

SHOESTRING SAGA

SUICIDE MISSION

(North Sea Films-Columbia) G Cert.

IF you are making a film on a shoestring (as the economists put it), the shoestring should be long enough to allow you reasonable freedom of movement. Having too little money can sometimes be almost as much of a handicap to the film-maker as having too much, but it would seem that when North Sea Films embarked on *Suicide Mission* they'd got the ships, they'd got the men, and they'd got just enough money, too.

And by Jingo, they (or more precisely their director, the New Zealander Michael Forlong) didn't do at all badly with them. In fact, Mr Forlong did remarkably well. *Suicide Mission*, which is a faithful abridgement of David Howarth's best-seller, *The Shetland Bus*, is admittedly not on the scale of *The Cruel Sea*, and it does not attempt to probe deeply into the personalities of the tough, taciturn Norsemen who fought sub-Arctic storms through the long North Sea winters to keep the Norwegian resistance armed and supplied. But it's as good as any of the other R.N. semi-documentaries of the war at sea, and a lot better than some—more convincing than *Cockleshell Heroes*, say, and more worthwhile than *The Sea Shall Not Have Them*. I'd go farther—I would say that the storm at sea in *Suicide Mission* is a more exciting and a more authentic seascape that you will find in any of these others—*The Cruel Sea* not excepted.

That alone is a fair measure of achievement for an old boy of the National Film Unit. That the authentic atmosphere is an indirect consequence of a measure of budgetary austerity detracts not one iota from the credit due to the director. Mr Forlong had apparently no large-scale studio tanks (perhaps no large-scale studio) in which he could mock-up sequences in reasonable comfort and under controlled conditions. To photograph a storm at sea he had to go to sea in a storm—and in a fishing-boat at that. But as the film eloquently demonstrates, he flinched at nothing to get the effects he desired, and what we see is a North Sea storm from zero altitude—great grey-bearded rollers laced with foam breaking over the bulwarks, slopping decks being squeezed by sheer wind pressure, the jar and stamp of the little diesel, the horizontal lash of rain and spray. There are not, you might think, many camera-angles aboard a 70-foot fishing-boat, but Mr Forlong has got all of them, and each adds its quota

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Suicide Mission."
OVERCAST: "Heaven Knows, Mr Allison."
MAINLY FAIR: "The Incredible Shrinking Man."
DULL: "Rock, Pretty Baby."

of meaning to the picture. No one who sees this record will doubt that on the Shetland bus-route it was, as David Howarth put it, a wholetime job merely to keep alive.

For a star, the film has Leif Larsen, one of the wartime skippers on the bus-route, and a number of others from the sea-borne section of the Norwegian "underground" (as well as a sprinkling of actors) also take part, most of them competently. The film has its conventional excitements, too—brushes with quislings and hair's-breadth escapes from Nazi security forces. But the battles with wind and sea and winter darkness are the most exciting of all.

HEAVEN KNOWS, MR ALLISON

(20th Century-Fox-CinemaScope) G Cert.

JOHN HUSTON—a director with some great films behind him—had almost everything that Michael Forlong lacked when he made this film. He had stars, and CinemaScope, and Technicolor, and stereophonic sound, and money, and the co-operation of the U.S. Marine Corps. He had also a story of quite monumental bad taste.

Corporal Allison, U.S.M.C. (Robert Mitchum), sole survivor of a forlorn mission, drifts ashore on a South Sea island some time in 1944 to find, not the Japanese garrison he expected (they arrive later), but a solitary (and beautiful) nun, Sister Angela (Deborah Kerr). Now I don't suggest for a moment that this kind of human situation—isolation, propinquity and a measure of mutual attraction ranged against the profound sanctions of religious dedication—could not properly be the subject of serious drama. But as it is treated here—as a kind of constant teasing excitement, served with a garnish of violence, elephantine humour and cracker-barrel philosophising—it was (to me and I'm sure to many other people) grossly offensive. I don't suppose Hollywood goes out of its way to offend its audience, but I have wondered before, and now wonder again, how it comes about that the likelihood of causing offence is not recognised.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

R: 13 and over only

ROCK, PRETTY BABY

(Universal-International)

Y Cert.

ACTING upon misinformation received, which led me to believe that I could make the acquaintance of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and be home in time for supper, I found myself forced to sit out the cacophonies of the second feature first (a rock and roll ordeal with delinquent overtones which I wouldn't recommend even to an Inland Revenue officer). I really doubt if the science fiction item was worth the effort, but by itself it is sufficiently offbeat to be intriguing. Apart from clever trick photography (of which there is a great deal), the interesting thing about the shrinking man is that though, by molecular disturbance, he keeps diminishing in size until he is fighting gigantic spiders with a pin that looks like a broadsword, he still keeps an adult-sized mind. And that's more than a lot of full-size screen characters do. The ending, too, is entirely unexpected.



LEIF LARSEN

Keeping alive was a wholetime job

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 23, 1957.



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