



Films

Ernest Borgnine makes a welcome reappearance in **Pay or Die!** as an Italian-born police lieutenant in Brooklyn (about 1908), vowed to smash the terrorising activities of the Mafia among the immigrants of New York. This is the real Borgnine, touching, tough, and, not infrequently, very funny. He is well supported by an intelligent cast—notably Robert Ellenstein as the Mafia's lawyer, and a charming newcomer, Zohra Lampert. Not a great film, but it is honest, and portrays brutality without capitalising it.

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs holds a comprehensive selection of the ordinary humdrum difficulties that may arise in any family—money troubles; shy children; mother too busy making do to have much time for father; father, out of work, turning elsewhere for affection. For good measure, there is also a spot of xenophobia, bigotry, and one suicide. Robert Preston and Dorothy McGuire head the cast, but Shirley Knight and Frank Overton steal the show. Some amusing dialogue and a nice sense of period—Oklahoma in the '20s, when the lucky ones were finding oil in their backyards—make this a pretty good example of matinée drama: it won't really upset your tea afterwards.

Based on a book by Art Buchwald, **Surprise Packet** is a comedy, bordering on farce, which goes off at half-cock because the acting is not uniformly stylish. A deported underworld king (Yul Brynner) from America gets entangled with an exiled king (Noël Coward, amusingly world-weary) from one of those Ruritanian states so familiar in musical comedy. The script inclines to wit, and off Mr. Coward's lips several modest epigrams gleam like pearls. But Mr. Brynner's timing for this sort of dialogue is quite unsympathetic; Mitzi Gaynor, as his moll, is clinically decorous.

Strangers When We Meet, a lengthy tale of joyless adultery, stars Kirk Douglas as an architect waiting for a break and Kim Novak as a bored wife waiting (rather hesitantly) for some excitement. They first meet while taking their children to the school bus stop, and the confusion that begins with their groceries in the super-market soon spreads through their lives. The best things in this would-be-adult picture are Ernie Kovacs as architect Douglas's writer client, and the house itself, designed by real-life architect Victor Gruen.

Jayne Mansfield's new British picture, **Too Hot to Handle**, lifts, so we are told, the lid off the strip-club underworld of Soho. As golden-hearted Midnight Franklin, she unavailingly tries to keep the owner of the 'Pink Flamingo' (Leo Genn) to a fairly straight and narrow path. Miss Mansfield has an opportunity to display her talent for spoofing.

George Pal's adaptation of H. G. Wells's **The Time Machine** is on the whole a success—especially for those who take their science fiction seriously but not too stuffily. Rod Taylor, as the time-traveller, and Alan Young, as his friend Philby, presented in a genuine Edwardian atmosphere, give this film a stamp of sincerity often lacking in the genre. The machine itself, comfortably upholstered, and

decorated (it would seem) by William Morris himself, is delightful. The means used to mark the passage of time into the future are ingenious; only with the appearance of the Morlocks, in the year 802,701, does the tension sag.

Foxhole in Cairo might almost have been intended as a burlesque of British spy thrillers. The story concerns a German agent (Adrian Hoven) who, with a radio operator, is 'planted' in Cairo in order to pass back information to Rommel about Allied military plans. Since, from the moment of his arrival, he behaves in a way calculated to arouse suspicion in the meanest Intelligence, whatever initial tension there is in the situation is quickly dissipated. James Robertson Justice is wasted in the stereotyped part of the British counter-espionage chief, but Albert Lieven, as Rommel, has at least two advantages over James Mason, his predecessor in this role: he is a shade less unlike Rommel in appearance and he speaks broken English naturally.

LETTER FROM JAPAN

When Japanese films first started to make their mark overseas, it was with historical dramas such as the prize-winning *Rashomon* and *Gate of Hell*. Much of the appeal of these films undoubtedly lay in the exotic quality of both their visual beauty and their story. The recent trend in the Japanese film industry, however, has been away from the historical and exotic, and towards the contemporary or near-contemporary theme. This change of direction has presented directors with a new kind of problem—how to replace by the intrinsic interest of their theme and treatment the appeal of the earlier colourful and strange masterpieces. Advance reports on the new films on their way from Japan indicate that the challenge has been met, and there will be a strong group of films on contemporary themes. Among them, Ichikawa's *Obsession*, based on Tanizaki's controversial sex novel, and the same director's *Fires on the Plain*, a 'shocker' about cannibalism in the last days of the war; Imamura's *Diary of Sueko*, a touching story of an orphan in a poverty-stricken mining district, based on a best-seller by a 10-year-old girl; *No Greater Love*, first part of Kobayashi's film version of a six-volume novel. (Material for this item was supplied by Shell Sekiyu K.K.)

A dramatic shot from Kobayashi's *No Greater Love*. (Photograph: Gala)

