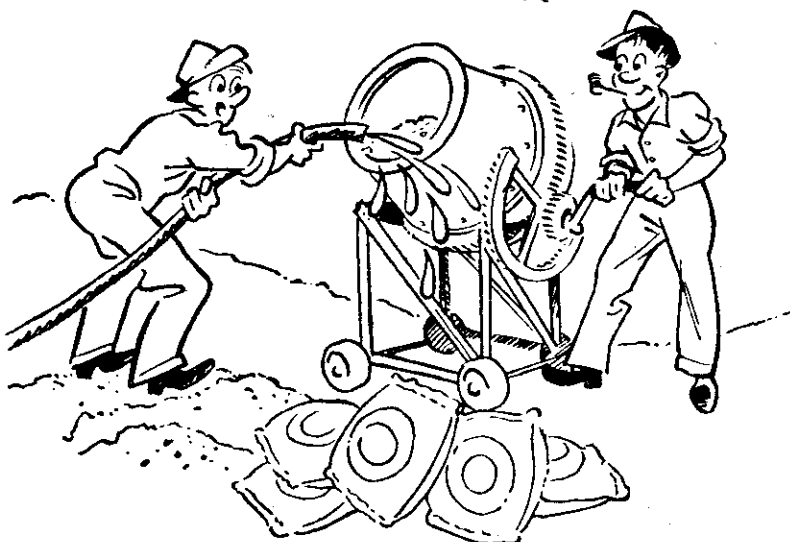


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## Film Reviews, by Jno.

# Star-Spangled Murder

## NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES

(Paramount)

ONE can't eat one's cake and have it, so while most Wellington filmgoers were crowding in this past week to sample *Hamlet*, or *Gentleman's Agreement*, or *Naked City*, I had perforce to content myself with a couple of bread-rolls in the shape of a new Edward G. Robinson thriller and an inconsequential little romance (q.v.) which introduced Dana Andrews as a Maine lobsterman. Neither of these films could be regarded as better than average B-grade entertainment, but neither pretends to be more than that and I am bound to concede that on many occasions I have passed an evening less agreeably.

*Night Has a Thousand Eyes* tells the story of a small-time vaudeville mind-reader (Robinson) who becomes subject to occasional brainstorms in which he can foresee the future. So long as this involves him in nothing more serious than the prediction of the winner in the 3.30, it is quite a pleasant form of aberration—particularly when the winner is a 50-to-1 outsider—but that portion of his subconscious which does the second-seeing is uncomfortably unselective (and uncontrollable) in its previsions. He foresees too much calamity for his own peace of mind and on top of that he can't be sure whether future events inspire his predictions or whether his prophecies shape the future events. After one particularly bad attack in which he foresees the death in childbirth of his fiancée (Virginia Bruce), he runs away and hides first in Arizona and later in a Los Angeles slum.

Flight really avails him nothing. His former partner becomes rich (as a result of one of Robinson's earlier prophecies), marries the girl, and she dies in childbirth as foreseen. Thus far the story is told by flashbacks. When the film opens little Mr. Robinson is despairingly trying to save the partner's daughter from the consequences of his latest bout of second-sight, in which he has reluctantly prophesied her death—"at night, under the stars"—with a wealth of circumstantial detail. From this point, the story develops as a sort of inverted whodunit, in which the interest centres on Robinson's frantic efforts to convince the girl's fiancé, and the police, of his bona fides—or at least of the bona fides of his intuitions. No one is prepared to take the shabby little man seriously until some of the events which he has foretold will precede her death actually take place. Then, of course, it is nearly too late. The climax develops to the accompaniment of thunder without, slow-ticking clocks within, eerily bulging curtains and creaking clichés, and not even the undoubted ability of Mr. Robinson or the slickness of the direction can conceal its artificiality.

## BAROMETER

MAINLY FAIR: "Deep Waters."  
OVERCAST: "Night Has a Thousand Eyes."

Enjoyment of a film of this kind, of course, demands certain intellectual concessions, and a corresponding relaxation of one's critical standards—and if the effort is worth it, I am prepared to concede and relax as comfortably as my neighbour. In the present instance, the story hardly warrants such readjustments, but what really put me off were the bursts of eerie discordant music which heralded Mr. Robinson's brainstorms. They sounded too much like bats in the belfry.

## DEEP WATERS

(20th Century-Fox)

THE most obvious and the most elementary criticism that one could make of *Deep Waters* is that they are not really very deep at all. In the literal or oceanographical sense, the action is confined to the moderate soundings of the Maine coastline where Dana Andrews ekes out a comfortable enough living catching lobsters in company with a cheerful Portuguese (Cesar Romero) who would much rather breed rabbits or raise chooks, or indeed do anything other than catch lobsters. Nor is the story much deeper as a psychological study. It pays conventional attention to the men-must-work-and-women-must-weep theme inseparable from the emotional life of a fishing community, but employs it simply as a source of mild conflict between Andrews and his girl (Jean Peters). Nor is one in doubt at any stage that Miss Peters will eventually surrender her comfortable job as a child welfare officer (and her comfortable car) and settle down among the lobster-pots.

The most promising complication in a film which can best be described as mild is the presence of a 10-year-old orphan, played with commendable intelligence by Dean Stockwell. This small boy, son of a drowned fisherman, is the special charge of Miss Peters who feels in honour bound to dissuade him from following his father's calling. With the twin drives of heredity and environment operating in direct opposition to her, Miss Peters's struggle is a hopeless one from the outset. Even when the youngster decides to run away from all womenfolk he steals a boat and makes for the open sea—giving the director his chance to stage a really tempestuous sea-rescue, in the studio, with some unbelievably stormy back-projection. Apart from this lapse, the settings are remarkably fine and fairly well photographed (all the exterior work was done on the Maine coast) and there is a pleasantly fresh atmosphere about the entire film. And I quite enjoyed the sight of Cesar Romero (last seen by me in the refulgent trappings of Herman Cortes) rigged out in grubby old clothes. He seemed to enjoy the change himself.