

No Deposit, No Return

US : 1976 : dir. Norman Tokar : Disney : 112 min
 prod: Ron Miller : scr: Arthur Alsberg & Don Nelson : dir.ph.: Frank Phillips
Brad Savage; Kim Richards
 David Niven; Darren McGavin; Don Knotts; Herschel Bernardi; Barbara Feldon; Vic Tayback;
 Charlie Martin Smith; John Williams; Bob Hastings; Louis Guss; Richard O'Brien

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	∞	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: original front of house still

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
1996 review:

"Two neglected kids stage their own bogus kidnapping to stir up attention and enable them to join their mother in Hong Kong. OK Disney comedy with so-so material enlivened by good cast. **1/2 "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Airport confusion causes crooks to abduct (unwittingly) a millionaire's grandchildren; the millionaire gives chase. Overlong and tedious action comedy which makes little sense."

"Once again one is left wondering why there should be such an unbridgeable gulf between the brilliant professionalism and sometimes innovative genius of the Disney animated films, and the dull artlessness of the majority of their live-action pictures"

– Philip French, **The Times**

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Lacklustre Disney comedy in which two rich kids connive to spend an Easter holiday with their busy widowed mom (Feldon). They induce two inept crooks to offer them for ransom to their wealthy grandfather (Niven), who's glad to be rid of the kids for a while. **"

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Lukewarm Disney comedy about two kids – plus pet skunk, natch – mistakenly kidnapped by a pair of bungling crooks. Millionaire grandpa Niven, normally pestered out of his life at hols time, is highly delighted and does his best to see they stay kidnapped. The kids/crooks scenes are fair enough, with Darren McGavin milking his part for every resigned look it's worth. There are also some good Harold Lloyd antics in pursuit of the skunk, and a funny car chase. But the rest is sacrificed to the bland presence of Niven, looking throughout as if he's doing everyone a favour. He isn't."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"Although this Walt Disney comedy makes you wait a long time for a laugh, it finally delivers the goods in a hectic wharfside chase. The story's about two children (personable Kim Richards and obnoxious Brad Savage) who, with their pet skunk, persuade two petty thieves to hold them to ransom so the crooks can pay their debts. The skunk is the best thing in the film, and David Niven is not noticeably stretched by his role as the kids' grandfather¹. ** "

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Two kids decide to escape from their multi-millionaire grandfather (David Niven) and visit their mother in Hong Kong. On their way to the airport, they end up in a getaway car with two incompetent safecrackers with (surprise!) a soft spot in their hearts for kids. It is unrealistic and not very believable, with occasional spots of real entertainment. Rated "G". ** "

Films & Filming review:

"I must confess to mixed feelings as regards Disney's live action extravaganzas. **"TREASURE ISLAND"**, with its eyeball-rolling Robert Newton was, of course, splendid, **"MARY POPPINS"** instant enchantment, **"ROBIN HOOD"** and **"ROB ROY"** both had their moments and such early half-live-half cartoon hybrids as **"SONG OF THE SOUTH"** and **"SO DEAR TO MY HEART"** remain, on re-issue, endearing and richly coloured wallows in small town Americana.

But the **"HERBIE"**s and the **"MISSING DINOSAURS"**, all those **"HAPPY MILLIONAIRES"** and **"FLUBBER"** freak-outs seem to me to be a dilution and misappropriation of what Disney did best at the beginning; those films for children which appealed to adults because the concessions made to a childish intelligence were as few and as far between as any child during my own wartime moviegoing required. Having come to a full appreciation of the Disney skill in

¹ This source gives the running time at 125 mins, but he's at variance with the rest

post-war revivals of **"BAMBI"**, **"PINNOCHIO"** [sic], **"SNOW WHITE"** and

the rest, the emergence of an all-talking Edgar Bergen and



"Some happy ending horseplay with the kids"

