

## Ahoy All Zaca Crew Members

'The Big Booodle' was released in 1957 by United Artists, filmed in black and white, with a running time of 83 minutes. It was directed by Richard Wilson with a screenplay by Joe Eisinger based on the novel 'Havana Detective' by Robert Sylvester. Sylvester's novel was also sub-titled 'The Big Booodle' and was originally published in hardcover by Random House in 1954. Perma Books published the paperback under the title 'The Big Booodle' in 1955 for the grand sum of 25 cents.

'The Big Booodle' was Errol Flynn's fifty-first feature film out of his career total of fifty-five films, coming right after 'Istanbul' (1957) and just before 'The Sun Also Rises' (1957).

'Istanbul', although set in the exotic capitol of Turkey was filmed on the soundstages and backlot of Universal Pictures. On the other hand, 'The Big Booodle' was filmed entirely on location in Havana, Cuba, and every shot was framed to take advantage of the local scenery right from the opening credits where a camera is mounted on the front of a speed boat as it rockets into the spectacular looking harbor of Havana of 1957! We are then transported to a bustling, humming casino in the exciting Cuban capitol, where we see Errol Flynn as Ned Sherwood, a blackjack dealer. While dealing his cards, Sherwood has already caught the eye of a beautiful, and mysterious Cuban woman (Italian actress Rosanna Rory) who leaves him a tip along with her losses. As she quickly leaves the blackjack table, Sherwood realizes that the money she has left are really counterfeit Cuban Pesos! Flynn leaves the table to pursue the mystery woman, who is already just outside the casino. Errol stops her, and while taking the handkerchief in her hand says, 'Oh, young lady, mind if I borrow your hankie? You see the ink is still wet on that queer money you just passed me.' The curvaceous femme fatal, like in all good 'film noir' stories tells Sherwood to get lost and that the money was probably his all along as she leaves the casino grounds.

On his way home that night a confused Sherwood is attacked by three men right in front of his apartment building. Flynn fights for his life as the men try to kill him, and rob him of the counterfeit money, but his life is saved by alert neighbors who call the police. We next see Errol Flynn in police headquarters, being bandaged up by the police surgeon, who says he is very lucky to be alive. Here Flynn's Sherwood meets for the first time the Chief of the Cuban Federal Police, Colonel Mastegui, (well-played by Mexican film star Pedro Armendariz), who doesn't buy a single word of his story. Mastegui is a rare thing in Havana and just about any other big city, an honest cop. He is a relentless bulldog who trusts no one and suspects everyone, and he accuses Flynn of being a counterfeiter! Errol also meets a U.S. Treasury Agent, who

informs him that in a Federal raid in Chicago, a counterfeiting operation was closed down. However these counterfeiters were not reproducing U.S. dollars, but Cuban Pesos, three million Cuban Pesos to be exact, which is still missing along with the plates. Mastegui has Sherwood arrested and as he is taken away he calls the police chief just a muscle with a badge! The next morning Flynn is bailed out of jail by an attorney who of course refuses to divulge to our hero the name of his benefactor. Errol returns to his apartment to find it occupied by a Mr. Miguel Collada (played by familiar American actor Jacques Aubuchon), and his violent thug of a henchman. Collada already knows about Flynn's arrest by Mastegui for having the counterfeit money, and says he is looking for three million more phony Pesos, as he gives Flynn a sample. Errol tells the story of the beautiful woman in the casino and that he going to try and hunt her down. When asked where he can locate Collada, the sinister stranger says, 'Don't worry. When you find the girl, we will find you.'

