

**BFI Future Film member Simon Arwas recommends
Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981, dir. Steven Spielberg)**



Raiders of the Lost Ark is not only great entertainment, it's something much more than that; it's an adventure film that has stood the test of time and set an example for all adventure films that have followed.

In the year 1936, Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) is an archaeologist and adventurer who is hired by US government agents to search and find the Ark of the Covenant before the Nazis do, and make themselves invincible. The Nazis are being helped by Indy's nemesis Rene Belloq (Paul Freeman). With the help of his old flame Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen) and his trusty sidekick Sallah (John Rhys-Davies), Indy sets off on a wild adventure to claim the Ark before the Nazis get their hands on it.

The plot is simple but highly effective; what sets it apart from other action movies of its time as well as other action movies of today is its unique blend of action and adventure.

What also sets it apart is its subject matter of archaeology: the sense of discovery, the search for lost artefacts, what those artefacts might hold, travelling to these different countries to experience different cultures and find out more about those long forgotten artefacts. What secrets would they be hiding? What powers might they possess?

The humour in this movie is also one of the main highlights. For a high-octane action adventure picture, with very high stakes and featuring some pretty scary hide-outs, as well as some fairly gruesome deaths, this film manages to remain light-hearted and maintains an enormous sense of fun.

Director Steven Spielberg's direction is just immaculate, the sense of scope he gives to this film and his tagging of the action scenes and handling of the more dramatic elements gives the movie a larger than life feel. The produc-

tion design is stupendous, the costumes are splendid, the cinematography is gorgeous and really does add to the film's period setting.

The score by John Williams is marvellous, the locations (Egypt, Nepal, South America) are wonderful, the scenery is breathtaking. The action scenes are spectacular, expertly staged and fantastically choreographed, the stunts are jaw-dropping and the special effects are superbly crafted and hold up pretty well today.

The acting is spot on, Harrison Ford crafts a character he was born to play as Indiana Jones - he's charming, charismatic and debonair but above all, at the core he's just an ordinary guy like you and me. When he's not travelling the world searching for artefacts, he's a college professor teaching archaeology to students. This backdrop helps to ground him and make us relate to him and put us in his shoes, and Ford pulls off all these elements effortlessly.

Karen Allen is feisty and smart as Marion Ravenwood. She and Indy have a history, they once knew each other when they were young, but he broke off the relationship and she's initially reluctant to work with him at first but after a little persuasion, she joins him and shows that together, they make the perfect pair. Sure, she gets her damsel in distress moment but she proves more than capable of looking after herself.

John Rhys-Davies is also highly effective as Sallah, he's jovial, good-natured, tough, and above all, honest. He's there to spout out all the religious and historical details about the Ark and becomes the voice of reason in the expedition.

Paul Freeman is also wonderful as Rene Belloq, the main villain of the film. In some ways, he's like Indy in that he's also an archaeologist and also seeks the Ark. By contrast to Indy, who wants to retrieve the Ark for the U.S. government, Belloq wants the Ark for himself as he wants to talk to God - and because he wants power.

Raiders of the Lost Ark is undoubtedly one of my favourite movies and a classic treasure.

Simon Arwas writes an independent, self-funded blog [The Anonymous Critic](#). Simon is a kooky, eccentric, passionate, adventurous amateur film buff with an encyclopedic and eclectic knowledge of films and TV shows from London. He is currently studying film at City Lit.