Source: Films & Filming

friends though tempered somewhat by an all-singing delightful Dinah Shore (she's still my favourite all-American girl singer) in a lukewarm mish-mash called **"FUN AND FANCY FREE"** hit my Disney-orientated susceptibilities with something of a shock. I mean, leg shows on an Argentinian beach in **"THE THREE CABALLEROS"** was one thing, but a ventriloquial act grafted on to the story of **"JACK AND THE BEANSTALK"** (replete with Mickey, Donald and Pluto) was quite another. And there, I think, the rot set in and stayed in. The occasional Dalmatian or sublime Julie Andrews apart, the Disney studios moved into second gear and put money before charm, cutesville ahead of fairyland.

Disney's latest offering is a nicely made, risible comedy called **"NO DEPOSIT, NO RETURN"** and, if kids will go for that unpromising title, then Disney has no need to think again... the kids will come stampeding to the box office as usual, to donate their inflation-type pocket money to yet another vast Disney project: do I hear Disney Universe?

The story is quite a neat joke about two small kids, brother and sister, who engineer their own kidnap so that they can extort a ransom from their crusty old English grandfather. Their absentee mother is a magazine owner, currently in Hong Kong, and the kids hanker to

go there. Embroiled in the plot are two amiable safe-breakers (Darren McGavin and Don Knotts) whose attitude to the kids becomes distinctly paternal. These two are in a bit of a hole because somebody called Big Joe has a computer that tells him that they're into his organisation for increasing amounts of the ready – like "Clickety-Click", every time he calls, the computer has added another 2,000 dollars to the principal. So, if Grandpa coughs up, there'll be plenty for everyone.

The film is the second in several weeks to pay affectionate tribute to Harold Lloyd's death-defying antics in urban upper space and Don Knotts has a whale of a time dicing with death amongst the process work in company with a most loveable pet skunk called Duster. Duster, in fact, all but steals the show and is actually the film's real hero since it is he who leads the way to Grandpa's giant safe where the kids are locked in and suffocating by degrees amongst the banknotes and racing trophies.

Add to all this one of the most gloriously destructive car chases since **"BULLITT"** to which the inclusion of a mechanised banana skin joke and a delirious argument between a police car and a magnetic crane hoist are but passing riches and you have a fast and furious second half. The film starts off disappointingly enough, with a cruelly wasted David

Niven as Grandpa, bereft of jokes and forced to rely on strained exchanges with a bulldog called Sir Winston and some happy ending

horseplay with the kids. Why did Disney even envisage



*But what family comedy could be complete without its amiable bungling crooks? Yawwwwnn...
Source: indeterminate*

paying Niven's no doubt generous salary if they weren't going to make proper use of him? (And why have all his recent films shown him with a pair of sideburns which, at his age, would look more appropriate on the ingratiating cheeks of a Yugoslav head waiter?)

Herschel Bernardi plays a long suffering cop with Charlie Martin Smith as his police college graduate sidekick and the script's jokes at the expense of their hilarious incompetence would make any gag writer green with envy. (For starters, there's the scene in which Smith mistakes a wet fish for a walkie talkie, or the one where Bernardi struggles to get comfortable in a hideous rubber life mask of David Niven in order to decoy the kidnappers, who arrive on the scene with their own set of masks which make them look like refugees from Disneyland.)

The kids in the film are less successful, though I must say I mightily preferred her to him. She (Kim Richards) has a certain hoarse charm, he is something less, but as the film – like many a Disney – is basically a story of insane adults seen through children's eyes, this uncharismatic casting seems a minor quibble. Incidentally, Iris Adrian – that perennial blonde temptation to numerous pre-war comedians – has a very funny bit as an irate

housewife, and one of the pleasures of the recent Disney product is the studio's loyal use of famous names from the past (Walter Brennan, Charlie Ruggles, Andy Devine) in featured roles, not to mention favourite stars who, dare we say it, have most of their greatest successes behind them?

