

MONTHLY MOVIES

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It's about time: Aging adventurer returns to face his destiny

By T. Rob Brown

Time and age are two important concerns for many of us, both personally and cinematically. Watches and clocks tick away as time runs out in a spy or detective story. Time travel serves as a major trope in sci-fi films.

We might even be *obsessed* with time as a culture, especially in the modern hustle and bustle. Yet even the wizard Gandalf had this to say to Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

That's the real trick, isn't it?

Even aging adventurers discover that sometimes their own body can become one of the biggest obstacles as they try to reach their goal. So, let's delve into the world of *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, which opened June 30 at cinemas. If you're counting, this is the fifth film in the franchise, which also included a prequel TV series.

Before I begin, while we're on the topic of time, let's lay out the film and TV timeline for the Indiana Jones franchise—you might need it to keep track. I'm not including novels, comic books, video games, or other media here. *NOTE: There may be SPOILERS in the rest of this article. If you haven't seen any of these films, I recommend you watch them first.*

- 1872: Henry Jones Sr. (portrayed by Sean Connery) is born Dec. 12 in Scotland.
- 1899: Henry Jones Jr. (also known as Indiana Jones, portrayed by Harrison Ford) is born July 1.
- 1907: *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* (1990s) begin with an 8-year-old Indy. The series covers his adventures up until 1920, at the age of 21.
- 1912: The opening sequence of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) introduces us to a young Indy as he acquires his whip, the scar on his chin, his fear of snakes, and his famous fedora.
- 1926: Indy begins his off-and-on-again relationship with Marion Ravenwood (portrayed by Karen Allen), daughter of Indy's mentor, Abner Ravenwood.
- 1935: *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)—many don't realize the second film of the series is a prequel to the original film.
- 1936: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)—the film that started it all. Indy recovers the biblical Ark of the Covenant. He also renews his relationship with Marion.
- 1938: *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*—most of this film takes place at this time. Indy recovers the biblical Holy Grail, which obsessed crusaders and impacted the King Arthur legend.
- 1944: The opening sequence of *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (2023) introduces us to Indy's first encounter with Archimedes' dial near the end of World War II.
- 1957: *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008)—this is many fans' least favorite film of the franchise. I like to call it, "Indiana Jones and the First X-File." In this one, Indy seeks out the famous Peruvian legend of the crystal skull, we learn he speaks and understands Quechua—the language of the Inca Empire—which coincidentally was the basis for the Hutt language in *Star Wars* (1977), another Ford-starring film. He learns he has a son and Indy reunites with Marion.
- 1959: Indy and Marion marry. This is shown at the end of *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*.
- 1969: *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*. The majority of this film takes place at the time of the moon landing. Indy must recover Archimedes' dial, which he previously held a piece of back in 1944.

As I was saying, time is an important element in this series. The final film, the swan song if you will, certainly shows this repeatedly. The director utilizes clocks and watches throughout the film. Ford makes sure to show us the effects of aging on the human body and the difficulties that can pose physically and on memories.

Despite all that, he's back: bullwhip, fedora, bomber jacket, khakis, and Webley pistol—oh wait, the latter he lost in *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Yep, he doesn't bring a sidearm with him on the newest journey. Famed director Steven Spielberg does not return to lead this film either, but at least legendary composer John Williams remains at the helm of the soundtrack.

Indy serves as one of cinema's most iconic heroes. He's a professor, a man of knowledge, but also of experience—he's a world traveler who went everywhere and did a great many things. While he's definitely a hero, he's also kind of a jerk. I think he's seen so much death in his life that he's become a bit hardened to it. You can really see this during the 1944 scenes. He's even back to his old exploits, going up against Nazis in search of the latest MacGuffin.

And what of Archimedes' dial? "What is a MacGuffin?" you might ask.

The MacGuffin is a term coined by famed director Alfred Hitchcock and refers to what's usually an item that everyone is chasing and fighting to get—it's a plot device that advances the story. Some of the most famous MacGuffins in cinematic history include: the Maltese falcon (*The Maltese Falcon* (1941)), the letters of transit (*Casablanca* (1942)), rosebud (*Citizen Kane* (1941)), the Holy Grail (both *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) and *The Last Crusade*), the Death Star plans (*Star Wars*), the Ark of the Covenant (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*), the Necronomicon (*Evil Dead* franchise), the briefcase (*Pulp Fiction* (1994)), the One Ring (*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy), and the Orb (*Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014)). Sometimes it's a person like Doug in *The Hangover* (2009) or Private Ryan in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

Sure, the dial's a MacGuffin—a common device used in the Indiana Jones franchise. Sometimes MacGuffins only drive the plot, but sometimes they actually create a direct effect on the characters. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the Ark of the Covenant melts the faces of those who look upon it after it opens. The cup of Christ heals Indy's father's bullet wound in *The Last Crusade*. In Indy fashion, Archimedes' dial is no different.

