



The Island

US : 1980 : dir. Michael Ritchie : Universal : 114 min
prod: Richard Zanuck & David Brown : scr: Peter Benchley : dir.ph.: Henri Decaë
[Jeffrey Frank](#); [Ricky Rincon](#)
Michael Caine; David Warner; Frank Middlemass; Angela Punch McGregor; Don Henderson;
Dudley Sutton; Clyde Jeavons; Zakes Mokae

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ♀ Z ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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**“FOR 300 YEARS A TERRIFYING SECRET
HAS BEEN KEPT FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD!”**



A luscious dreamy-eyed cabin boy. Just the ticket really for putting a spring back in the step of your jaded rotting buccaneer crew. Who's a pretty boy then? Source: indeterminate website

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
1996 review:

"Absolutely awful thriller about a magazine reporter who investigates strange doings in the Caribbean and winds up a prisoner of a primitive island tribe. You know you're in trouble when David Warner plays the most normal guy on the island! Peter Benchley scripted from his own novel. Shot in Panavision. *Bomb*"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A journalist is in fear of his life on a Caribbean island inhabited by the bloodthirsty descendants of seventeenth-century buccaneers. Ridiculous shocker from the "JAWS" people; stupidly plotted and gruesome in detail. Scr: Peter Benchley, from his own novel."

"Suspense gives way to gut-level sadism aimed at the lowest common audience denominator"

- **Variety**

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Of the many theories put up to explain the Bermuda triangle, this movie offers, in the event, the dreariest: the survival of a pirate tribe that kidnaps the unwary, in this case Michael Caine and his young son. The first part is eerie, but the director then struggles against the turn of events, presumably taken from Peter Benchley's novel. David Warner is the pirate leader and Angela Punch McGregor the romantic interest, of sorts. * "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Big-budget Peter Benchley premise of an inbred band of marauders descended from 17th-century buccaneers¹. Director Michael Ritchie forgets that action and violence are not interchangeable dishes from columns A and B. ** "

¹ *Inbred? Gee whiz, can you have incest between pirates too?*

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"This latest summertime tale from the water-obsessed pen of Peter Benchley gets off to a bristling start as a charter boat-load of boozy business types is ambushed by something or someone that leaves hatchets planted in their skulls and several limbs scattered aboard.

Cut to British journalist Michael Caine, who persuades his editor that his latest Bermuda triangle-type ship disappearance justifies his personal research.

But once the mystery is banally resolved - the island is inhabited by a tribe of buccaneers who've been in-breeding for 300 years and prey on pleasure ships - the film degenerates to a violent chase melodrama.

Michael Ritchie's witty direction is abandoned in the violence, and periodic efforts to revive the built-in comedy fall flat."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Michael Caine as a reporter investigating the mysterious disappearances of pleasure craft and their owners in the Caribbean. Rated "R". *Turkey*"

The Universal Story review:

"After "JAWS" (1975) and "THE DEEP" (Columbia, 1977), scenarist Peter Benchley, working from his novel of the same name, took to the water once again in "THE ISLAND" and, in cahoots with director Michael Ritchie set out to top, for sheer gratuitous horror, the worst excesses of his two aforementioned hits. The not-for-the-squeamish sight of eyes being stretched open with pegs, bodies being bled by leeches and stung by jellyfish, and young men being mutilated with grappling hooks, were all part and parcel of a story involving the mysterious murders of a boat-load of inebriated businessmen who, somewhere in the region of the Bermuda Triangle, are found hacked to death. Michael Caine, as a British journalist, goes to investigate in the company of his young son, Jeffrey Frank, and what he discovers provided the film with its main narrative thrust, as well as its laughably far-fetched denouement. Ritchie's film started promisingly enough but, after passing the point of no return,

deteriorated disastrously. A Zanuck-Brown production, it also starred David Warner as the leader of a tribe of inbred pirate buccaneers, and featured Angela Punch McGregor, Frank Middlemass, Don Henderson and Dudley Sutton."

Excerpt from **Films Illustrated** - November '80 - article:

"... In the evening we go to Hollywood Boulevard to see **"THE ISLAND"**, needlessly blown up to 70mm. Like all American cinemas, the floor is sticky with spilled Coke and the air is thick with freshly roasted popcorn. Described by Alain as "a hardcore **Treasure Island**", this adaptation of Peter Benchley's third watery best-seller is a leave-your-brain-at-home and graphically violent yarn about a band of 18th century buccaneers living in a time-warp and looting ships in the Bermuda Triangle. Michael Caine is a journalist who suffers terribly [so should they all] before he wipes everyone out in a frenzy of machine-gun fire that drew cheers from everyone. Its violence is questionable but the film grips you from start to finish as, in different ways, does all of Michael Ritchie's work. For dinner we share a monster pizza. Two messages from Sidney Poitier await me at the hotel..."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Jeffrey Frank:

"Jeffrey Frank is Michael Caine's schoolboy son in **"THE ISLAND"**, an enjoyably ludicrous story of a colony of inbred pirates on an island off Florida, who capture the pair of them and brainwash the boy into (nearly) shooting his father once the latter has performed a necessary act of fertilisation on the colony's only viable woman. Jeffrey, having smouldered balefully in his "changed" state, was subsequently engaged for a leading role as a member of the Hitler Youth in a West German TV serial called **"Blut Und Ehre - Jugend Unter Hitler"** (82)."

