

Eyewitness

(US = "Sudden Terror")

UK : 1970 : dir. John Hough : ITC

: 91 min

prod: : scr: Ronald Harwood : dir.ph.:

[Mark Lester](#)

Lionel Jeffries; Susan George; Jeremy Kemp; Tony Bonner; Peter Vaughan; Peter Bowles;
Betty Marsden; Joseph Furst; David Lodge; Anthony Stamboulis; Robert Russell;
John Allison; Maxine Kalli; Jonathan Burn

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 € M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Susan George was pretty, sexy, and a talented actress when given half a chance. Mark Lester was... well... anything but talented, as he demonstrates very capably in this film.

Source for all screen grabs – indeterminate website



Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide review:

"Adequate variation on the boy-who-cried-wolf theme: prankish youngster (Lester) witnesses the murder of a visiting black dignitary, but can't convince others. Almost ruined by self-conscious direction. Good cast though. ** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above, though translating "adequate" as "good"

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A boy is the sole witness to an assassination, but no-one believes him except the assassins. **"THE WINDOW"** all over again, the standard clichés being tricked out with fancy photography, sub-Hitchcock set-ups and Mediterranean locations, which make it all very tolerable. * "

Movies on TV (1987) review:

"A fairly well done suspense thriller in the accepted vein. Mark Lester, an adorable child actor from **"OLIVER!"**, is prone to telling tall tales. So you can't really blame his sister and grandfather when they reject his story about witnessing the assassination of a visiting African president on the island of Malta. It's not boring¹. ****1/2** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"The one about the witness who sees a murder but no-one will believe him/her. In this case, Mark Lester is an 11-year old (it's 1970) who sees an assassination on Malta. Susan George is his sister; Lionel Jeffries, Peter Vaughan, Jeremy Kemp, Peter Bowles flesh out from John Gough's routine direction. * "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"A breathlessly exciting thriller along the lines of the story of the boy who cried wolf. Mark Lester is the boy on a strife-torn Mediterranean island who witnesses a murder – then tries to get people to believe it while the murderer closes in on him. John Hough's furious direction in the final chase sequence will leave you gasping.² ******* "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

" **"EYEWITNESS"** has its groundroofs in an often-used idea. Angle of a likeable kid with an imagination so vivid that unfeeling adults good-humouredly regard him as a chronic liar. Result is that when a crisis really arises no-one fully believes him. Young victim is Mark Lester and it's the hook on which is hung a fairly conventional crime chase yarn – from a novel by Mark Hebdon – set on a Mediterranean island (it was shot in Malta) which has some exciting moments but lacks much of the tension that more astute and experienced directors than John Hough might have given it. Adventure starts with the assassination of a visiting president. The moppet [*sic*] claims to have seen a policeman pull the fatal trigger. He has to avoid two cops and also convince his relatives that his story's on the level. "

Videocassette – Warner VHS PES 38169 – sleeve notes:

"A top VIP is murdered in cold blood. The assassin is safe except for one eyewitness – a young boy notorious for his tall stories and outlandish pranks. But he has cried wolf once too often for his family to believe in his sudden terror. And alone he must now face the stark reality of a dangerously over-active imagination.³ "

¹ There's damning with faint praise, if you like!

² Surely you mean yawning?

³ And here endeth the lesson...



[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"Why did a playwright of the calibre of Ronald Harwood bother himself with this adaptation of Mark Hebden's minor "cry wolf" thriller? It's hardly original stuff, and

the threadbare plot leaves players a lot more experienced than Mark Lester looking forlorn. Fresh from his success in the title role of "**OLIVER!**", Lester is not helped by second-time director John Hough, who is obviously still too obsessed with "meaningful" angles and camera trickery to concern himself with the pivotal performance. Best loved for his comedic skills, Lionel Jeffries is equally effective here and provides some all-too-welcome moments of relief. ** "

"Thriller. A young boy's life comes under threat after he witnesses the assassination of an African leader. ** "

TV Times review:

"Thriller starring Mark Lester and Susan George. A boy witnesses the assassination of a visiting African president, but no-one believes him – except the killers... **** "

The Sunday Times note:

"A young boy staying on a Mediterranean island witnesses a murder, but his family refuse to believe his story – until they realise that he is in grave danger."

