last Crusade*, Indy ends up turning a mythical father-son relationship into a more grounded reality. This draws the audience in because Indy, in the presence of his commanding father, changes from exceedingly masculine and confident into shy and intimidated. Towards the end of the film, the quest for the Holy Grail can be seen as a plot device that gets us to what really matters – the reconciliation of

Indy and Henry through belief in God. The importance of this part of the journey is emphasized in the shot-reverse-shots between Indy and Henry throughout Indy's trip to the Grail and back to his father.

At the end of the film, Indy is forced to take a leap of faith across a bottomless trench in order to save his father. Indy's willingness to put his life on the line in this manner is a new test for the character. Alsford contends, "It might be argued that the true test of the heroic is whether one is prepared to sacrifice the role."⁵⁴ After Henry gets shot, Indy is ready to sacrifice himself for a chance to save his father. Indy must venture towards the Grail's resting place, avoiding booby traps on the way owing to his wealth of survival experience. Indy steps over the trench only to find an invisible bridge that appears to believers and would remain invisible to nonbelievers. Contrary to his views in *Raiders*, Indy chooses to believe. Indy's faith allows him to land on the bridge, which leads to finding the Cup of Christ. After choosing the correct cup, something the villains pursuing Indy did not do, Holy Water is brought and poured from the Cup onto Henry's wound, saving him.

The end of this journey leaves Indy more deeply changed than any of the past adventures. After dealing with archeology and mythology, both of which proved to Indy not to underestimate the power of what he seeks, *Last Crusade* makes Indy find his faith. With the combination of theology and the absent father, this is the most personal of Indy's journeys. Vogler argues, "Heroes don't just

visit death and come home. They return changed, transformed.”⁵⁵ Indy defeats death, as well as evil, by finding his faith. This film is simultaneously a road both to Indy’s faith and his father, who is a strong believer. It appears that if Indy found his faith, he would find the relationship with his father. At the end of the film he has officially reconnected with his father, signified when Indy drops the Holy Grail and decides to grab his father’s hand before falling into a massive crevasse. This is a complete transformation from the Indy in *Raiders* who thought of religious stories as fairy tales.

The closing of *Last Crusade* shows Indy and his group riding their horses into the sunset with John William’s iconic and uplifting score playing in the background, reminding us again that we are watching a hero. The audiences do not see Indy return to his ordinary world and are left watching the hero as he rides towards his next adventure – whatever it may be. Like the previous films, Indy does not gain possession of what he sought in the beginning. He gains something more important. The elixir in this film is the reuniting of Indy and his father, the Holy Grail and faith in God bringing them together. *Last Crusade* wraps up a trilogy where audiences are able to see Indy grow as a person and adventurer. In discussing the historical importance of art, T.S. Eliot writes, “no poet, no artist of any art, has complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.”⁵⁶ This means that contemporary critics must weigh the merits of current art against those who

influenced the artist in question. By this film, it is clear that Spielberg has used his own imagination and successfully brought to life versions of the heroic characters in the famous pulp serials he grew up with.⁵⁷ If one views these three films as a single journey, it is clear that Indiana Jones has grown from a skeptical adventurer to a strong man of faith and family.

Conclusion and Implications

Religion is not only found in overtly religious films. As Craig Detweiler has noted, it can be beneficial to look for some less obvious examples of theology in film for fruitful studies.⁵⁸ Throughout this journey, Indy grows and learns a great deal about his life and work while searching for sacred and ancient artifacts. Looking at the first three films as a whole, Friedman writes, “Jones and his allies survive because they ultimately recognize the power of the divine within the artifacts. Although Indiana fails to retain possession to these objects, he finds personal fulfillment and spiritual illumination.”⁵⁹ Each of the artifacts he seeks has religious significance. The traditions represented are Judaism in *Raiders*, Hinduism in *Temple of Doom*, and Christianity in *Last Crusade*. Friedman argues, “all three films function as stories of moral education.”⁶⁰ With each adventure, Indy grows personally and professionally. Constantly surrounded and subjected to

religious power in his journey, it should be no surprise that Indy eventually becomes a believer in God.

