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**Rajinikanth** Shyam Sabu

**Anna Nicholas** Stephanie McVey

**Charlie Brill** Inspector Ramesh

**Jack Kehler** Paul Lorre

**Christopher Neame** Van Hoeven

## CREW

Directed by **Dwight Little**

Written by **Curt Allen** and **Nico Mastorakis**

Produced by **Nico Mastorakis**

Co-Producers **Ashok Amritraj** and **Murali Manohar**

Associate Producer **Perry Husman**

Edited by **Nico Mastorakis** and **Nancy Morrison**

Director of Photography **Eric Anderson**

Music by **Jerry Grant**

# BLOODSTONE HOLLYWOOD TO KOLLYWOOD, VIA GREECE

by Mark Cunliffe

The 1980s were something of an interesting time for mainstream American cinema. The previous decade had seen the rise of New Hollywood, a cinematic movement that was all about reflecting the uncertainty that was being felt in society as a whole. The films produced in the 1970s saw themes and characters who expressly occupied not the black and white of traditional Hollywood's genre cinema, but the morally dubious grey areas that lay between them instead. However, New Hollywood experienced an unceremonious fall with Michael Cimino's costly folly, *Heaven's Gate* (1980) and, as the 1980s dawned, studio executives decreed that the days of the auteur were over. No longer could they bankroll an original vision that could not be guaranteed to recoup their investment. The 1980s were a time when profit was everything and 'greed is good'. As a result, Hollywood began to give audiences movies that were proven box office successes, returning to the well time and again to produce variations on a theme; sequels, cash-ins and rip-offs.

In my essay, *Heroes Don't Die: The Need for Jake Speed*, which accompanied Arrow Video's 2018 Blu-ray release of Andrew Lane's 1986 B-movie popcorn adventure *Jake Speed*, I discussed how George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, two key figures in the New Hollywood movement of the 1970s, rang in the changes for the more optimistic, good guys vs. bad guys flavored 80s with the incredible box office successes of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* franchises. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was arguably the turning point; the 1981 action adventure homage to 1930s Saturday morning cinema achieved that potent mix of critical and commercial success that Hollywood could not ignore, in the shape of nine Oscar nominations and a whopping \$389.9 million in box office takings. Keen to grab a



piece of a market that clearly held considerable appeal for audiences, a plethora of smaller-scale, low-rent filmmakers began to produce a slew of movies based on the same formula and with variable success; Brian G. Hutton's *High Road to China* (1983) which starred the man who was almost Indiana Jones, Tom Selleck, and *King Solomon's Mines* and *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* from Cannon Films in 1985 and 1986 respectively, starring Richard Chamberlain as H. Rider Haggard's hero, reimagined as a tongue-in-cheek Indy clone.

One imitator stepping out of the shadows of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* became something special in its own right. In 1978, Diane Thomas was working as a waitress at Coral Beach Cantina on the Pacific Coast Highway by day and working on her screenplay by night. Like Spielberg and Lucas, Thomas wanted to emulate old Hollywood, and her screenplay was a romcom action adventure featuring two mismatched protagonists – a big city girl and a charming, soldier-of-fortune – whose dialogue and chemistry would recall the sparky relationship of Tracy and Hepburn or Gable and Colbert. Now, some people claim that Thomas's agent sold her completed script in less than a week to Michael Douglas and Columbia Pictures for \$250,000, whilst others say that Thomas directly pitched it to Douglas herself when he just happened to come into her cafe as a customer. It doesn't really matter how Douglas came to buy it (though obviously the latter is a *Cinderella*-like story that the romantic at heart would like to be true), the important thing is he bought it. "It just had a spontaneity about the writing," he subsequently said. "She was not cautious. The script had a wonderful spirit about it... There was a total lack of fear to the writing. It worked." That screenplay was for a 1984 movie that subsequently starred Douglas himself, alongside Kathleen Turner and Danny DeVito. It was called *Romancing the Stone* and, despite studio insiders believing it to be just another *Raiders* cash-in and predicting a flop, it went on to over \$115 million worldwide at the box office. Its legacy, including its subsequent, even more lucrative 1985 sequel, *The Jewel of the Nile*, is that of the only film to stand in comparison with the *Indiana Jones* franchise for sheer entertainment and box office value.