Coincidentally, I found it to be a bit of meta-humor that Toby Jones, who plays Basil—Indy's friend who goes up against the Nazis alongside him in 1944—was a Nazi scientist in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) with Hydra.

One thing that isn't the same is the logo. For some unknown reason, the graphic artists either made a creative choice or forgot how to create the traditional Indy logo. This is the first Indy film since the Disney buyout of Lucasfilm Ltd. Maybe they forgot?

The traditional promotional logo is a single line for the name "Indiana Jones" with "and the" under that, then the film's title under that. His name appears in a stylized font with a reddish-orange gradient that shifts to yellow at the bottom of the letters. Yet, for the newest film they split his name into two lines and it's just yellow. Online fans "corrected" it and made their own versions of the new film's promotional posters.

A couple things that returned in terms of sound effects: The famous Wilhelm scream, which was featured in nearly every Indy and Star Wars film, as well as the *Millenium Falcon* engine failure sound.

Another thing that's back in this film is a 40-year-old Indy due to a digital de-aging process. Multiple online sources reported that it took more than 100 visual effects artists to recreate the younger Indy. At the time of filming, Ford was 80. Simultaneously, they also de-aged actor Mads Mikkelsen for the 1944 scenes. Turning back the clock takes a lot of digital work.

While it wasn't a significant reference, I loved that the alleged spear of destiny was also in this film—since both artifacts tie into the specialized dramatic conflict called "Man vs. Destiny." This film is all about one man's destiny—both on and off the big screen—as a historical legend within his story and a legend of the silver screen.

Overall, I felt this film did a great job of showing the contrast between a younger Indy and an older Indy, emphasizing the effects of aging on the body.

Directed by James Mangold, *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Ford, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Antonio Banderas, John Rhys-Davies, Mikkelsen, Jones, and Allen. It runs for

2 hours and 24 minutes. It received a 69% on the Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer and yet an 88% audience score, plus a 6.9/10 on the International Movie Database. I give it two thumbs up. Sure, it's not perfect—but what it does, it does well.

Briefly, I'd like to also talk about a somewhat *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*-like film. Well, it involves aliens: *Asteroid City* (2023).

While I'm not the biggest Wes Anderson fan, this was definitely one of his better films. It hit all the odd marks that fulfill the trademark inclusions of the highly stylized Anderson films, yet it's a sci-fi comedy—what I believe might be a new genre for the director. His films are typically funny and odd. If you're unfamiliar with them, here are some of my favorites: *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), *Rushmore* (1998), and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004).

Aside from his name in the credits, here are 10 things that can help you determine if it's an Anderson film: frequent collaborators (like Jason Schwartzman), '60s and '70s music, chapter-like structure—though this one is structured like a play, dysfunctional families, deadpan humor, recurring themes, slow motion, quirky costumes, symmetrical imagery, and a fairly unique color palette.

To achieve the color palette for this film set in the mid-1950s, director of photography Robert Yeoman shot the entire thing on Kodak 35mm color and black & white film to get the striking results, according to a June 14, 2023, article on Kodak's website. The article further indicates that Yeoman's collaboration with Anderson included 11 feature films all shot on analog film. Credit for the color palette also goes to colorist Gareth Spensley who did the final color grading for the film.

Directed by Anderson, *Asteroid City* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Jeffrey Wright, Tilda Swinton, Bryan Cranston, Ed Norton, Adrien Brody, Liv Schreiber, Steve Carell, Matt Dillon, Willem Dafoe, Margot Robbie, Jeff Goldblum, and Tony Revolori. It runs for 1 hour and 45 minutes. It received a certified fresh 73% on the Tomatometer and a 61% audience score, plus a 7.1/10 on IMDb. I give it one thumb up.

Well, we're out of *time* for this issue. Wait, did you just groan?

"The show must go on."