

(continued from previous page)

to warn him of his danger and urge him to escape. "The Swede" is lying on his bed when the message reaches him; he doesn't even bother to get off it, but with tired resignation simply waits for his doom.

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[T is at this point in the film that the Hollywood scriptwriter takes over from Hemingway and tries to dispose of the author's quest-on-mark. Having shown us "The Swede" being murdered, he attempts to explain why. But to me his answer is neither convincing nor clear; certainly not clear. An insurance investigator (Edmund O'Brien) pries into the murder and starts to uncover a pretty sordid mess of mayhem and intrigue; all kinds of questionable characters are introduced, including a sultry temptress (Ava Gardner) who was involved in "The Swede's" love-life, and a big-shot racketeer (Albert Dekker) who led him into a career of crime and in the end made his life not worth living. The further the investigation proceeds the thicker becomes the tangle of plot and counter-plot, double-crossing and triple-crossing, clues, false scents, and explanations. I suppose some members of the audience found their way out satisfactorily, but frankly, I was still in the middle of the thicket when the curtain went down.

Robert Siodmak is a much-better-than-average director for this variety of melodrama: he has the Hitchcock flair for introducing menace into everyday situations and surroundings and, particularly when he photographs street scenes at night, he manages to convey a feeling that something dangerous and unexpected is lurking in the shadows or waiting round the corner. He is assisted here by acting which is competent if not sensational. Yet the net result of his labours is that, in the process of blowing up *The Killers* into a full-length melodrama, he succeeds only in reducing an unusually brilliant short story to the level of a conventional, tough Hollywood whodunit. This does not mean that *The Killers* is not a useful entertainment in its class; the type of thriller which talks all the time out of the corner of its mouth. But if it is remembered at all five years from now it will be because of those first ten minutes.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

THIS week's review (No. 285) includes two items with a naval flavour. From Auckland there is a "cover" of the Sanders Cup racing, and from Lyttelton, a Navy League's Sea Cadet camp on Quail Island, where young seamen learn the ropes and other skills. Nola Luxford, well-known hostess to New Zealand servicemen passing through New York during the war, gives an interview, and there is an item from Motueka, "The Apple Growers," which is an interesting study of apple orchards, the growers' problems, and what is being done about them.

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