Unfortunately, it was a legacy that Thomas did not live to see. Just six weeks before the release of the sequel – which she had contributed rewrites to, rather than actually wrote – Thomas was being driven home by her boyfriend in the Porsche Carrera that Michael Douglas had bought her as a thank you gift, when he lost control and crashed the car. Both Thomas and another passenger, died instantly. She was just thirty-nine-years old and *Romancing the Stone* remained her only completed, authored work. Her screenplays for *Always* (directed by Spielberg and released in 1989 with a screenplay co-credited to Jerry Belsen, who took over the project following her death), for a project entitled *Blonde Hurricane* and, perhaps most tantalizing of all, for the third *Indiana Jones* film (which was to be set in a haunted mansion) remained unfinished.

What *Romancing the Stone* and *The Jewel of the Nile* did was mutate the formula that imitators would go on to adopt. The success of an action adventure with a husband and wife treasure seekers at its core set the wheels in motion for a project that an opportunistic Greek exile by the name of Nico Mastorakis was working on. A true renaissance man of the entertainment industry, Mastorakis started out life as a reporter in his native country, gaining unprecedented access to Aristotle Onassis' yacht when the billionaire shipping magnate was playing host to his future wife, Jackie Kennedy and her brother-in-law, and Ted. Throughout the 60s, Mastorakis's love of music led to him working in radio and as a lyricist (often working with future film composer Vangelis) and record producer, befriending both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and staging Athens' first ever international pop concert in 1967 with the latter group as the headline act.

It was his instrumental role in developing Greek television that saw Mastorakis fall out of favor, with the military regime outing him twice for 'anti-government propaganda'. By 1974, he was considered *persona non grata* and fled Greece to ply his trade as a filmmaker. He scored an underground hit and subsequent 'video nasty' notoriety with his 1976 film, *Island of Death*, a graphic and perverse proto-slasher about a sadomasochistic British couple's bizarre killing spree on Mykonos which was released, uncut, by Arrow in 2011, and achieved more respectable



attention for his 1978 film, *The Greek Tycoon*, a *roman à clef* starring Anthony Quinn and Jacqueline Bisset based on his encounter with Onassis several years earlier. By the 1980s, Mastorakis had hit a rich seam as a B-movie filmmaker, writing and/or directing movies such as *Blood Tide* (1982), *Blind Date* aka *Deadly Seduction* (1984), *The Zero Boys* (1986), *The Wind* (also 1986) and *Terminal Exposure* (1987). With his magpie like ability to pick at genre and influences, Mastorakis's project for 1988 would be a screenplay that traded not only on the success of *Romancing the Stone* and *The Jewel of the Nile*, but was also hoping to tap into the lucrative Indian cinema industry, specifically the Tamil-speaking market known as 'Kollywood'. That film is of course the one you are presently holding in your hands, *Bloodstone*.

Directed by American filmmaker Dwight Little (who also directed in 1988 the third *Halloween* sequel, *Halloween 4: The Revenge of Michael Myers*) *Bloodstone* is a film planted firmly in the *Indiana Jones/Romancing the Stone* adventure genre. The plot concerns the hunt for the eponymous huge ruby, which is said to contain mystical properties. Stolen by the British in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it has now been stolen back by Jack Kehler's character, a small-time crook by the name of Paul Lorre (an obvious allusion to *The Maltese Falcon* [1941] star Peter Lorre, which – just like *Indiana Jones* and *Romancing the Stone* – recalls vintage Hollywood). Realizing that the Chennai authorities in the shape of bungling Inspector Ramesh (played, in these less PC days by the blacked up American actor Charlie Brill) are onto him, Lorre foregoes his appointment with the villainous Dutch fence Van Hoeven (played by British actor Christopher Neame of *Dracula AD 1972* fame) and instead places the priceless gem into the luggage of an unsuspecting American couple and our heroes, Sandy and Stephanie McVey (Brett Stimeley and Anna Nicholas) as they hail a cab driven by local, Shyam Sabu (played by Tamil superstar Rajinikanth). From there, the movie is all about the determination of Van Hoeven and his thugs to retrieve the titular Bloodstone by any means necessary, leaving the Americans and the roguish Sabu no option but to pool their resources and fight for their very lives.

