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Mystery Island

Australia : 1980 : dir. Gene W Scott : Andromeda Productions : 75 min
prod: Gene W Scott : scr: Geoff Beak : dir.ph.: Phil Pike
Michael McGlinchey; Niklas Juhlin; Melissa Woodham; Jayson Duncan
Ray Meagher; Bill Charlton; Ray Marshall; Allan Penney; Tom Richards

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Kbytes	Ω □ ♀ Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"When four children whose boat has run out of gas discover what appears to be a deserted island, they promptly name it Mystery Island. There is actually an old pirate who lives there. The children find a case of counterfeit money which belongs to villains, who later return to the island for it. The old pirate's timely intervention saves the kids. The best part about this children's film is the beautiful under-water photography. *** "

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"Modest children's adventure story, in which four young detectives encounter smugglers and ghosts while marooned on a creepy island. Old-fashioned entertainment with lively performances from the children and striking photography, particularly in the underwater sequences. ** "

"Family adventure. Two children get caught up in a smuggling adventure on an island off the Australian coast."

Sunday Times note:

"Stars Jayson Duncan and Niklas Juhlin. Two children, who are visiting their cousins on an island off the coast of Australia, become caught up in an intriguing series of events."

What's On TV note:

"Family adventure. Four children, shipwrecked on a desert island, discover a lighthouse - and an eerie, pirate-like figure."

Indeterminate TV guide review:

"Attractive location filming on the Queensland reef islands adds impact to this adventure story of four children shipwrecked on a desert island. Worth taping for the kids.¹ ** "

¹ Come again? Ah, tape it for the kids...

"He certainly is a strange old man!" "But a jolly nice one!" Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

These immortal – and overtly Blytonesque – lines bring to a close yet another intrepid – and overtly Blytonesque – children's adventure in which four kids outwit some crooks (sigh) and have a ripping good time in the process. What gives this tired Australian derivative an edge over 101 eerily similar adventures from the UK are the photogenic sub-tropical shores and islets of its location and, as the above reviews say, ample underwater footage. It has the same holiday magazine appeal of an older Australian children's series: "**The Adventures of the Seaspray**", which concerned a family's adventures on a gorgeous ocean-going schooner. Picture a feature-length episode of "**Flipper**" with a low dolphin count and you're halfway there.

When their mother is taken ill, Roger and Marky (Jayson Duncan and Niklas Juhlin) arrive to stay with their cousins Jock and Sandy (Michael McGlinchey and Melissa Woodhams) on an Australian island. They're all aged 9 to 12. Uncle John promptly makes himself scarce and takes off on a business trip, leaving the four kids to their own devices. Impatient to get in some snorkeling, Roger and Marky hire a floating sieve from a disreputable neighbouring boatyard, obliging Jock and Sandy to come to the rescue in their dad's speedboat. But they neglected to check the fuel guage first, and all four of them are soon stranded in open water. Happily next morning they find themselves washed ashore on one of the tiny neighbouring islands, which has an abandoned lighthouse, food supplies, and a crusty old beachcomber hermit who tries to spook them off his island.

Running the boatyard which hired them the floating sieve are two rum sorts – Royston and Tommo – involved in a ring smuggling counterfeit currency from Hong Kong. No sooner have they collected a sea-drop by night than they run into the same four stranded kids, who of course grab the loot and hightail it back to barricade themselves into the lighthouse. The bad guys settle down to a siege, ineffectually, until one of the four castaways, Marky, decides to steal out undercover of night, borrow the crooks' boat and go for help. He does not get very far, and the time comes for that crusty hermit – Old Duffy - to show his true colours.

Leader of the pack in this film is Michael McGlinchey, who was seen elsewhere in the Australian children's serial "**Top Mates**". Like a sandy blond version of Gary Pankhurst, who played Sonny in the "**Skippy**" series, he teeters precariously on the cusp between "ample" and "podgy", but plays out the entire film in the skimpiest of swim briefs or a wetsuit. Clearly an accomplished swimmer and scuba diver, he's given ample opportunity here to prove it. But it's invidious to single out any of the four child players in such a predictable film. They're on screen together throughout, but their dialogue – by Geoff Beak from an "original" story by Cliff Green – is purely functional, and of the *come-on* variety: "Come on, let's explore!", "We'll lock ourselves in the lighthouse! Come on!", etc. Rome Warren's intrusive score seems intent upon drowning out as much of that dialogue as possible, succeeding in several scenes.

Absurdly, this quaint children's feature was broadcast at 4.40 a.m. Who on earth did they think would be watching at that hour?

See subject index under **AUSTRALASIA, BOATS / FISHING, DESERT ISLES / CAST-AWAYS, KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS** and **SWIMMING**. See also "**MYSTERY AT CASTLE HOUSE**" for more in the same vein.