

Recent releases don't deserve afterlife on video

Jason returns in yet another film

By Henry Herx
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The endless *Friday* the 13th series continues with yet another mindless horror sequel, *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (New Line). We should be so lucky.

This time out, the madman (Kane Hodder) is blown to bits with only his black heart still alive to pass into other bodies whenever the one it's inhabiting is killed.

With the hockey-masked goon back on murderous rampages, a bounty hunter (Steven Williams) shows up claiming to know how Jason can be permanently dispatched.

Following his instructions, one of Jason's female relatives (Erin Gray) plunges a magic dagger through the monster's heart.

Amid thunder and lightning, Jason is pulled underground by other monsters, leaving behind the hockey mask as a monument.

Only the box office will determine



New Line Cinema
Kane Hodder plays the hockey-masked killer in New Line Cinema's horror thriller *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*.

whether this marks the final *Friday*. Directed by Adam Marcus, the repetitious proceedings in the formula script are as tiresome as its gory variations of special-effects mayhem are repulsive.

Because of excessive violence, sexual situations, gross humor and rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Wilder Napalm'

The sibling rivalry between two brothers over their unique power to start fires by projecting their thoughts is the serio-comic situation fitfully dreamed up in *Wilder Napalm* (TriStar).

Wilder (Arless Howard) and his younger brother, Wallace (Dennis Quaid), have grown up with the telekinetic power to make objects burst into flames.

After causing a tragic accident in which a man died, Wilder has tried to keep his power a secret and live a placid, normal life.

When Wilder marries charming, vivacious Vida (Debra Winger), the jealous Wallace burns the hair off his brother's head before leaving town to go on his own.

Five years later, Wallace turns up as a clown with a broken-down carnival and announces his plans to make a fortune by going public with his fire-starting powers.

Not incidentally, Wallace also plans

to take Vida away from his brother.

One thing leads to another and, after Vida innocently spends an evening with Wallace while Wilder announces a bingo game at the local firehouse, the fireworks start in earnest.

After pelting each other with fireballs and burning down Wilder's trailer home and most of the carnival, the brothers come to a predictable end in a tacked-on reconciliation.

Most of the interest in director Glenn Gordon Caron's movie comes from the pyrotechnics generated by the special-effects unit, from fiery fingertips to large-scale conflagrations.

The actors are fine but the characters are cardboard thin and earn little sympathy as they go through their paces with Howard's Wilder being a bundle of repression, Quaid's Wallace exuding a nasty, explosive edge and Winger's Vida remaining irrepressibly cheerful.

The supporting cast, including M. Emmet Walsh and Jim Varney, are largely wasted in meaningless roles.

Because of some special-effects violence, sexual situations and coarse language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Last years of Arthur Ashe marked by 'Days of Grace'

By Joseph R. Thomas
Catholic News Service

Shortcomings aside, Arthur Ashe's cool, almost dispassionate memoir, *Days of Grace* (Alfred A. Knopf, \$24) provides a sharp, clear picture of a man determined to die well — and succeeding.

The title alone tells us much about the author, a former Wimbledon tennis champion and U.S. Davis Cup captain. It is a reference to those days between 1988, when he learned that he had contracted AIDS as a result of a post-surgical blood transfusion, and last February, when death claimed him without, however, conquering him.

In fact, though, the title could just as easily stand for a longer period beginning in 1979, when Ashe underwent quadruple heart bypass surgery. Given his family's history of heart disease, Ashe took it for granted that the sum of his days was not likely to bring him to old age.

Indeed, it was the need for a second bypass operation in 1983 that exposed him to the AIDS virus. It was then that he received the tainted blood, the virus remaining hidden until brain surgery became a necessity in 1988.

Days of Grace is not a medical treatise, however. Rather, it is the reflections of a man reasonably satisfied with his accomplishments in life yet determined to make still something more of it instead of railing at fate.

Written with Arnold Rampersad, *Days of Grace* emerges as a testament to the importance of values and a sober assessment of the good things done — and a few good things not done — in the 25 years or so he spent in the public eye. That he is troubled by the good things not done tells us much about the interior man and his integrity.

Basically, Ashe wrestles with questions about the extent of his involvement in the questions of the day, especially those dealing with civil rights. As a black in the white world of tennis, he was in a unique position to influence public opinion but failed to do so until late in life when he became an activist on behalf of South African

blacks.

Likewise he was in a position to say something about AIDS between 1988, when the diagnosis was made, and 1992, when he was forced into making a public disclosure of his condition, a development he resented to the end. But it was not until his situation became public that he embraced a public role in the AIDS struggle.

Ironically, on Dec. 1, 1992, in an address to the U.N. World AIDS Day, he had this to say: "It has been the habit of humankind to wait until the 11th hour to spiritually commit ourselves to those problems which we knew all along to be of the greatest urgency."

This even though he writes that he was aware early in his career that "I wanted to make a difference, however small, in the world, and I wanted to do so in a useful and honorable way."

The truth, of course, is that he did

make a difference and, with his book, continues to make a difference because *Days of Grace* is a thoughtful contribution to the discussion of topics as disparate as race, athletics, conscience, values, self-esteem and personal responsibility.

That he takes up the tug-of-war that sometimes pulled him in one direction and then led him to question his motives and methods makes for a more compelling presentation — one which leaves readers free to forge their own views and not simply nod in agreement.

As his days dwindled down, Ashe gave himself over to his family, to reading (the Bible and the black theologian-philosopher Howard Thurman in particular), to music (Beethoven and gospel) and to his relations with God.

"In the end," he writes, "as much as I love reading and music, and al-

though love given and received by human beings is perhaps the only sure token of God's love and God's grace, I understand that the deepest consolation comes from one's relationship to the divine."

For him, the purpose of prayer was not to seek relief from his burdens but rather "to ask God to show me God's will, and to give me strength to carry out that will. God's will alone matters ... Thus far, I have been steadfast."

Ashe closes with an eloquent letter to his daughter Camera, his final legacy not only to her but to all who read it.

Granting differences of opinion on some theological and moral questions, *Days of Grace* will be a grace for many.

Thomas is retired editor in chief of *The Christophers* and a former diocesan newspaper editor.

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