Excerpt from *The Moving Picture Boy* entry on Lester:

"... For the next five years the plaintive upward twist of blond eyebrows over doe-like eyes was everywhere in demand, and

all the old pathos-plots were dusted off for soulful Mark. He found his voice in distress for a struggling horse, stole an elephant, was chased by Latin assassins. He was never less than a touching sight; the only snag was that he wasn't much of a performer, and if pressed for emotion merely looked petulant or self-pitying.

Mark was more engaging when a touch of humour entered into the plot, as in **"EYEWITNESS"**, **"S.W.A.L.K."** (in which he was reunited with his former Artful Dodger, Jack Wild) and **"WHOEVER SLEW AUNTIE ROO?"**. He was even offered to the public as a little psychopath in **"NIGHT HAIR CHILD"** (getting sexy with Britt Ekland on the way) and in **"SENZA RAGIONE"** (where Telly Savalas shoots one of his ears off)... "

Not to be confused with the 1981 film of the same name (aka **"THE JANITOR"**) with William Hurt and Sigourney Weaver, the 1956 film of the same name with Donald Sinden and Muriel Pavlow, or **"EYE WITNESS"** (UK 49), a wrong-man-accused-of-murder thriller.

Mark Lester, here 12, plays Ziggy Armstrong-Smith, who lives in a lighthouse with his retired colonel grandfather (Jeffries) and older sister Pippa (Susan George – there *is* a resemblance between them, though Susan George is prettier... Just.) A visiting African dignitary is given a state reception and half the island turn out to see him (life must be dull on Malta). Ziggy has crept away from his sister for a better vantage point from a window overlooking the route, but the assassin (Peter Vaughan) has chosen the adjacent room. From here on in, the film is largely a game of tag with Vaughan and accomplice Peter Bowles dressed in police uniforms pursuing the boy around scenic locations on the island. His tale is dismissed as the latest in a long line of stretchers, and he is packed off to bed without supper. Martial law is declared following the shooting, and it isn't long before the police are at the lighthouse door.

The plotline does contain the slight twist that the visiting head of state was not in fact the intended target, but police inspector Jeremy Kemp, travelling in the car with him. One or two of the casual killings are unexpected, and the climactic car chase is quite well-handled for a British film shot on a modest budget, but without the essential ingredient of suspense it all looks like a tediously drawn-out episode from one of those 1970s ATV action series, an impression enhanced by the presence of so many familiar faces from UK TV (you half expect Sam Kydd to lurch round a corner any moment), and some agitated 70s camerawork. Lester is alright as Ziggy, but there's only so much you can do with a constipated fawn expression, and he just does **not** strike one as the colourful imagination type. The film's lame attempts early on to convey him as a teller of tall tales do nothing to bridge this credibility gap. Jeffries is likewise only so-so as the brandy-pickled reactionary grandfather, who offers such illuminating insights as "Most boys are born liars".

Shooting Mark Lester's ear off is perhaps an excessive reaction, but I'm relieved to see that John Holmstrom agrees with my general verdict on the boy's abilities. Perhaps all he needed was a more severe director to compel more effort into his performances, but in any case he didn't get it. Lester went on the following year to make "**BLACK BEAUTY**" (more in the

nature of a guest role, although he got top billing), "**S.W.A.L.K.**" (aka "MELODY") and the controversial "**NIGHT HAIR CHILD**" (aka "WHAT THE PEEPER SAW") with Britt Ekland. His first film appearance had been in "**ALLEZ FRANCE**" (64) aged 6. The same year he made this Lionel Jeffries was cutting his teeth as a director with "**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**", and in 1972 "**THE AMAZING MR BLUNDEN**", both of which are better films than this.

See subject index under **EYEWITNESSES TO MURDER / BOY-WHO-CRIED-WOLF** and **GRANDPARENTS**.