Whilst Bollywood – the Indian Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai – is arguably the best known and most lucrative example of Indian cinema, currently representing some 43% of Indian net box-office revenue, it's important to remember that the Tamil-language film industry, aka Kollywood (a portmanteau of Kodambakkam, a central residential district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and Hollywood), comes a close second at 36% and has a history that stretches back to the days of silent cinema. Kollywood is said to account for approximately 0.1% of Tamil Nadu's gross domestic product (GDP), whilst the mid-80s saw its average annual film output peak. Its productions are highly stylized and often unapologetically non-realistic in nature, recalling the strong Indian tradition of narrating mythology, history and fairy tales through a mixture of song and dance and great visual spectacle. The biggest star in Kollywood is undoubtedly Rajinikanth, a former bus conductor who came to prominence as a supporting player in several productions from the mid-70s onwards, specializing in villainous roles. It was the 1978 film *Bairavi* that bucked the trend, casting him against type as the hero. In order to publicize the film, the producer S. Thanu, set up a 35ft tall cut-out of Rajinikanth and his superstar status was set.

In the 1980s, he began to capitalize upon his acclaim and became hugely popular across South Indian cinema, making his Bollywood debut in 1983's *Andha Kanoon*, one of the highest grossing films of its day. By 1985, Rajinikanth had already starred in his 101<sup>st</sup> movie, *Bewafai*, taking over 119 million rupees at the box office that year. Still today widely regarded as the most popular South Indian film star (he is said to be the highest paid actor in Asia after Jackie Chan), Rajinikanth's screen persona is that of a stylized and charismatic action super hero, renowned for his flair for dialogue, often delivering Eastwood style laconic threats to his many foes and Bondian *coup de grace* quips as he inevitably bests them. Eager to appeal to both American and Tamil-speaking audiences, it was only natural for the makers of *Bloodstone* to seek out the bequipped and mustachioed actor's talents. Indeed, it is said that Ashok Amritraj, the former tennis player and one of the film's producers, now CEO of the Head Park Entertainment Group, personally recommended Rajinikanth for the film. *Bloodstone* became the





Kollywood star's first English-language movie (his speech was re-shot in post-synch with help from an English-speaking dialogue coach) though it remains his only foray into Hollywood. In *Rajinikanth: The Definitive Biography* (2012), author Naman Ramachandran interviewed *Bloodstone's* director Little, who recalled the difficulties a Hollywood production had in filming on the home turf of a Kollywood screen icon. "We had huge crowd problems, people would travel on foot for miles to get a look at him. Buildings were covered with people on rooftops and balconies. When he would step outside, the sound was so loud that we could not film. There was an accident when a building gave way under the weight of all the people. I don't think anyone was seriously hurt."

As *Bloodstone* remains to this day Rajinikanth's sole venture into Hollywood, the film is a rare opportunity for western audiences to see the superstar's appeal. His cocky charm, physicality and insouciant air make him stand out not as a supporting DeVito-esque player, as no doubt the role of Sabu was intended, but as the star of the film in all but name. He easily diverts our attention from the admittedly handsome, though ill-equipped in the charisma stakes, Brett Stimeley (whose voice was deemed insufficient for that of an action hero and subsequently dubbed by *Starsky and Hutch* star David Soul) whilst Anna Nicholas is squandered as the female lead; Mastorakis may have been thinking of Kathleen Turner's kidnapping in *Romancing the Stone*, but he singularly fails to see that the appeal of that character was her ability to get herself out of fixes, rather than relying on the masculine heroes to come to her rescue. This, along with other issues, makes *Bloodstone* more of a rip-off than a rival to the bigger action adventures of the decade. Dubbed, it was released in India as *Vairavel* ensuring that Rajinikanth's fellow countrymen and women could see him teach the stars of Hollywood a thing or two. Though quite what they made of Charlie Brill's unfortunate, 'brown face', head-wobbling, Kermit the Frog voiced performance is anyone's guess.

*Mark Cunliffe is a regular contributor to thegeekshow.co.uk, the web home of the UK's largest independent specialist podcast network, and is currently contributing to Scared for Life: Volume II, a book about the scary and inappropriate pop culture of the 1980s. A devotee of mostly British and European film, he lives in the north-west of England.*







## ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*Bloodstone* has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 5.1 and stereo sound.

An original 35mm Interpositive was scanned, graded and restored in 2K resolution at Silver Salt Restoration, London.

The 5.1 and stereo mixes were supplied by the filmmaker.

Silver Salt Restoration:

Anthony Badger, Mark Bonnici, Lisa Copson, Simon Edwards, Ray King, Tom Wiltshire

All original materials supplied for this restoration were made available by Nico Mastorakis.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc Produced by **Kevin Lambert**

Booklet Produced by **Samuel Thiery**

Executive Producer **Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**

QC **Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Artwork by **Graham Humphreys**

Design **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Mark Cunliffe, Josh Hurtado, Michael Mackenzie,  
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