Flynn still has the fancily embroidered handkerchief from the mystery woman, and he is able to trace it to a linen shop in downtown Havana. The shop girl says it was made along with a dozen others for Carlos Ruby, a playboy who gives them out to beautiful women all the time. With the address in hand, Flynn locates Ruby in his swanky apartment where he is swimming in his rooftop pool. Ruby says he has so many girlfriends that he couldn't possibly remember to whom he gave that particular handkerchief. After leaving Ruby's apartment building, Errol Flynn is nearly deliberately run over by a car in the narrow streets of old Havana! Flynn reports back to Colonel Mastegui and demands protection. Mastegui confiscates the new counterfeit money and laughs, 'I'll bet if I keep picking you up enough times, I can recover the entire three million, one piece at a time!' Errol does not appreciate the cop's humor and asks to be locked up. Mastegui refuses, saying 'I want you to be free like a pigeon to lead me to your partners.' A sneering Flynn says, 'Wrong bird Mastegui, I'm a dead duck!' as he walks out of the office in disgust.

Flynn receives a phone call from an unidentified woman asking to meet him at the Havana Country Club. Expecting the mystery woman, Sherwood finds instead a statuesque brunette, Anita Ferrer (played by another stunning Italian actress Gia Scala). Anita drives Flynn to the mansion of her father, Armando Ferrer. Ferrer is a wealthy Cuban, a descendant of the original Spanish grandees and is the president of the National Bank Of Cuba, which is really the treasury department of the Cuban government. Mr. Ferrer informs Errol that he is also under investigation by Colonel Mastegui because counterfeit Pesos are starting to turn up in the public. Three million counterfeit Cuban Pesos will destroy the economy of Cuba, and undermine it's government so it must be stopped. Ferrer says that Mastegui maintains that a sum that large can only be distributed by one source, the National Bank Of Cuba, and that he would be right in thinking that. He himself has tried to locate the source of the money in

the bank, but was not successful. He asks Flynn for his help and cooperation when all of a sudden Mastegui shows up in person. A furious Mastegui demands of Ferrer, 'Why is a known counterfeiter like Sherwood, having a drink and smoking a cigar in the house of the President of the National Bank Of Cuba?' Ferrer insists that Mr. Sherwood is his guest when the police chief walks out. As Errol Flynn leaves the house, he bumps into the arrival of Ferrer's other daughter Fina, who is actually the mystery woman from the casino! Flynn says nothing to Mr. Ferrer but arranges to meet the lovely Fina at her luxurious beachfront cabana the next day. There Fina is grateful for Sherwood not giving her away to her father, but she has no idea how she was passed the money. Flynn proposes that they paint the town, hitting every nightspot until they possibly recognize the source who passed her the counterfeit Pesos. Before departing, the exotic Fina makes a play for the still-handsome, broad-shouldered, one-time swashbuckler, who politely rebuffs her as they have work to do.

We next see an exciting montage of neon lights, night clubs, Spanish rumba orchestras, Salsa dancers, bongo drums, and cocktail shakers as Flynn and Fina jump from club to club in old Havana! Finally a man approaches Fina when Errol goes out for a smoke, Carlos Ruby! Ruby is the source of the counterfeit money, and Flynn suspects that the doe-eyed Fina is his girlfriend!

The next day, Errol reports his discovery over lunch to Anita Ferrer in a harbor boat restaurant that overlooks Havana's famed Morro Castle. Anita accuses her sister Fina of being ruthless if not evil, and then makes a play for Errol Flynn herself, and this time he does respond. Come on, the poor guy's only human! She mentions that as children Fina and her used to play in the historic Morro Castle, and that they even had a secret hiding place there.

After further twists and turns, including another murder attempt on Flynn's life by a professional killer, once again Sherwood is sitting in front of the grinning Colonel Mastegui. The cop gloats at Flynn, 'So you are just a blackjack dealer, yet you put a professional killer in the hospital? Well I guess you proved that he wasn't very professional after all!' Errol asks Mastegui for 24 hours to solve the case of the missing three million Pesos, and to call off his police so he can operate freely. The police chief agrees to Flynn's plan laughing, 'If you get killed, then I'll be there to arrest your killer. So you see, it works out good for me either way! Here Sherwood, take this gun.' A very dubious Flynn takes the revolver with, 'Thanks, I think!'

