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can make such a good job of this story by Dickens, we may now look forward with anticipation instead of trepidation to the promised screen versions of *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist*, *Pickwick Papers*, and *Bleak House*. And I do wish somebody would have a shot at *Barnaby Rudge*—there's surely good screen material there.

DEAD RECKONING

(Columbia)



HERE is Hollywood still talking tough and still behaving more than a little foolishly. Here again is the hard-bitten hero (Humphrey Bogart) becoming, without any scruples, a law unto himself, dodging the cops as well as the crooks, getting himself drugged, slugged, and "worked over" by a flabby sadist (Marvin Miller) who likes soft music, emerging bloody but unbowed from this ordeal to eliminate his enemies with hand grenades, and finally receiving a bullet in the ribs from his girl-friend when he is about to hand her over to the police and the electric-chair. And why does he endure all this? Why does he insist that the lady must "fry," as he so delicately puts it, when she has just suggested a much more alluring alternative? Why? Because he wants only to clear his dead buddy's name of suspicion of murder, so that the dear lad may posthumously receive the Congressional Medal of Honour. That means more to him than anything.

Yes, these tough guys—even a case-hardened specimen like Mr. Bogart—are really just big softies at heart; they're as susceptible as anybody to that excessive sentimentality which one may be excused for regarding as an American characteristic—that phoney appeal to the emotions which is, of course, found most conspicuously in the Hollywood movie, but which is reflected also in American advertisements, pulp literature, radio features, and popular music.

For the first half-hour or so, *Dead Reckoning* manages to engage your attention, if only because it's so cryptic that it keeps you guessing, and because there's the slick veneer of clever camerawork and John Cromwell's direction. Also there's Mr. Bogart himself, who has done this sort of thing so often that he can scarcely help being technically proficient at it. But as soon as you set your teeth into the story the shell collapses, and there's the soft and cloying centre. As for the other star of this piece, she's Elizabeth Scott, an actress who must have seen Lauren Bacall once (or even twice) and has never forgotten. It's hard to believe that anyone can find anything to admire in the part she plays or the way she plays it: the "heroine" of this story, if not exactly degenerate, is certainly unwholesome—and would be more so if she were not ridiculous.

Well, after this I'm even less inclined to criticise Dickens for writing stories which are artificial and long-winded and for creating characters that are grotesque and incredible. Compared with *Dead Reckoning*, *Great Expectations* is a plain, straightforward tale, peopled with human, everyday types.

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