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

TV Quick review:

"A reporter gets ensnared by a tribe of 18th-century throwbacks in a forgotten corner of the Caribbean. Pull the other one, it's got a parrot on - not Michael Caine's finest hour."

What's On TV review:

"Mystery. Michael Caine is a reporter who goes exploring the Caribbean only to be captured by a band of pirates who think it's the 18th century!"

Sunday Times note:

"Thriller set in the Caribbean starring Michael Caine."

Source unknown:

"Caribbean pirate story from Peter **"JAWS"** Benchley with Michael Caine and David Warner."

Not to be confused with the 1989 Australian film **"ISLAND"**, or the 1961 Japanese film **"HADAKA NO SHIMA"** which has the same title in English. Michael Caine must love location shooting in the Caribbean, I guess, since he was undeterred enough by this stinker to lend his

name and face to "**JAWS THE REVENGE**" (87). Which of the two is the more awful is a vexed question. For that matter, which of Benchley's follow-throughs to "**JAWS**" is worse: this one or "**THE DEEP**", is also too close to call. Coming in last chronologically, and adapted by his own fair hand, "**THE ISLAND**" proved conclusively that the power of "**JAWS**" was 85% Spielberg, and only 15% Benchley. He should have quit while he was ahead.

"Hardcore Treasure Island" is a very apt description of what Benchley set out to accomplish. One could fairly argue it was high time somebody stripped away the anodyne "boys' adventure" quality of most pirate films, but it would take a more historically-minded writer than Benchley to get the detail right, and a less mainstream commercial director than Ritchie.

As with all cinema turkeys of the first order, one is left wondering how come none of the cast or crew noticed they were making a stinker until it was in the can. The script alone should have been adequate warning. Pirates, after all, are box office poison. Consider Spielberg's own abortion (one of his few) "**HOOK**" (91), or Polanski's "**PIRATES**" (86); look at the pitifully unfunny post-Python "comedy" "**YELLOWBEARD**" (83), or John Carpenter's "**THE FOG**" (80); don't forget Orson Welles' awful "**TREASURE ISLAND**" (72), or Robert Shaw's "**SWASHBUCKLER**" (76), or Ken Annakin's "**THE PIRATE MOVIE**" (82). Yet still they keep on coming – the latest addition to the heap being Geena Davis' feminist-adjusted "**CUTTHROAT ISLAND**" (95). Pirate movies are poison.

There is nothing especially wrong with the central premise: an isolated colony descended from a crew of 18th century cutthroats, carrying on the family business with the assistance and protection of a deranged historian (Middlemass) who considers them a priceless living window on the past. Journalist Caine blunders upon all this (in the fashion of journalists) with his young son Justin in tow, and both are taken captive. The pirates, who are boarding passing pleasure yachts and butchering the passengers, are careful to spare any boys they chance upon (sound principle that) with a view to replenishing their own degenerate gene-pool. Justin is separated from his dad therefore, and brainwashed into joining the pirate community, under the new name of "Two-barb". Caine is only spared in order to mate with the widow of a pirate he killed during his capture. He escapes, is recaptured, but escapes again with the complicity of ex-cabin boy (Ricky Rincon), abducted at the start of the film, who has grown jealous of Justin, now adopted as the "son" of pirate leader David Warner. Hell hath no fury like a cabin boy spurned, as the whole pirate band learn to their cost.

The predominantly English cast features several very capable TV faces – Frank Middlemass, Don Henderson – but the whole crew disport themselves as though having a high old time, and the essential air of deadly serious menace is missing, despite their occasional bloody sorties against passing pleasure boats. The last of these, while far from horrific, leaves a distinctly unpleasant taste in the mouth, as the film invites the audience to begin siding with the butchering pirates against the drug-ravaged crew of students, one of whom is obliged to perform an absurd kung-fu routine to the derision of his assailants, before being unceremoniously run through – from behind, of course – with a cutlass. Reach for that Freud handbook, somebody.

Caine, needless to say, is woefully miscast – again! – but it is hard to see how such a botched script could have been retrieved even with a more credible lead and a surer directorial hand. The intriguing subplot of Justin's betrayal, indeed rejection, of his father is not explored at all, and the script struggles so hard to make the pirates credible as a functioning social community that it strips them of menace without according them any humanity. And Caine being spared in order to function as stud for the only nubile woman in sight (the rest of the crew being left to fight over the boys, we must suppose) is such a corny concession to tabloid sex fantasy that the plot surrenders what tenuous plausibility it had. Ennio Morricone's score tries desperately at the last to whip up an air of free-spirited maritime adventure lust, but to no avail. It's time for Caine to reach for that machine gun and put us all out of our misery.

And, all joking aside, we really can't let this one pass without observing that the reason boys like Jeffrey Frank were recruited to serve on buccaneer ships had nothing to do with the captain's posterity, and everything to do with the boy's posterior. Historical records show how one celebrated Caribbean pirate captain, for example, expressly forbade his crew to bring "boys or women" (in that order, nota bene) on board his vessel, because of the friction and jealousy that would inevitably ensue. Boys as alternate lust objects, even in very distant periods (qv "**THE NAME OF THE ROSE**") remains a fact of life to be utterly erased from history, at least as far as commercial cinema is concerned.

See subject index under **JOURNALISTS (& OTHER LIARS), KIDNAPPING, and SEAFARING / PIRACY.**