

## Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade ★★★

---

**Year of Release:** 1989

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** USA

**Verdict:** See It

---

With *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas finally have fulfilled an informal agreement they made in 1979 to make a trilogy of movies about an adventurous archaeologist modeled in part after James Bond. In this alleged final installment of the series, Professor “Indiana” Jones embarks on a quest for the Holy Grail, an endeavor that takes him from the United States to Venice, Austria, Berlin, and the Middle East. During his adventures, Indy must contend with Nazis, religious fanatics, rats, a femme fatale, and perhaps most challenging of all, his father.

*The Last Crusade* begins with an extended flashback to 1912. River Phoenix, doing his best Harrison Ford impersonation, plays Indiana Jones as a teen in a humorous sequence that establishes the hallmarks of the character: his fear of snakes, his hat, his whip, his scar, and his love of adventure. Then the film shifts to 1938 with Ford once again reprising his most famous role. Actually, *The Last Crusade* contains quite a few familiar faces as *Lost Ark* alumni Denholm Elliott (as Marcus Brody, the curator who once got lost in his own museum) and John Rhys-Davies (as Indy’s faithful ally, Sal-lah) both have returned for Indiana’s last adventure. The cast also includes Alison Doody as the requisite love-interest, an Austrian art historian who has nothing in mind but her own self-interests.

In many ways, *The Last Crusade* is the antithesis of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. In fact, Spielberg claims that he made *The Last Crusade* to apologize for the gloomy, gruesome violence in *Temple of Doom*. Where *Doom* showed excess, *Crusade* shows surprising restraint; Spielberg has toned down the violence considerably. Where *Doom* was dark and mean-spirited, *Crusade* is light-hearted and good-natured. Spielberg and company play this one for tongue-in-cheek laughs. Whereas the relentless, non-stop action in *Temple of Doom* completely overshadowed and overwhelmed the characters, the action in *Last Crusade* takes a back seat to character development.

The first third of *The Last Crusade* is atypically slow, but the pace immediately picks up the moment Sean Connery hits the screen. Connery is brilliantly cast as Indy’s father, Dr. Henry Jones, a professor of Medieval Literature who has devoted his entire life to locating the Holy Grail at the expense of estranging himself from his son. Playing against type in a tour de force performance, Con-

nelly is hilarious. A far cry from his days as 007, he’s bookish and blundering—making him totally ill-suited to his son’s dangerous lifestyle. Connery’s welcome presence on screen keeps *The Last Crusade* from being just a retread of the first two films. Connery always seems to inject life into his movies, whether they are good (*The Untouchables*) or mediocre (*The Presidio*), and *The Last Crusade* is no exception.

The heart of the movie, making it special, is the father-son relationship between Connery and Ford, who play off each other well and build an amusing rapport. The movie is at its best when Indy and his father bicker and nag at each other, especially during their attempts to foil the Nazis. The friction between the Jones boys runs especially high whenever Henry Jones infuriates his son by calling him “Junior.” When he’s around his father, Indy often feels intimidated and defensive, and Ford effectively portrays these emotions. *The Last Crusade* is the first film in the series to grant Ford an opportunity to give Indiana some depth and humanity. Eventually, of course, the two men overcome their estrangement to forge a relationship of warmth, tenderness, and mutual respect.

When it comes to action, *The Last Crusade* falls short in comparison to its predecessors. Although the movie is well-paced, not one of its action sequences is memorable or terribly original, and the film never really got my adrenaline pumping. *The Last Crusade* is fun and exciting, but it’s not dazzling or awe-inspiring. In my mind, nearly every action sequence in *Raiders* is a classic, and although *Temple of Doom* goes overboard, the film is undeniably tense and hair-raising. By contrast, *Crusade* is too tame and fails to distinguish itself from imitators of the series, such as *Romancing the Stone*.

The plot is also disappointing. Except for substituting the Grail for the Ark, the movie is just a regurgitation of the *Raiders* story line, with Indy once again racing against the Nazis to unearth a powerful religious artifact. And unfortunately, *The Last Crusade* is the only film of the trilogy without any lasting impact. Whereas *Raiders* left us stunned and awe-struck and *Doom* left us disturbed and exhausted, *Crusade* is memorable mostly for Connery’s performance. The movie also suffers from being the third in the series; it faces higher audience expectations and must labor harder to achieve originality and avoid repetition.

But perhaps it's unfair to draw so many comparisons between *The Last Crusade* and its predecessors. While it may not be a classic, *The Last Crusade* is certainly an appealing crowd-pleaser that never fails to provide old-fashioned, larger-than-life entertainment. And while I was somewhat disap-

pointed, I have to admit that I haven't had so much fun being disappointed since *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. I'll definitely miss Professor Jones and his wild escapades, but I have to admire his good judgment in knowing when to hang up his hat—and his whip, for that matter.

© 1989 – Randy Parker - All Rights Reserved  
<http://www.emusements.com/randy/RRI/>