

THE FIGHT GAME

THE SQUARE RING

(Rank-Ealing)

I LIKE to think that at the cinema I have a better stomach than many people for the uncooked facts of life—properly served, of course—even to the extent of an occasional second helping, but among the films in this class *Champion* is one I wouldn't care to see again. *The Square Ring* has many points of comparison with *Champion* and its implications are just as depressing; but it's much easier to sit through—partly because there's quite a bit of light relief—and should get across to a wider audience.

The setting is an English boxing stadium where the entire action takes place in one night. Almost at the beginning "Happy" Lewis (Bill Owen), a rising young boxer who never belies his nickname, makes a noisy entrance with several girl friends, and his noisy exit brings the film to an end. Sharing the dressing room with Happy are a string of fighters, all well played, whose public and private lives carry the story: a Welsh novice (Ronald Lewis) having his first professional fight; a punch-drunk pug (George Rose) with a grievance about being first on the bill; a dumb ox (Bill Travers) with a liking for science fiction; Rick Martell (Maxwell Reed), prepared to lose for what a racketeer will pay; and Kid Curtis (Robert Beatty), a former champion trying to make a comeback, whose fight provides the big drama of the night. There are some other interesting characters, too—the Kid's wife (Joan Collins), Rick's girl friend, a manager whose wife (Kay Kendall) has more than a professional interest in the Kid, a shabby promoter, a ringside bookie and his pals, and a dressing room "handler" (Jack Warner), who is wiser than most of the other people in the story. Interest never flags as the film cuts at a good pace between dressing room and ring, with occasional shots also of the Kid's estranged wife in an adjoining eating house to point up the tragedy of marriage to a fighter whose illusion is that he'll quit after another year at the top.

One of the tests of a film is the time it stays in your mind. This one haunted me. I couldn't get rid of the sad-humorous voice of the punch-drunk, the face of the Kid, the horrifying close-ups picked out of the crowd, its roar heard from the dressing room, swelling each time the swing doors open, and the perennial strident march that at any sports gathering sends you home. The film catches an atmosphere that should distend the nostrils of any boxing fan, though not every fan will find all of the story palatable—for it pulls no punches.

The Square Ring is based on a play by Ralph W. Peterson. It was directed by Basil Dearden, who made *The Captive Heart* and *The Blue Lamp*, and photographed by Otto Heller, whose better-known successes include *The Queen of Spades*.

KNOCK ON WOOD

(Paramount-Dena Productions)

ANY filmgoer who realises when the lights go up that laughter has recently brought him to tears may expect

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BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The Square Ring."
FAIR: "Knock on Wood."
FAIR: "The Magnet."

to be branded a sourpuss if he starts looking for faults. Okay, then, I'm a sourpuss; but let me explain that I began to wonder just how good *Knock on Wood* was when I realised there was none of it I'd specially want to see again. This is a funny film with some very funny bits—Danny Kaye in a Hibernian gathering; a car with all the gadgets and Danny pressing every button but the right one; Danny, trapped between two pairs of legs under a desk, in a knee-scratching, hand-slapping routine. Other good ideas might have been carried further: Danny as a neurotic ventriloquist whose dummy is his alter ego is abandoned in favour of a spy story in which the dummy's dumb. The songs and music are again by Sylvia Fine, but unless you like burlesque more than I do you'll find none of the song or dance numbers as good as the best in *On the Riviera* (which I liked very much and some other people didn't); and there is nothing like Popo the Puppet. All this fault-finding comes from trying to explain things. Well, don't let me put you off. I like Danny, we all like Danny, and even if some of the material he's given to work with is sub-standard he manages to make *Knock on Wood*—I say it again—a funny film.

THE MAGNET

(Rank-Ealing)

I JUST missed *The Magnet* in Auckland two and a half years ago, and have looked out for it ever since; and now that I've seen it I can't help wondering why it has taken so long to get what I think is its first screening in a Wellington metropolitan theatre. It isn't a masterpiece, but it has a freshness which is one of the most agreeable qualities in any film, and it should appeal very much to the many family filmgoers who may not like some of the heavier pieces I recommend on this page. It's about a small boy (engagingly played by William Fox) who acquires a giant magnet from another boy by a piece of childish dishonesty—when all other offers fail he trades for it his "invisible" watch. Straightway he develops a bad conscience, and the rest of the story is about the consequences. The script is by T. E. B. Clarke, who has written some of the most successful Ealing comedies. This one isn't up to his best, but it is amusing in a quiet way (there's a nice sequence at the expense of the psychiatrist father—Stephen Murray—well off the track in his diagnosis of the boy's behaviour) and exciting, too (when the boy runs away and becomes involved in a piece of daring that nearly ends in tragedy). I feel that the film as a whole doesn't quite succeed, but I would be less than honest if I didn't say I enjoyed it. Charles Frend directed.

NEW FRONTIER

(Pacific Films)

PACIFIC FILM PRODUCTIONS, whose recently-started monthly magazines have included some excellent material (Rongotai Development, the Harry Squires Appeal), as well as one piece (Winter Stock Feed) that looked sort of familiar, have now produced a 20-minute film on the Kawerau pulp and paper project. Scripted and edited by John O'Shea, and photographed by Roger Mirams, this develops its story in an interesting way and has some fresh, imaginative touches. I think, though, it would have been better if it had departed less from straight commentary—in particular, the phone calls, conferences and other get-togethers are rather stagey.

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