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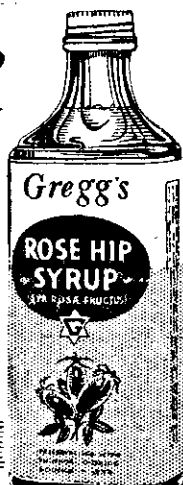
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FILM REVIEWS, BY F.A.J.

One Plain, Two Coloured

THE KILLING

(Kubrick-Harris-United Artists) A Cert.
NOT since *The Asphalt Jungle* have we seen an American thriller in the same class as *The Killing*. Here again are both the sustained suspense and the extra dimension in character which make such a film memorable. And here again, as it happens, is Sterling Hayden, trying to buy security and happiness with his last big robbery—only this time there's no sentimental journey at the end.

The race track is the setting for the "killing," and with its tension underlined by rhythms that play on the nerves and a finely imaginative use of natural sound, the film has you hypnotised in no time. You meet the superbly played characters, fairly ordinary people who, for urgent reasons, want to get rich quickly: a reformed alcoholic (Jay C. Flippen), a jumpy tote cashier (Elisha Cook), who'll do anything to buy back the affection of his wife (Marie Windsor); a barman with no money for the doctors his sick wife needs; a cop in debt; and Johnny Clay (Sterling Hayden) and his devoted girl friend—he's not long out of jail, never (he hopes) to go back again. No one need be hurt, except a horse which a hired gunman (Tim Carey) will shoot to cause confusion, and a few cops, slugged by a strong man (Kola Kwarian) hired to start a riot.

Filmed in a series of short sequences which overlap and recapitulate as they tell the story from the viewpoint of one character and then another, and cut to a nerve stretching rhythm, *The Killing* reminds us, in the colour-and-wide-screen era, how good conventional black and white cinema can be. Without being arty, the stark photography is never less than striking, and in its economical exploration of character in visual terms (watch the scenes between the cashier and his unfaithful wife) it uses the close shot and close-up more often, more boldly and more effectively than any film I have seen for a long time. (I gather, by the way, it has been cut somewhat—and too much, surely, at the point where infidelity begins to pay off.)

The Killing is the work of a young director, Stanley Kubrick, whose *Killer's Kiss* I reviewed a few months ago. This new film isn't as compassionate as the earlier one, but with a clearer aim it never falters and its action never declines into melodrama. Though Mr Kubrick wrote, directed, shot and cut *Killer's Kiss*, other hands have used camera and scissors in *The Killing*; the score is again by Gerald Fried. Nevertheless, Mr Kubrick's talents are so individual and his signature so clear that I'm sure his genius much more than any other fathered this remarkable movie. May he give us many more.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

(Robert Rossen-United Artists) G Cert.
WHEN spectacle so often benumbs us, a film-maker who takes a big historical subject seriously deserves success. Robert Rossen, who wrote and directed *Alexander the Great*, has tried hard, and in his 12,000-odd feet of film are many brilliant passages, but as a

BAROMETER

FINE: "The Killing."
FAIR TO FINE: "The Spanish Gardener."
FAIR: "Alexander the Great."

whole it's disappointing. Could it be that integrity has chased out liveliness? Of the film's two halves—Alexander growing up, schooled by his father, Philip of Macedon, to succeed him, and Alexander the conqueror—the first is the best. Here are the events which should go a long way towards explaining Alexander, and Richard Burton brings a presence and a voice to the part. Even so, interested but seldom really moved, I didn't ever feel I had got very close to Alexander. Yet if Mr Rossen was to succeed at all with his formidable subject he had surely to give us first a living and unforgettable character. It may be that reconstructed history on this scale isn't my dish. I remember most vividly such scenes as the death of Darius and the charge of his chariots in his last battle—and there is enough of this sort of thing to make me feel that seeing the film was worthwhile.



STERLING HAYDEN

As you might expect, Robert Krasker's CinemaScope camera-work is beautifully done; and among other players Frederic March as Philip, Danielle Darrieux as the scheming Olympias, and Claire Bloom as Barsine do well. Incidentally, Michael Forlong, not so long since with the National Film Unit, was second unit director.

THE SPANISH GARDENER

(Rank) G Cert.
THE SPANISH GARDENER is a film of promise not quite fulfilled; a story with a worthwhile subject—the relationship between father and son—which goes so far, then is marred by plot and melodrama. Even so, it's an attractive piece. The father, played with considerable insight by Michael Hordern, is an embittered British consular official in Spain. Not good enough for a top job and deserted by his wife, he smothered his son with too devoted care, imagining him a delicate child who must be protected from the world. When the boy starts to develop robustly under the influence of the young gardener at the consulate, the father jealously forbids their friendship. Still, the outcome should please everyone. Jon Whiteley, best remembered as the elder boy in *The Little Kidnappers*, an earlier Philip Leacock film, gives a good performance as the boy, and Dirk Bogarde is a likeable gardener. He's no Spaniard, though, nor is the villain, Garcia, as played by Cyril Cusack, which is another weakness of the film. However, the relationship between the boy and his father is sensitively portrayed, and the script (from an A. J. Cronin novel) is intelligent. The film, which has used some fine Spanish locations, is beautifully photographed in very good colour (and VistaVision) by Christopher Challis.

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 21, 1957.