I liked the film very much, once my initial antagonism to its view that my still childlike mind had to be played down to had abated and once I realised that a genuine effort had been made to make the gags work. It is not vintage Disney any more than anything in recent years has been, but it's swell fun and – talking of Disney, whatever happened to "SMITH"? This was a redskin drama with Glenn Ford which bombed pretty badly in the States six years ago and has never, to my knowledge, been shown in Britain. I do think that we are at least old enough to be allowed to see it and judge for ourselves! And while they're at it, why can't Disney run a bumper season somewhere of all those lovely "Silly Symphony" cartoons ("Winken, Blinken and Nod", "The Three Mousquetaires", "Noah's Ark" et al) and such nearly forgotten gems as "MICKEY'S GALA PREMIERE" with its deft caricatures of early talkie stars? I, for one, would be at the head of the queue."

– Julian Fox

CAST:

J W Osborne.....DAVID NIVEN
Duke.....DARREN McGAVIN
Bert.....DON KNOTTS
Carolyn.....BARBARA FELDON
Tracy.....KIM RICHARDS
Jay.....BRAD SAVAGE
Jameson.....JOHN WILLIAMS
Sgt Turner.....HERSCHEL BERNARDI
Longnecker.....CHARLIE MARTIN SMITH
Big Joe.....VIC TAYBACK
PeterBOB HASTINGS
Freddie.....LOUIS GUSS
Capt Boland.....RICHARD O'BRIEN
Sgt Benson.....BARNEY PHILLIPS
Miss Murdock.....RUTH MANNING
Mrs HadleyOLIVE DUNBAR
Ming Lo.....JAMES HONG

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies of the Seventies", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"Two children attempt to finance a visit to their mother by pretending to be kidnapped. Sub-standard Disney action comedy that wastes an interesting cast headed by David Niven. * "

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Brad Savage (presumably elder brother of Fred Savage, though he makes no mention of it):

"Brad Savage, a beefy child, was a bit like a dark, curly-haired Kurt Russell, with sharp blue eyes in a pudgy face. He started his stage career playing Auntie Mame's nephew in a touring production. On screen Brad usually played uncomplicated, cheerful kid brothers, but when for a change he played an elder brother (to Ronnie Scribner) in "**SALEM'S LOT**" he found himself being an involuntary blood donor to his junior, who by an unfortunate accident had become a boy vampire. Once bitten, Brad of course became one too. After "**MAYDAY! MAYDAY!**" (81), he was one of the high school guerrillas in John Milius' egregious "**RED DAWN**" (84)."

Story by Joe McEveety, who just has to be kindred to directors Bernard and Vincent McEveety. For younger readers one ought perhaps to explain the title: pop or soda bottles used to be returnable to shops for a few pennies (manufacturers *recycled* them, before that word was thought of). When cans began to replace glass bottles the idea was abandoned, and bottle labels started to carry the message "no deposit – no return", thus increasing litter, wasting natural resources, and depriving kids of some extra pocket money all at one fell swoop. Learn your *real* history here, guys.

Brad Savage was 10. Between other Disney fare – "**THE APPLE DUMPLING GANG**" (74), "**RETURN FROM WITCH MOUNTAIN**" (76) – he made some scarcely more interesting films for adult audiences, among them the Hemingway story "**ISLANDS IN THE STREAM**" (76). Kim Richards of course was one of the principals (with Ike Eisenmann) of the "**WITCH MOUNTAIN**" films, but in 1976 she also had a brief but telling appearance in John Carpenter's "**ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13**", as the little girl who is shot dead when she complains about the ice cream flavour she's just bought. (Consumer rights count for nought in inner city ghettos). Doubtless she did other work with Disney, but the titles aren't known.

See subject index under **COMEDY**, [DIRECTORS](#), [DISNEY](#), [GRANDPARENTS](#) and [KIDNAPPING](#).