





JAKE SPEED

CAST

Wayne Crawford Jake Speed
Dennis Christopher Desmond Floyd
Karen Kopins Margaret Winston
John Hurt Sid
Leon Ames Pop Winston
Donna Pescow Wendy
Roy London Maurice
Barry Primus Lawrence
Monte Markham Mr Winston
Alan Shearman Rodrigo
Rebecca Ashley Maureen Winston
Karl Johnson Charles

CREW

Directed by Andrew Lane
Written by Wayne Crawford and Andrew Lane
Produced by Andrew Lane, Wayne Crawford and William Fay
Executive Producer John Roach
Co-Producer Mark Ratering
Director of Photography Bryan Loftus
Film Editor Fred Stafford
Music by Mark Snow
Production Designer Norm Baron
Costume Designer Diana Cilliers



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HEROES DON'T DIE: THE NEED FOR JAKE SPEED

by Mark Cunliffe

"Can you handle an adventure?"

There was something of a sea change in 1980s mainstream cinema. The New Hollywood of the previous decade was drawing to a close, brought about in the most publicly shameful of fashions by Michael Cimino's costly box office flop *Heaven's Gate* (1980). Audiences were looking for something more reassuring and wholesome in terms of entertainment than the ground-breaking yet deeply cynical movies that had made them feel as uncertain and uncomfortable in their leisure as Watergate, Vietnam and the growing incidences of terrorism had made them feel in reality. People grew tired of films that sent them out into the night without the security of a happy ending. Clearly, something different was needed for the new decade.

Of course, it wasn't as if the 1980s were a better, more stable time for the world. Nuclear war seemed more like an inevitability than a possibility. US President Ronald Reagan's foreign policy looked to have learnt nothing from the damaging experience of the war in Vietnam, whilst British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared that there was "no such thing as society." In response, the self-interested 'greed is good' culture that was so cuttingly captured in Oliver Stone's 1987 film *Wall Street* began to rise to the surface as community spirit fell into a catastrophic decline. Cinemagoers in the 1980s no longer felt that it was necessarily a film's duty to hold a mirror up to the world; there was a need for optimism instead. The notion that cinema ought to be an escapist form of entertainment once again took hold.

What followed was a style of filmmaking that seemed to respond to the words of Fifi in George Miller's 1979 film *Mad Max*: "We're gonna give them back their heroes."

Ironically it was two key figures in the New Hollywood movement, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, who helped turn the tide. In 1977, Lucas proved that there was a market for the kind of serial, ripping yarn entertainment he grew up with by making his epic space opera *Star Wars*, which quickly proved to be a huge hit and pop cultural phenomenon causing those who had dismissed it to eat their words. In 1981, Lucas joined forces with



his friend, *Jaws* (1975) director Spielberg, to continue this revival with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which introduced modern cinemagoers to Indiana Jones – the kind of lantern-jawed, wisecracking and seemingly invincible hero that their parents and grandparents might have been more familiar with. The film was a huge hit, becoming the highest grossing film in North America for 1981. Box office takings of \$389.9 million and nine Oscar nominations ensured that this new/old hero was here to stay, and a slew of cash-in movies which aped the style and formula of *Raiders* with variable results quickly went into production. 1983's *High Road to China*, directed by Brian G. Hutton, is widely regarded as one of the more satisfying imitators and allowed Tom Selleck the chance to star as the film's lead, a hard-drinking WWI ace pilot – something of a consolation prize for the *Magnum, PI* star, who had to turn down the opportunity to star in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* because of a scheduling conflict with his popular Hawaiian-set detective series. The ubiquitous Cannon Films – helmed by Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, Israeli cousins and business partners whose modus operandi was to purchase low-rent scripts and turn them into a succession of starry, action-orientated B-movies in an attempt to rival the Hollywood blockbusters of the day – also got in on the act with their extremely loose adaptation of H. Rider Haggard's 1885 novel *King Solomon's Mines* (J. Lee Thompson, 1985). This was the fourth time the story had been adapted for the big screen, but it bore little resemblance to any previous efforts or indeed Rider Haggard's classic, opting instead for a deliberate tongue-in-cheek response to the success of Lucas and Spielberg's franchise. Panned by the critics, the film scored surprisingly well at the box office and rejuvenated the career of star Richard Chamberlain. Golan and Globus had high hopes for a franchise of their own, filming a sequel, *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* (Gary Nelson, 1986), back to back, but its release was a critical and commercial failure and plans to make a further film, based on Rider Haggard's *She*, were abandoned.

