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Treasure Island in Outer Space

(original title unknown - released on video as "SPACE ISLAND")

Italy/Fr/W German TV serial : 1987 : dir. Antonio Margheriti

Radou (?) / TF1 / Bavaria

: 8 x 55 min

prod: Giovanni Leto & Letiizia Palma : scr: Renato Castellani & Lucio de Caro

dir.ph.: Sanoro Messina

Video: Braveworld / IVS VHS IVSV 1091

Anthony Quinn; Itaco Nardulli; Philippe Leroy; David Warbeck; Klaus Löewitsch;

Ida di Benedetto; Ernest Borgnine; Renato de Carmine; Enzo Cerusico; Andy Luotto;

Giovanni Lombardo Radice; Biagio Pelligra; Bobby Rhodes; Bruno Zanin; Stanko Molnar

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**“At the edge of the Universe lies the ultimate Prize.
Beyond Time. Beyond Space. Beyond your Imagination”**



Sleeve notes to the 110-minute video release version “**SPACE ISLAND**”:

“It’s now 2300 A.D. A nuclear disaster on Earth has left a dark and strange civilisation of sprawling space colonies forever under attack from bands of marauding pirates. Amid these colonies lives 12-year old Jimmy.

When he is befriended by a battle-scarred old adventurer Jimmy is let into an amazing secret – a map to the greatest treasure in the Universe, buried long ago on a cold and eerie planet deep in a far-away galaxy.

But a sinister band of brutal space pirates are after the treasure map and will stop at nothing to get their hands on it.

Jimmy and his friends organise a daring expedition to the planet but a notorious space pirate and his renegade followers smuggle themselves on board the ship disguised as crew.

Unaware of the dangers, young Jim becomes a firm friend with the devious villain – a friend who cheerfully and effortlessly drags Jim through a series of mutinies, blood-curdling battles, evil prison ships and countless action-filled adventures in their search for the Ultimate prize.”

[no listing in "The Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction", "The Golden Age of Children's Television", "Halliwell's Television Companion", "History of Television", "How Sweet It Was", "Into the Box of Delights - a History of Children's Television", "Television's Greatest Hits"]

What's On TV programme notes:

"Part 1 of an eight-part sci-fi drama series starring Anthony Quinn. "

"Part 2 of the sci-fi drama serial.. [etc] "

The hilarious video packaging – complete with new zappier title and a laminated plastic “3D” flicker-image of a space battle not actually in the film – reaches so strenuously for the “**STAR WARS**” audience, yet the jacket blurb betrays it as just another yo-ho-hum *TREASURE ISLAND* remake. Top Secret is the fact that the film – “ideated by Renato Castellani” - is only a pruned down version of a pan-European children’s TV serial, and as poorly post-synched as one would expect.

But don’t dismiss it too hastily, because this is by no means a bad fist of freshening up the old familiar tale by recasting it in an SF setting. Castellani and De Caro’s script follows the original text more closely than some of the orthodox adaptations. Every scene is transposed – the Spyglass Inn becomes a tavern for space scum, the island itself a desolate planet in the “Hibiscus system” – and all the original characters are present and correct: Borgnine as Billy Bones, Quinn as Silver, and a hotchpotch of European players in the remaining roles.

Jim Hawkins, unspecified in the credits, is a feisty glamorous Italian of about 13, and some way better than Cooper in ‘34, Burfield in ‘72 or Bale in ‘90. His version (“Jimmy”) is a Caravaggio cherub, luscious as a peach, like a tousle-headed Dean Stockwell, and in keeping with the target audience, he is very much central to the action throughout. When we first meet him, he’s herding turkeys at an abandoned spaceport in Sicily. Enter Ernest Borgnine with his space trunk and (for reasons surpassing understanding) a small girl’s doll which electronically triggers a secret compartment in his trunk containing the all-important map. “Gee, you’re always so grouchy Mr Bones” Jimmy remarks at one point, a line Stevenson decided to drop from the final draft of his book.

Black Dog (a black pirate, logically enough) and Blind Pew do their thing, the map is decyphered with the aid of Dr Livesey, and Jimmy is soon packed off to Roma-Napoli to board ship. Anthony Quinn’s Silver is closest in spirit to Wallace Beery’s – an amiable deferential rogue with one prosthetic leg stocked with contraband liquor, and in this retelling his affection for the boy seems quite sincere. For the other principals, Squire Trelawney is a dissolute adventurer and his manservant Joyce an android talking suspiciously like C3P0.

Pruned down from about 360 minutes (allowing for commercial breaks) to 110, the video version clearly does not do justice to the original serial, yet it still interpolates a long middle section as the Hispaniola voyages to its remote destination, allowing the special effects guys to strut their “2001”-inspired stuff. Here the script makes one of its quite acceptable deviations from the text – as the Hispaniola arrives at the uninhabited planet it finds a derelict spacecraft in orbit (rammed by the pirates for the bulk of Flint’s treasure). When Captain Smollett, Livesey and Trelawney go E.V.A. to investigate, the pirates choose their moment to mutiny, and Jimmy has to space walk to the wrecked craft to warn his comrades of the plot. The mummified remains of the ship’s complement put a fright into the boy, and he becomes trapped aboard while Smollett is planting charges to detonate the wreck.

But that is only one of several tweaks to pad out the story to serial length, and some of them are nice touches indeed. After Jimmy’s first encounter with Ben Gunn, for example, who stalks through the planet swamps on stilts, he wakes next morning alone in a tree, planting the doubt in his own mind whether he’d dreamt the whole bizarre meeting. When he returns to the stockade after recapturing the Hispaniola from Israel Hands (played here as a ruthless rival of Silver’s) he finds the pirates in possession, and busy digging five graves. Naturally he assumes the worst, and for a moment is overcome with grief and wretchedness, all his comrades slaughtered by Silver. A small touch perhaps, but quite affecting.

The location footage for the planet was shot in Morocco, where the pirates march to the site of the treasure (here it’s buried underwater) through an elephants’ graveyard of dinosaur bones. Invention flagged, however, on what a futuristic treasure haul might consist of, so we have the incongruous sight of space marooned Ben Gunn festooned with eighteenth century tiaras and pearl necklaces. Silver capitulates, the pirates are left stranded on the planet, and Silver jumps ship in a shuttle as it nears Earth orbit, fondly bequeathing his parrot to Jimmy, who is set fair for a lustrous career in the space cadet academy. Roll operatic end credits.

“**TREASURE ISLAND IN OUTER SPACE**” is, as these pan-European affairs go, not bad at all, and quite an expensively-mounted production for a children’s TV serial. What makes it so appealing, despite the trite dialogue and clumsy dubbing, is that it returns the story properly to its roots – as a ripping boys’ adventure yarn with a very pro-active 12-year old hero. It’s exasperating that we cannot put a definite name to him – but he’s presumably either Itaco Nardulli, Ida di Benedetto or Renato de Carmine. Quinn makes a quite acceptable Long John Silver, but he does not hog the screen away from Jim Hawkins, as many of his predecessors were wont to do. The story should be seen through the boy’s eyes, he is not an incidental character in the tale. For this reason alone, [recommended](#).

See “**TREASURE ISLAND – GENERAL NOTE**” for details of all the other known productions, and subject index under **KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS, SCIENCE FICTION, SEAFARING / PIRACY, SERIALISATIONS, SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS** and **TREASURE HUNTS**.