Flynn is then kidnapped along with Fina by Miguel Collada and his henchman, and taken to a fancy, high-class bordello in a large mansion on the outskirts of Havana. In return for information, Collada explains that he is the Vice-President of the National Bank Of Cuba, and that on the 8th day of the 8th

month of every year, the bank destroys millions of worn out, old, and dirty Peso notes. He opens a large cabinet containing the bundles of nearly three million Cuban Pesos, all counterfeit! Collada's plan is a masterstroke in that he will switch the counterfeit currency with the old notes, and that the phony Pesos will be incinerated instead. The old, worn out money will go into Collada's pocket and bank accounts as it is authentic, bona fide currency. Before he can put the plan into operation, Collada needs the plates for the counterfeit money, and the name of the person who has already been passing some of the Pesos against his wishes. When Fina is shown the beaten-up Errol, who has refused to give her away, she tells Collada the truth. Carlos Ruby was tapping into the counterfeit money, and giving some of it to her sister Anita! Why? Because Anita is the real girlfriend of Ruby, and when Flynn accuses her of lying, she takes out the handkerchief from his pocket, and unfolds it so that he can see that the name of 'Anita' is lovingly embroidered on it! Collada doesn't care about any of this and simply demands the plates, and swears he will take care of Ruby later. Fina declares that the plates are hidden in Morro Castle in their old childhood hiding place. At gunpoint Collada takes the unselfish and noble Fina to Morro Castle, while Errol will remain in the custody of the Collada's thug. Fina knows that Collada will kill her after he gets the plates, but this is the only way she can save the life of the man she loves, Errol Flynn!

Carlos Ruby shows up at the brothel looking for Collada, but he is instantly gunned down by his henchman, and Flynn uses the distraction to smash a chair over his head and escape. Before leaving, Errol calls the Cuban Federal Police and tells Mastegui to get his men and meet him at Morro Castle immediately! Anita also shows up and drives them both to El Morro. We next see Collada and a frightened Fina inside historic Morro Castle taking the guided tour. Morro Castle was built in 1589 by the Spanish, and is a huge fortress with many cannons, ramparts, battlements, and a lighthouse. The tour guide tells the American tourists that Morro Castle had guarded the harbor of Havana for centuries, and points out a ramp tunnel leading to the water that the Spanish used to dump their prisoners straight to the sharks waiting below. Collada and Fina leave the tour to locate the old hiding place containing the counterfeit plates. At the same time, Errol and Anita hop a ferry boat from the mainland to the castle, followed shortly after by Colonel Mastegui and his men on a police launch!

Fina locates the hiding place, and gives the plates to Collada, who now plans to murder Fina because as the old expression goes, 'Dead Men Tell No Tales!' In the nick of time Errol Flynn shows up to save Fina, but Collada starts shooting at both him and Anita. Taking cover behind the huge Spanish cannons, Flynn and Collada trade shots while Mastegui and his men rapidly advance. Anita runs to Collada to plead with him, but is rewarded with a bullet to the stomach. That was Collada's mistake as it was his last round, and Flynn

pounces in a fight to the death near the edge of the battlements of Morro Castle! Collada is clearly trying to push Flynn over the edge and into the sea. Instead, Errol Flynn gives Collada a roundhouse punch that sends the fat man crashing through the barrier and into the water below! Flynn peers over the edge and can see that Collada has survived the fall and is treading water. Then in a surprisingly realistic and harrowing scene, three sharks circle Collada and move in for the kill finishing off the screaming corrupt government official!

Flynn winces at the sight below, and then returns to hold Anita in his arms until she dies. Mastegui asks him if Collada is alive, and Errol says, 'No, the sharks got him.' Fina looks down at Errol and gently asks him, 'Will you go with me?' Errol Flynn looks up at Fina, and answers, 'Anywhere.', and they walk away together arm in arm towards the lighthouse. Colonel Mastegui watches them walk off with a smile on his face as the music swells. The End.