The unexpected success of Cannon's reimagining of Quatermain led to other productions which breathed new life into the literary creations and stories that had arguably influenced Indiana Jones. Handmade Films' *Bullshot* (Dick Clement, 1983) poked fun at Sapper's gentleman adventurer Bulldog Drummond, whilst the 1986 British film *Biggles* (directed by John Hough) attempted to tap into the success of both *Raiders* and the recently released *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985) by placing W.E. Johns' WWI RAF hero in a time-travelling adventure. The *Daily Mirror*'s saucy wartime comic strip *Jane*, created by Norman Pett, also got the big screen treatment with 1987's *Jane and the Lost City*, directed by Terry Marcel and starring Kirsten Hughes as the ditzy heroine with a habit of losing her clothing. She appeared opposite Sam Jones, who, having previously played the title character in *Flash Gordon* (Mike Hodges, 1980), starred as the Indy-lite character of Jungle Jack, alongside a cast that included British comedian Jasper Carrott and Bond girl Maud Adams as Gestapo officers. Even Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes got in on the act: *Young Sherlock Holmes* (Barry Levinson, 1985) depicted a distinctly Indiana Jones-style adventure

for the schoolboy detective thanks to a script from future *Harry Potter* director/producer Chris Columbus and Spielberg's production company Amblin.

Into this fertile territory stepped creative partners Wayne Crawford (who sadly passed away at the age of 69 in 2016) and Andrew Lane. The duo had scored a hit with the 1983 teen movie *Valley Girl* (directed by Martha Coolidge), a romantic comedy they had written and produced which managed to mix Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with a satire on the then-fashionable upper middle-class girls of LA's San Fernando Valley's commuter belt whose peculiar dialect, 'Valleyspeak', had inspired Frank Zappa to write his hit single *Valley Girl* in 1982. They followed this up with *Night of the Comet* (Thom Eberhardt, 1984), a pastiche of vintage B-movie sci-fi released the following year and which features a character, Samantha 'Sam' Belmont (played by Kelli Maroney), who went on to directly influence Joss Whedon's heroine Buffy Summers in the film and TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003). Their next project two years later for New World Pictures was *Jake Speed* – a film that would see Crawford step in front of the camera, adding leading man to his duties of co-writer and co-producer.

"More than a myth, less than a legend, and a bit too big for his boots."

Like Indiana Jones before him, the character of Jake Speed is an homage and pastiche of a certain kind of pulp fiction hero who belongs to yesteryear. In this case, Speed is a direct descendant and would-be contemporary of paperback heroes such as *Doc Savage: The Man of Bronze*, *Mack Bolan: The Executioner* and *Remo Williams: The Destroyer*. These characters are enduringly popular, especially Stateside, and highly prolific. The oldest of this influential trio is Doc Savage, who appeared in *American Pulp Magazine* in the 1930s. Created by Henry W. Ralston, John L. Nanovic and Lester Dent, the character, often hailed as the world's first superhero, has enjoyed a life in a wide range of media including novels, comic books, radio serials and a 1975 film, *Doc Savage: The Man of Bronze*, directed by Michael Anderson and starring Ron Ely. The adventures of Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir's creation, Remo Williams, has continued for over 150 pulp novels since the series commenced in 1971 and has included Bond director Guy Hamilton's 1985 film *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins* and an unsuccessful pilot to a mooted TV series. Likewise, since its inception in 1969, Don Pendleton's *Executioner* series has seen over 600 paperback novels penned by a series of ghost-writers which detail Bolan's war against organized crime.

The characters of Bolan and Williams are even name-checked in *Jake Speed*, which opens with a menacing, almost proto-*Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008) chase sequence that sees young American tourist Maureen Winston (Rebecca Ashley) kidnapped in Paris by two gun-toting, hardboiled French ne'er-do-wells. Back home in America, Maureen's family are



naturally distraught, whilst her father personally blames his other daughter Margaret (Karen Kopins) for their misfortune, as it was she who encouraged her baby sister to see Europe. Increasingly disenchanting with the US authorities who can produce no leads, it is Leon Ames as the Winstons' grandfather who hits upon the idea of hiring a private contractor – someone like Mack Bolan, Remo Williams... or Jake Speed. It is of course the latter that Grandfather prefers, the only snag being of course that, like Williams and Bolan, Jake Speed exists solely in the pages of the pulp novels he voraciously reads, written by the mysterious 'Reno Melon'.

