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Le Samourai
(The Samurai)
(FRENCH-COLOR)

Paris, Nov. 7.

Prodis release of Filmel-CICC-Fida Cinematografica production. Stars Alain Delon; features Nathalie Delon, Francois Perier, Jacques Leroy, Cathy Rosier. Written and directed by Jean-Pierre Melville from book by Joan McLeod. Camera (Eastmancolor), Henri Decae; editor, Marguerite Bonnot. At Colisee, Paris. Running Time, 105 MINS.

Jeff Alain Delon
Inspector Francois Perier
Girl Nathalie Delon
Pianist Cathy Rosier
Gunman Jacques Leroy
Wiener Michel Boisrond

Jean-Pierre Melville has made parts of two of his films in the U.S. and has a great knowledge and fondness for Yank pix, especially gangster items. Here he uses an American book on a hired killer and transposes it to France for a curiously hybrid pic. This appears a bit too solemn to inject all the suspense, action and characterization he seeks.

It almost seems to be an American film dubbed into French with some strange effects in altering the French scene to appear American in such things as night clubs, sordid little hotels, police lineups and the general comportment of the personages. It is intermittently successful. Without a true French gangster core that would breed this sort of automation killer, Melville extends it to try to compare him to the Japanese Samurai dedicated to the military codes.

Gangsters may have gotten folk hero status in some societies, but appear forced in a French setting. Melville conducts this with solid seriousness and maintains interest even if using the familiar happenings in tales of hired killers.

Alain Delon has the empty agate eyes, cold demeanor and implacable presence for the glacial killer.

Killer manages to spark love in a part-time kept woman, and becomes the prey of a dedicated unswerving police inspector. Melville does wring some suspense as the killer tries to gun down his ex-employers and is also being hounded by the police.

He is killed on his final job. But it seems he has had some heart for he walks into the trap wittingly and without a true desire to kill his next victim.

Nathalie Delon is somewhat too frigid as the killer's mistress while Cathy Rosier has presence and poise as the comely pianist. Francois Perier, a comedian, is cast against type as the almost fanatical inspector but manages to acquit himself acceptably. Film has tempo but could be cut a bit.

There's no denying Melville's admiration for this kind of pic and his assimilation to local terms. But this one doesn't come off completely. It appears a likely play-off item abroad if tightened and using the hardsell. Mosk.