

# For Stouthearts Only

## THE WAGES OF FEAR

(Filmsonor—Films de France)

WHATEVER else you may say about the film version of Georges Arnaud's "novel of suspense" it is certainly suspenseful—it could hardly be more so. All those with weak hearts should stay away. The other obvious thing about it is that it takes a very dim view of the human experiment. Here the director, Henri-Georges Clouzot, who has already shocked us with *Le Corbeau* and *Manon*, is in his element, and in a rather exciting way he wallows in it. It's an outlook for which I can feel some sympathy though not, I'm afraid, very much admiration.

The story, set in Central America, is already pretty well known through the book or the widely broadcast BBC version. A large quantity of nitro-glycerine is needed to put out a blazing oil well, and for a reward of 1000 dollars apiece four hard-up, desperate men undertake to drive two truckloads of it over 300 miles of bad roads, where the tropical heat or a sudden jolt might blow them sky high. In a film which runs for over

two hours, M. Clouzot takes rather a long time to set the scene, though I must say this early part is fascinating enough, and in its way as brilliantly done as the rest; and it includes at least one scene—a trial of strength between two of the principals—which claws briefly at the nerve ends and provides an interesting contrast with the sort of courage they are to need when the hazardous journey begins.

The main characters are two Frenchmen, Jo and Mario, who meet in the festering little town where the story opens. Yves Montand, who plays Mario, has already been seen here as a talented actor in *Les Portes de la Nuit*; but I think Charles Vanel, as Jo, will be longest remembered from this film as a study in courage and fear. Contrasted with these two are Folco Lulli as Luigi, a likeable Italian, and Peter van Eyck as Bimba, a German refugee who is the hero of one of the big scenes when a rock has to be blasted out of the way. The aftermath of this incident, by the way, provides about the only really human moment of the film. Others of importance are Vera Clouzot (the director's wife) as Mario's girl friend, and William Tubbs (he was the Catholic



"A STUDY IN FEAR AND COURAGE"  
Charles Vanel on the hazardous journey

chaplain in *Paisa*) as the tough American boss who sets the assignment.

The real stars of the film, however, are M. Clouzot himself and his cameraman, Armand Thirard, who was with him also on *Manon*; for it's as a piece of

film-making that *The Wages of Fear* achieves something like greatness. The early part, I've said, is well done, but once the trucks are on the road scene after scene is startling in its imaginative use of camera angles and movement, its

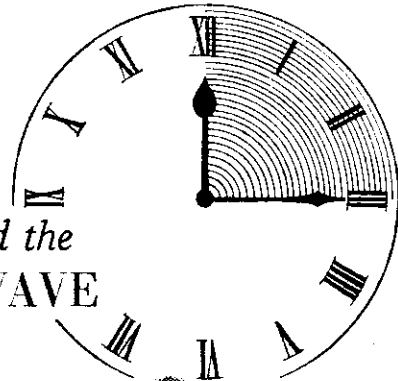
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