"Maybe it's a blessing," Margaret's friend Wendy (*Saturday Night Fever* [1977] star Donna Pescow) says at one point. "At least your grandfather believes in somebody. Speedy Jake. Remero. Whatever. Who are our heroes?" she asks. "Nobody," Margaret rather sadly replies, once again signifying that the 1980s is both a world without heroes and a world desperately in need of them.

But maybe Grandfather is right to believe in Jake Speed because, in a move that pre-dates Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1993 action fantasy *Last Action Hero* (directed by John McTiernan), Margaret begins to find evidence that Jake may actually be real and that Melon's novels are effectively recounting true exploits and adventures, written by Jake and his loyal sidekick Desmond Floyd (Dennis Christopher), the alias stemming from Jake's favorite town and Des' preferred breakfast of choice. Des and Jake somehow get word of Margaret's plight and a meeting is arranged which sees her become increasingly sucked into their ambiguous universe as Jake explains that her sister has been kidnapped by white slavers and sent to her fate in an unnamed African country – in reality Zimbabwe where much of the film was shot (along with Paris and California), making for a suitably exotic production.

As a character, Jake Speed is your traditional wholesome man of action who exists purely to defeat evil wherever it may be found for nothing other than the opportunity of excitement and adventure. This being the 1980s, Speed comes with a seemingly magical shotgun named 'The Kid' and a distinctive set of wheels, in this case a '30s roadster cum assault vehicle entitled 'H.A.R.V.' (Heavily Armored Road Vehicle) and a suitably meta and mythical background ("Where did you and Des meet?" Margaret asks at one point; "Volume one," comes Speed's reply) that allows the film to retain a sense of enigmatic mystery regarding the real nature of Speed, which comes in handy when Margaret has to consider whether he is just a delusional conman taking her for a ride. "Why doesn't she believe in us?" Jake asks Des at one low point. "We believe. That's why we win." In a script packed with some interesting, clever, funny and effective dialogue, it is perhaps that line that reminds us that, just like Indiana Jones, Wayne Crawford's Speed possesses a subtly fallible nature beneath his cocky, action-packed exterior. The occasional moments of self-doubt and his rather big-

hearted and idealistic nature are what gives the film the kind of touching, positive message you perhaps don't expect to take away from such an action B movie pastiche. Jake Speed is unmistakably a likeable hero who fights evil not for profit or personal gain ("If all this were about money, I'd be working for the wrong side most of the time") but because he knows it is the right thing to do, and "When you're right, nothing can hurt you."

"I'm the last of the original nice guys!"

Where the eponymous character and his set of values are perhaps showcased the best is in the nemesis Crawford and Lane have chosen to pit him against: the marvelously sleazy and sadistic Sid. If Jake Speed exists to do the right thing, Sid exists to do wrong. He is the yin to Speed's yang, a figure who gets to proclaim "Being the good guy's so predictable. You do everything right! I can do anything I want!" It's a lip-smackingly self-referential moment delivered by the film's star name and biggest draw, the late John Hurt. Effectively an extended cameo, Hurt only appears about an hour into the proceedings of this ninety-minute movie. The decision to keep the villain in the shadows for so long is a harmful one, but equally Hurt is both a help and a hindrance to proceedings. He is clearly a much better and more famous actor than those around him and so naturally dominates the film the moment he arrives, meaning the less capable Crawford's depiction of the hero seems a little ho-hum and inferior opposite him. But it is worth pointing out that Hurt, out of all the actors, is the one who pitches his performance the most effectively. He plays the role of Sid exactly like a cartoon come to life and that's exactly what this salute to pulp heroes required. *Jake Speed* is, after all, a spoof movie, yet to its cost, it doesn't always come across as such. Andrew Lane made his directorial debut here and the film's at times uncertain tone can be laid at his door. The pacing doesn't always have the necessary punch required for such a rollicking adventure and several scenes play out as straight action drama (albeit with a cheaper budget and less style than most blockbusters) rather than the affectionate satire *Jake Speed* was intended to be. The film also lacks a real marquee name in the lead to pull audiences in, with Crawford and Christopher as Speed and Des appearing a bit flat and amateurish – in contrast to Cannon, who at least secured names such as Richard Chamberlain, Charles Bronson, Chuck Norris, Lee Marvin and even Sylvester Stallone for their B movies – though it's worth saying that Crawford equips himself well in several of the film's rather effective action sequences, including barroom brawls, a car chase along a perilous cliff drop and a daring escape from a den of hungry lions. Likewise Kopins, primarily a TV actress, is rather strong as the leading lady and she easily depicts the journey her character takes from a disbelieving cynic, who throws her lot in with Speed because she sees no other alternative in rescuing her sister, to someone who comes to believe both in Speed and the power of good over evil, and in herself too. But despite some good performances, it was perhaps this deficit in star power that sealed *Jake Speed's* fate at the box office. New World's ambition for it to become its big break-out