'The Big Boodle' is a typical 'film noir' classic of the type that Hollywood cranked out so successfully in the late 1940's and 1950's. In Robert Sylvester's pulp novel 'Havana Detective: AKA The Big Boodle', the character of Ned Sherwood is a New York City private eye retained by a beautiful mysterious femme fatale. However once Sherwood arrives in Havana, the plot is basically the same as the film version. 'The Big Boodle' is a good mystery-adventure with an intriguing plot based on it's fine literary source. Time has been wonderful to all the 'film noir' epics especially 'The Big Boodle' with it's Havana setting in the days when that city was the sun and fun capitol for rich American and European tourists! In two years Fidel Castro's revolution would take over the island, changing it's character (at least through 2005) forever. Even in black and white, 'The Big Boodle' is filmed on the gorgeous picture postcard scenery of Havana! Clearly, the biggest flaw in 'The Big Boodle' was that it was not shot in color to take full advantage of it's beautiful vistas. In fact during the opening credits, the producers gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Cuban government with the filming of 'The Big Boodle', since of course it is really a travelogue advertisement for tourism to Havana.

This was Errol Flynn's third and final 'mystery/noir' film in his career. His first was the comedy/murder mystery 'Footsteps In The Dark' (1941), and his second was the dark, gothic house mystery 'Cry Wolf' (1947). 'The Big Boodle' was the kind of film that might have been offered instead to either Glenn Ford, Broderick Crawford, Alan Ladd, Robert Mitchum, or even Jeff Chandler, as they all seemed to excel in 'noir' adventure/intrigue films. If United Artists had been able to secure one of the other mentioned stars for this film, the studio would have increased the budget to shoot 'The Big Boodle' in both color and widescreen scope, but Flynn had slipped so badly at the box office that they decided to play it safe instead. Even so Errol Flynn's film career was on a definite, if slight upswing. No longer the swashbuckler, but now a man of action

and adventure, Flynn had just made 'Istanbul' for Universal Pictures. That studio really ballyhooed Flynn's Hollywood comeback, and 'Istanbul' was a moneymaker for Universal! 'The Big Booodle' with its equally foreign setting of Havana, was also a profitable film for United Artists. In his last starring film role, Errol Flynn gives a solid, tough, gritty performance worthy of any of his competitors, and never once flashes his trademark charismatic smile! For his next film, Errol Flynn would be offered a supporting, character role that would become a milestone in his film career.

'The Big Booodle' was directed by Richard Wilson, a one-time assistant director of Orson Welles. Wilson worked with the great Welles on the uncompleted 'It's All True' (1943) for RKO, the filming of which collapsed under tragic circumstances. After a stint at producing, Richard Wilson started directing fine if not outstanding action features such as 'Man With A Gun' (1955) for United Artists with Robert Mitchum, 'Raw Wind In Eden' (1958) for Universal Pictures with Jeff Chandler and Esther Williams, 'Al Capone' (1960) for Allied Artists with Rod Steiger, 'Pay Or Die' (1960) for Allied Artists with Ernest Borgnine, and his most ambitious project, 'Invitation To A Gunfighter' (1964) for United Artists with Yul Brynner and George Segal. Richard Wilson would direct eight feature films before his death in 1991.

