

OF BLOODY DEEDS AND DEATH . . .

RICHARD III

(London Films-Laurence Olivier)

G Cert. Rec. for persons 13 and over.

De l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace! Were I required to devise a blazon for Sir Laurence Olivier, Dan'on would supply the motto. What a monstrous clever fellow is this—and how arrogantly he shoulders himself above all other screen Shakespearians. Boldness has been the badge of his achievement, and his achievement has been a marriage of stage and screen styles which no other producer has come so close to consummating.

Henry V, symbolic in its break-out from the wooden "O," was a conscious—almost a self-conscious—breaking with tradition. With its colour, its glorious battle sequence, its charming formalised romantic interludes, it had a pristine sparkle and exhilaration. From *Henry V* to *Hamlet* was a characteristically ambitious leap forward. Olivier's restless Prince has taken as many barbs as St. Sebastian—in the main from the Shakespearians—but the film stands, and will stand, as one of the particular ornaments of the English screen, an audacious essay that infected one (at any rate, this one) with a profound and disquieting excitement.

Now we have *Richard III*—and what is the particular quality of *Richard*? Here, I think, fascination is the word which, above all others, rings most truly; and not fascination in any commonplace sense. Inevitably, of course, one is engrossed by the performance of a company which could scarcely be matched in the English-speaking world; by the richness of Shakespeare released in a new dimension; by a superb theatrical sense ranging at large beyond the confines of the stage.

But the fascination of *Richard III* is something simpler, something more potent and more personal. It lies in Olivier himself, in the magnetism of the man, in the particular zest and vitality with which he plays the villain. Plays is, indeed, too weak a word. For close on three hours he is *Richard*. Audacious as ever, he speaks directly to you from the screen. Not to the audience at large, mark you, for these of which he discourses are dark and devious matters—plots, inductions dangerous, libels and dreams—but to you alone, secretly, as he spies through the casements at Westminster or capers grotesquely across the empty throne-room. It was this confiden-

BAROMETER

FINE: "Richard III."
OVERCAST: "Away All Boats."

tial villainy which, for me, keyed the tune and held me mesmerised until the last crashing discords on the field at Bosworth.

Pictorially, the film abounds in felicities, from coronation pomp (the last scene of *Henry VI*, Pt. 3, opens the film, so that there are two crownings) to the flash of the headsman's axe as it falls on the neck of Hastings, the crunch of snow under horses' hooves on a leaden winter's day, the crown hanging on a briar stem on Bosworth field. Textually, the play has been treated with a ruthlessness akin to *Richard's* own. Characters and scenes have disappeared entirely, others have been transposed—Anne is wooed across her husband's bier, not her father-in-law's—an emendation which notably sharpens the drama of the interlude, but for me somewhat abated its conviction. The voluptuous Jane Shore (Pamela Brown) flits meaningfully but almost mute from scene to scene.

But if the text is cropped—the more room for action, the less space for words—what remains is wonderfully brought to life. No player I have ever seen so brilliantly suits the action to the word as Olivier does; no one more carefully studies the choreography of the drama. It is not usually easy to disentangle the credits of a film, but here, beyond doubt, Olivier is the guiding intelligence, the prime mover. He is, of course, producer and director as well as star (his third hat-trick), but he has also been ably seconded by his designer (Roger Furse), his art director (Carmen Dillon), director of photography (Otto Heller), and, of course, by a superlative cast—Hardwicke, Richardson, Gielgud, Claire Bloom, Mary Kerridge, Norman Wooland, Laurence Naismith, Alec Clunes—the list is too long to deal fairly with.

But see *Richard* for yourself—and if you have already seen it, see it again as I shall do. See it even if you care not a fig for Shakespeare—but take a strong stomach with you, for this is a veritable blood-pudding of villainy.

AWAY ALL BOATS

(Universal-International)

G Cert.

IN the Pacific the seamen, soldiers and airmen of the United States fought from Midway onward the greatest (and

the bloodiest) amphibious campaign in history. A score of films at least have so far celebrated some phase or other of that struggle—some of them were good, some middling, others bad. The best so far—*The Caine Mutiny*—was a psychological study, rather than a war history. None at all so far has matched the heroism or the horror of those days. *Away All Boats* barely makes the middling grade. It taught me something about assault transports and landing craft, and I encountered some battle sequences that are by now tolerably familiar (the kamikazes are almost old friends), but few of the characters ever existed outside the lush sentimental imaginations of the scriptwriters.

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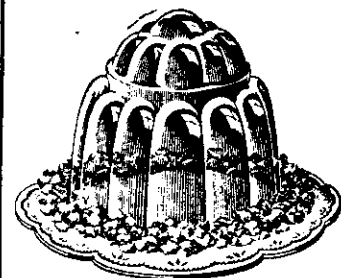
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★ LAURENCE OLIVIER, CLAIRE BLOOM—
"Anne is wooed across her husband's bier."