A question remains, however; why should Spielberg chose to focus on Christianity and not Judaism (his own religion)? One theory is that the story originates with George Lucas and it could be that he envisioned it with a Christian emphasis. Knowing that both Lucas and Spielberg work closely on all aspects of their films, it may be more accurate to assume that the filmmakers saw the Cup of Christ to be an iconic artifact representative of religion in a general sense. Also, how can we know the filmmakers are serious about their insertion of faith into this story? Indy, for the first time, choses *not* to go after the artifact that he could have risked his life to snatch before falling into the crevasse. Instead, Indy took his father's hand. The opposite might have occurred if Indy had not made his leap of faith. It is important to note that if these films were released in the reverse order this whole analysis would be reversed as well. Indy would have been a hero moving from faith to increased skepticism. Since this is not the case, Indy gradually moves closer to faith throughout this trilogy.

True heroes are always destined for adventure. As Indy rides off into the sunset in the *Last Crusade* we do not see him returning to the ordinary world. The next time audiences see Indy in the ordinary world at the university, is in another sequel, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). The fourth film, set decades after the third installment, may signify a new journey. Indy is

much older and gets married by the end of this film. Both the hero and his society have changed. In a new world Indy must find different reasons to escape the university to get back out into the special world of the hero where he is most comfortable. Less certain remains the question of where the journey leads from here? Audiences are left free to speculate about the answer. What we know is that Indy is married and has a son, Mutt, played by Shia LaBeouf. Therefore, a new journey may follow just Mutt filling Indy's shoes or could involve the entire family. The era of the Cold War was still raging at the end of *Crystal Skull*, so maybe Indy finds a new foe in Moscow.

Audiences will likely welcome another adventure from Indy because he is a hero to which people can relate. As the Hero's Journey informs us, the hero is often imperfect and capable of being defeated even though he or she usually wins. The hero can be an underdog and on the defensive. People relate to that, especially if you take into consideration the hypermasculine action films released during the 1980s alongside the Indiana Jones trilogy.⁶¹ Friedman writes, "All three Indiana Jones films contain such conspicuous deviations from the macho codes that dominate their source materials...Spielberg challenges simplistic definitions of masculine heroism and offers significant shades of gray."⁶² These shades of gray keep the character interesting. Indy never comes out unscathed, but he remains a victorious hero in each film. Indy's journeys will always be

accepted; he is the everyman's hero, and one that eventually found faith under that iconic wide-brimmed fedora.

¹ Lester D Friedman and Brent Notbohm, *Steven Spielberg: Interviews* (United States: The University Press of Mississippi, 2000), VIII.

² Friedman and Notbohm, IX.

³ Stephen Schiff, "Seriously Spielberg," Ed. Lester Friedman and Brent D. Notbohm, *Steven Spielberg: Interviews*. (United States: The University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 178-9.

⁴ Dean A. Kowalski, "Introduction," *Steven Spielberg and Philosophy: We're Gonna Need a Bigger Book*, Ed. Dean A. Kowalski, (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 1.

⁵ Elissa Nelson, "Beneath the Surface and the Excess: An Examination of Critical and Aesthetic Attacks on Films of the 1980s," *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 46, No. 5, 2013.

⁶ The Fourth Film, *Kingdom of the Crystal Skill* stands alone and may signify a new journey as rumors of a fifth film continue to circulate.

⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, (Novato: New World Library, 2008, originally printed in 1968), 1.

⁸ Campbell, 337.

⁹ Mike Alsford., *Heroes and Villains* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 8.

¹⁰ Some examples of recent complex heroes in the new superhero cycle are *Watchmen* (2009) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012).

¹¹ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers (Third Edition)*, (Chelsea: Sheridan Books, 2007), 7.

¹² Wayne Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," (*Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 60.2. 1974. 165-74), 171.