Of Errol Flynn's co-stars, Pedro Armendariz was originally a Mexican film star before going to Hollywood to work for film director John Ford. There Armendariz with his eloquent, noble voice made 'The Fugitive' (1947) for RKO with Henry Fonda, 'Fort Apache' (1948) for RKO with both Henry Fonda, John Wayne and Ward Bond, and 'The Three Godfathers' (1949) for MGM with John Wayne, and Ward Bond. Pedro Armendariz's single starring role in Hollywood was 'The Pearl' (1947) for Eagle-Lion studios, based on the John Steinbeck novella where he gave a magnificent performance as Kino the fisherman. He often played hammy villains like he did in 'Captain Sinbad' (1963) for MGM with Guy Williams, but he also had the bad luck to appear in 'The Conqueror' (1956) for RKO. Produced by Howard Hughes, and directed by Dick Powell, and starring John Wayne, Susan Hayward, Armendariz, and Agnes Moorehead, this huge, big budget epic on the life of Genghis Khan (played by the Duke?) was filmed at Hughes' request on the U.S. Government's Yucca Flats, where they tested the Atomic bombs! The entire leading cast and director Dick Powell all succumbed to one form of Cancer or another over the years in order to make this unintentionally funny motion picture. Pedro Armendariz finished 'From Russia With Love' (1963) for United Artists with Sean Connery, and checked himself into the UCLA Medical Center for treatment of terminal Cancer. In his hospital room, Pedro Armendariz shot himself and took his life.

Gia Scala was already an Italian actress when she was tapped to make 'The Big Booodle'. When her parents asked her who would be her leading man, she

said Errol Flynn, and they screamed at her, 'You will be raped instantly!' When asked about Flynn's behavior towards her during the making of 'The Big Boodle', Gia Scala was quoted as saying, 'Errol Flynn was a perfect gentleman to me. I was never so disillusioned in my life'. Gia Scala's performance in 'The Big Boodle' was noticed by MGM, who signed her up to a long-term contract. There she made the biggest hit of her career with the service comedy 'Don't Go Near The Water' (1958) with Glenn Ford, and then went onto make 'Two Headed Spy' (1958) for MGM with Jack Hawkins, 'The Tunnel Of Love' (1958) for MGM with Richard Widmark and Doris Day, and 'The Angry Hills' (1959) for MGM with Robert Mitchum. She was loaned to Columbia studios where she co-starred with Gregory Peck, Anthony Quinn, and David Niven in the blockbuster hit 'The Guns Of Naverone' (1961). However Gia Scala was already afflicted with depression starting with her mother's death, and had become unreliable, and was dropped by all the studios. The stunningly beautiful Gia Scala slipped into a severe mental illness and made several suicide attempts before finally succeeding in 1972 at the age of 38.

Rosanna Rory, who played the beautiful mystery woman Fina in 'The Big Boodle' returned to Italy where she made a few more films before dropping out of sight completely. Jacques Aubuchon was a familiar face in movies and television from the 1950's through the early 1990's. He appeared nearly everywhere often cast as Indians or Gypsy kings, and may be best know as the chief of the cannibals on the hilarious WW2 comedy series 'McHale's Navy' (1962 - 1966) with Ernest Borgnine. Jacques Aubuchon, who gave a fine performance as Collada in 'The Big Boodle' died in 1991.

The term 'Boodle' means stolen loot, or a huge stash of hidden money, but United Artists thought that our British cousins would not understand this American colloquial term, and released the film in Great Britain as 'A Night In Havana!' That title sounds more appropriate for a 15th Marx Brothers film instead! Now if we remove Errol Flynn's character of Ned Sherwood, we can then replace him with private eye Sam Grunion (Groucho), his assistant Salvatore (Chico), and his loyal sidekick Rusty (Harpo) in Havana to solve the case of the missing counterfeit three million Pesos! Imagine Grunion offering himself as a willing dupe to be seduced by Anita (Gia Scala) in his hotel room. Rusty sees Anita enter Grunion's room with a dagger, and runs down to the lobby where he finds Salvatore. The silent Rusty conducts an elaborate pantomime which Salvatore finally understands to mean, 'The boss is in big danger from a gooda looking lady!' Everything is going great for the cigar smoking Sam Grunion inside the room with Anita, as he duckwalks to the beauty on the sofa until he hears a pounding on the door and the voice of Salvatore! 'Hey Boss! You gotta woman in there?' Grunion shouts back, 'Yeah! it's my sister!', but without missing a beat Salvatore retorts with, 'Oh yeah! Well I'm her brother! Get her out!'

Best Wishes

Ralph Schiller