

# Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull (2008)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 4; L-1 ; S/N -1. Running time: 2 hours 2 min.

*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."*

*Genesis 2:17*

*If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will not succeed.*

*For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces with your bows.*

*Psalms 21:11-12*

Although he occasionally refers to being too old, Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones keeps up as brisk a pace as he ever did in the three earlier Steven Spielberg films. It has been close to 20 years since Indy fought the Nazis on the big screen, and in the new film it is 1957 when the Russian Communists are the villains of choice. Cate Blanchett's Irina Spalko is a worthy opponent, fighting with guns and a sword while leading a burly bunch of Russian goons whose main purpose seems to be trying to shoot and/or capture Indy and his pals. Need we say that although Indiana and company deep in a South American cave.

2008 Paramount Pictures

they expend thousands of bullets, they never hit their targets? This might lead our children, should they take all this screen nonsense seriously, to wonder why we ever feared the Russians so much if they were such poor shots.

The action begins in the Southwestern US with Irina and company brutally shooting the guards at the entrance of a military installation. With Indy and his friend Mac (Ray Winstone) as captives, Irina forces our hero to find a certain package stored in a huge warehouse filled with wood crates, which he does by an ingenious means. There follows a series of thrilling, escapes chases, captures and recaptures, during which the prize that the Russians had been seeking—the crystal skull of the title—changes hands back and forth several times. It seems that this sacred object is the key to unlocking the vast knowledge of an alien race that had landed in South America thousands of years ago.

One of the new characters we meet in a delightful way is Mutt Williams (Shia La Beouf). He shows up amidst the misty steam of a train engine astride a motor cycle, his appearance apparently in homage to Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. He even talks like a biker or budding hippy of the period. Beginning with the revelation that Mutt is the son of old flame Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen), Indy is faced with the knowledge that he is a father. The two race off to the mountainous jungles of South America where Marion is being held captive, and soon the special effects people are working overtime to create the ancient temple complex and its marvelous mechanisms for opening doors and chambers. Irina, of course, is holding Marion hostage as she also seeks the resting place for the crystal skull.

The film delivers on its promise of excitement, though as

others have noted, the freshness of the original cannot be duplicated—and one definitely does not want to think very much about all of the wild stunts and effects. Despite its unreal nature, however, Spielberg does inject a serious touch of the Fifties when he has Indy fired by his college because of the suspicion that he is tainted by Communism. This note of McCarthy era anti-Communist hysteria in academia is enhanced by the remark of Indy's friend Dean Charles Stanforth (Jim Broadbent) that he has lost his job in defending him.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1) How is Stephen Spielberg's creation a good synthesis of the pulp fiction and Saturday matinee serials of bygone days? What do you like best about Indy?

2) How does the crystal skull and the alien civilization that produced it reflect the belief held by some that the pyramids and such were created by an alien race, who are also enshrined in the ancient myths of gods and heroes?

3) What seems to be the role of Prof. Oxley (John Hurt) in the story? To raise the questions and provide the information for the audience?

4) How is Irina and her thirst to know everything like such characters as Icharus, Pandora, or the quests of Dr. Jekyll and other sci-fi scientists? Compare her to the builders of the Tower of Babel.