¹³ Stuart Voytilla, (*Myth and the Movies: Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films*. United States: Sheridan Books, Inc, 1999), 19.

¹⁴ Voytilla, 290.

¹⁵ Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (Third Edition), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 257.

¹⁶ Lester D Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁷ Joseph McBride, *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* (Second Edition), (United States: The University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 16.

¹⁸ This can be seen in movies such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, *The Color Purple* (1985), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), and *War of the Worlds* (2005).

¹⁹ Peter Wollen, "The Auteur Theory," *Film Theory and Criticism* (Seventh Edition). Ed. Leo Brady and Marshall Cohen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 466. Also, Spielberg's films are easy to recognize, not only for the aforementioned family dynamic, but also by their distinct and tightly focused spectacle, choice of film score, and child-like sense of adventure.

²⁰ Susan Royal, "Steven Spielberg in His Adventures on Earth," Ed. Lester Friedman, and Brent D. Notbohm, *Steven Spielberg: Interviews*, (United States: The University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 98.

²¹ A great example of this, to cite one of Spielberg's heroes, is Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. This film grew in popularity over time and still frequently shows up in new scholarship and criticism.

²² Voytilla, 18.

²³ McBride, 13.

²⁴ Spielberg, like DeMille, is a bankable director, known for serious epic films, is a studio partner, is regularly panned by the art film crowd, etc.

²⁵ Longinus, "On the Sublime," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, Ed. Walter Jackson Bate, (Miami: Wolf Den Books, 2002), 57-8.

²⁶ Vogler, 30.

²⁷ Shooting in the back is a taboo dating back to the Wild West, which aligns Belloq and his associates as the bad guys.

²⁸ Vogler, 66.

²⁹ John Williams' famous theme music turns up for the first time here.

³⁰ Vogler, 39.

³¹ See willing heroes in Vogler, page 110.

³² Vogler, 33.

³³ Vogler, 31.

³⁴ Voytilla, 19.

³⁵ Schiff, 176.

³⁶ McBride, 354-5.

³⁷ Royal, 137.

³⁸ Prior to this film, filmmakers were generally working towards a PG or R rating.

³⁹ A more recent analysis of this film from an Indian journalist can be seen here:
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-toi/all-that-matters/SHASHI-ON-SUNDAY-India-Jones-and-the-template-of-dhoom/articleshow/1746623.cms?flstry=1>

⁴⁰ During a night shoot for the film, a segment directed by John Landis saw a helicopter in a scene fall from the sky and crush three actors. This aftermath of this tragedy took a large toll on everyone involved in the film. For more information, see McBride pp. 343-352.

⁴¹ Joseph Addison, "The Pleasure of the Imagination," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate, (Miami: Wolf Den Books, 2002), 169.

⁴² Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*, (United States: Anchor Books, 1991), 5.

⁴³ Note that once again, Indy has reverted back to his comfortable skepticism. Of course, that will all change.

⁴⁴ Voger, 108.

⁴⁵ Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 84.

⁴⁶ Vogler, 32.

⁴⁷ Vogler, 143.

⁴⁸ Vogler, 155.

⁴⁹ Vogler, 200.

⁵⁰ Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 80.

⁵¹ Vogler, 103.

⁵² Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 92.

⁵³ Schiff, 186.

⁵⁴ Alsford, 57.

⁵⁵ Vogler, 156.

⁵⁶ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate, (Miami: Wolf Den Books, 2002), 482.

⁵⁷ A list of potential influences for the Indiana Jones story and characters can be found at: <http://www.theraider.net/information/influences/inspirations.php>

⁵⁸ Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 83.

⁶⁰ Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 78.

⁶¹ Major action stars of the 1980s are Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Predator*, *Commando*, *The Terminator*) and Sylvester Stallone (*First Blood*, *Rambo II*, the *Rocky* films), among others. A useful critique on the hypermasculine action genre is Tasker, Yvonne. "Dumb Movies for Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice in Contemporary Action Cinema." *Critical Visions in Film Theory*. Edited by Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj. (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), 754-766.

⁶² Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 113.

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