

Unlucky Days: A Tribute to the “FRIDAY THE 13TH” Series, Part Seven

Written by Professor A. Griffin
Friday, 11 March 2011 16:04



He is such an easy mark. Standing by the edge of the dock, the way all tourists do. He isn't even paying attention to where he is or what time of night he has chosen to sightsee. He's staring up at the lights and the buildings in a way that screams to the world, *Hey, everyone! I'm a big dumb bald tourist! Mug me!!*



Moving in closer now, closer...easy pickings... *Whoa!* What the hell is that? A hockey mask?!

—*Dramatization of the trailer from FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VIII: JASON TAKES MANHATTAN*

The year was 1989, only one year after Jason Voorhees faced telekinetic heroine Tina Shepard in FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VII: THE NEW BLOOD (see previous Unlucky Days essay [here](#)). Jason was revived with much less care in what was to be one of the most embarrassing films (and indeed, the last film in the franchise) to come out of the horror chute at Paramount Pictures. I imagine that the pitch for this was similar to the one that led to DRACULA A.D. 1972.

To be fair, most of the action of JASON TAKES MANHATTAN takes place on the claustrophobic confines of a luxury cruise ship carrying the graduating class of Crystal Lake High, bound for New York. Still, the idea has worn very thin by the time our boy Jason sets foot on the shores of New York (actually, mostly Vancouver locations substituting for NYC).

Kane Hodder once more plays Jason, and it's a grand moment in horror history: the first time Jason was portrayed by the same actor in two consecutive movies. Other 1980s horror icons that have been played more than once by the same actor include Freddy Krueger (Robert

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England), Pinhead (Doug Bradley) and The Tall Man (Angus Scrimm), and here, Jason joined the ranks of the elite.

Jason has been lingering at the bottom of Crystal Lake for quite a while since Tina’s undead father pulled him in with chains to save his daughter in *THE NEW BLOOD*. For some reason, Jason looks more solid than he did before. His rib cage is no longer visible, there aren’t as many exposed bones throughout and his clothes have become remarkably less tattered. His skin is a sickly pale blue this time around, as though he’d been waterlogged to the point of being squishy. He has no mask on his face at the beginning of the film (it was destroyed during the battle with Tina), but he soon appears in complete uniform again due to a most ridiculous set of coincidences.



A Crystal Lake High School couple, Jim and Suzy, are having some fun in the moonlight on Jim’s boat. They flirt, make jokes and talk about the big graduation cruise to the Big Apple for the seniors the next night, an important plot point. Yes, it’s business as usual at Crystal Lake. As they do what most all Crystal Lake teens do before they die, their anchor drags an underwater electric cable toward an ominous corpse floating in the murky depths, attached to a chain. The cable is hooked, and faster than you can say Reddy Kilowatt, Jason is shocked back to life for the second time in his undead career. Now, I don’t think Jason was dead *per se*...just hanging out down at the bottom of Crystal Lake and apparently regenerating. The shock treatment causes an electrical underwater explosion and a bubbling blue-light effect from down below that sort of looks like Godzilla himself is rising.

As this force rocks the boat, this naturally prompts Suzy to say, “What was that? Go check it out.” And Jim, the dutiful lover/boyfriend, obliges. Suzy waits a bit, then ventures out to see what’s taking Jim so long. Suddenly, a hockey-mask-wearing form appears...Suzy screams in terror...but, hey, wait a minute! It’s only Jim wearing a hockey mask to scare Suzy with the Jason legend. Jim’s hockey mask is a remarkable mockup of Jason’s original, even down to the ax wound on the left side. This Jim guy knows his folklore. Well, the myth himself climbs aboard, and Jim and Suzy are both killed. Suzy’s death is actually the most effective in the film,

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as she hides from the murderous Jason inside a storage bin on the boat. Jason finds her and slowly raises the spear as she lies trapped in the storage cubicle, begging and pleading for her life. There is a cold-bloodedness to Jason here that sends shivers up my spine. I think he actually enjoys hearing Suzy’s pitiful cries for mercy, and relishes the horror that she experiences as he slowly raises the spear for her to see and then plunges it down, pinning her to the inside of the storage bin like a butterfly in a collection. Jason is now, once again, masked and ready for slaughter.

There is also something notably missing right off the bat—no blood. Well, very little blood, anyway.

The next day, the students of Crystal Lake High are gathered at the docks and boarding the magnificent cruise ship that will take them to New York. Graduation is a big moment for these teens. Heck, growing up in Crystal Lake and actually making it to your graduation alive must be a high point for any student in this town. Unfortunately, there is a stowaway on the boat, appropriately named the *Lazarus*. Why does Jason climb aboard the vessel headed for New York? Obviously to move the story along, but I think he instinctively goes to where the party is. He has a mission, after all.

And apparently, that mission is just mindless revenge. Anger still courses through Jason Voorhees, and he seemingly wants to snuff out all life, especially happy teenage life. The ones who let him “almost” drown, the ones who killed his mommy and yeah, the ones like that telekinetic bitch Tina. (I personally like to think Jason never gets over his encounter with Tina in PART VII and remains royally pissed about it to this day.)



Our main characters are introduced: Rennie Wickham, the strange, introverted girl who has a horrible memory of almost drowning and, therefore, a fear of water; Charles McCulloch, her

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guardian who insists she take this cruise, as it will be good for her; and Miss Colleen Van Deusen, the chaperone for this ill-fated venture. Rennie’s love interest, Sean Robertson, is also introduced. Well, the cruise gets underway, and Jason makes himself at home in the bowels of the ship. Jason’s body count up until this point is 71 (including Jim and Suzy at the film’s beginning), and before the *Lazarus* reaches Fun City, Jason has done away with 10 more. The deaths, however, are all practically bloodless. Director Rob Hedden knew what he was up against (the MPAA’s ratings board) and had to come up with unique ways of showing the slaughter. The most brutal is the death of an unidentified boxer: Jason shoves a hot rock into his chest while he relaxes in the dry sauna with a towel over his face. He never sees it coming. Ouch!

With his 76th kill (Wayne, tossed on a control panel and electrocuted), Jason actually sinks the *Lazarus*, while all the main characters escape on a lifeboat. As the *Lazarus* drifts below the waves *à la* the *Titanic* and Jason and the survivors wash ashore in New York, I realized, even back in 1989, that this FRIDAY THE 13TH was very different than the ones I loved—and not better. But the worst was yet to come.

TO BE CONTINUED

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