picture soon disappeared as the film fared poorly domestically, taking \$1,943,751 overall after an opening weekend showing of \$1,058,048. Its fate was to become a cult favorite on VHS and DVD amongst film fans who could appreciate the tongue-in-cheek charm of a film where the leading ladies spend the climax in their underwear because they've had to remove their clothing to fashion a length of rope to climb down and make good their escape, and where villains happily dispose of more loyal yet incompetent henchman than they do good guys who thwart their plans. Hopefully this cult cache will return once more care of this splendid release from Arrow Films.

"Heroes don't die."

In 1989, Lucas and Spielberg delivered what was intended as the final chapter in their Indiana Jones series, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, which saw their hero riding off into the sunset and effectively bringing a close to this style of retro-fueled, fun for all the family adventure film. The 1990s lay just around the corner and the new decade wanted to reflect contemporary trends. This era of popcorn action belonged to the musclebound Schwarzenegger and Stallone who let their brawn do the talking, save for the odd Bondian quip after dispatching their enemies. Only Bruce Willis bucked the trend – with 1988's *Die Hard* (directed by John McTiernan), he paved the way for a new trend in action blockbusters, the ordinary Joe hero who would save the day, which would later bear fruit in the Simpson/Bruckheimer films *The Rock* (Michael Bay, 1996), *Con Air* (Simon West, 1997) and *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998). Only *The Mummy* franchise from director Stephen Sommers (1999, 2001, 2008) hinted at there being an audience for what had proven so popular in the 1980s, and it effectively paved the way for a long-awaited revival of Indiana Jones, who returned older and craggier for 2008's *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* with less than impressive results.

As we stand now, it is the Marvel Universe and the revival of George Lucas' *Star Wars* franchise by Disney that dominates Hollywood's blockbuster output. However, and perhaps because of the success of the latter, a fifth instalment of the Indiana Jones franchise is scheduled for release in 2020, whilst *Lethal Weapon* creator Shane Black is also developing a new movie featuring Doc Savage, the daddy of them all, with Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson set to star. As the world becomes a less certain, less secure and altogether scarier place to live, perhaps it's only right that we seek out and return to these old-fashioned heroes to entertain and inspire us once more.

Mark Cunliffe is a regular contributor to thegeekshow.co.uk, the web home of the UK's largest independent specialist podcast network. A devotee of mostly British and European film, he lives in the north-west of England.





A man and a woman are shown from the chest up, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The man is on the left, and the woman is on the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Jake Speed was restored for this release by Arrow Films. The film is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono audio.

The original 35mm Interpositive was scanned in 2K resolution on a Lasergraphics Director Scanner at EFilm, Burbank. Picture grading and restoration was completed at Pinewood. The grading was completed on a DaVinci Resolve and picture restoration was performed using PFClean software. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. Some instances of wear remain, in keeping with the condition of the film materials. The audio was remastered from the original magnetic reels.

All materials were provided by Lakeshore Entertainment.

Pinewood:

Patrick Wilbraham, Jake Chapman, Jashesh Jhaveri, Jon Mann, Darren Rae, Leigh Reid

EFilm:

David Morales

Lakeshore Entertainment:

Mike Lechner

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**

Production Coordinator **Liane Cunje**

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

Artist **Graham Humphreys**

Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Giuliana Bolazzi, Mark Cunliffe, William Fay, Daniel Griffith, Graham Humphreys, Andrew Lane, Sigrid Larsen, Leroy Moore, John Muto, Chris Poggiali



ARROW
VIDEO

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