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Le Cercle Rouge
(The Red Circle)
(FRENCH—COLOR)

Paris, Nov. 3.

Corona release of Films Corona-Selenia production. Stars Yves Montand, Bourvil, Alain Delon, Francois Perier, Gian-Maria Volonte. Written and directed by Jean-Pierre Melville; camera (Eastmancolor), Henri Decae; art director, Theo Meurisse; editor, Marie-Sophie Dubus. Reviewed in Paris, Oct. 21, '70. Running Time: 140 MINS.

Jansen Yves Montand
Corey Alain Delon
Mattel Bourvil
Vogel Gian-Maria Volonte
Santi Francois Perier

It appears that Melville may have taken too literally the French highbrow penchant of reading Greek tragedy into this genre of films. The American counterparts sprang from a social phenomena—the Depression, Prohibition, etc., that made the gangster a part of the local scene, whether organized or via the rural, more anarchic, personal gangs.

Melville has underworld types who seem to spring from no actual milieu but recognize each other at once and have their own code, ways and manners. The police see their mirror image and use ruthless ways to cope with them. But Melville has become a bit too portentous and uses way-out coincidences, metaphorical dialog and a too-measured style and pace to make this masculine tale too stilted to humanize its protagonists or turn it into a tragic, inexorable ritual.

A young gangster is released from prison, another is being taken to prison by a police inspector. The latter escapes and hides in the trunk of the former's car. The escaped man saves him when two thugs overtake him to kill him for having taken money from a former confederate who let him down and even took over his girl.

Together they decide to pull off a big heist and get an alcoholic ex-policeman to go in with them. The holdup is done with solid suspense, though not up to others in this sort of caper, which make the holdup transcend the milieu and become an exciting look at men doing a job well. It has a tendency to become grandiloquent, as when the ex-alcoholic, after set-

ting up a tripod to do a shot that requires perfect precision, suddenly whips it off the tripod to do it handheld. It is more a theatrical gesture than one springing from character or the professionalism displayed till then.

They finally all get knocked off by the inspector who had borne the brunt of the one's escape. Melville has a solid name cast to help for payoff, with a little tightening, abroad via Alain Delon as the man released from prison, Gian-Maria Volonte as the escaped man, Yves Montand as the alky and the late Bourvil as the plodding, honest but still devious inspector who uses blackmail to get people to turn stool pigeon.

Actors all perform professionally and the expert steely hues of cinematographer Henri Decae, the knowing editing and fine production dress are all on the positive side. This is a caper pic, with a bit more, which tries too hard to transcend its genre by suggestion and treatment rather than in allowing a verisimilitude and more human characterization to do it.

But no denying Melville's craftsmanship and his inventiveness in using a film type in too personal way if he tries too hard to make it timeless. Film even gets a pre-title quote of Buddha into it, about men who must meet someday ending up in a red circle which will play out their destiny. Mosk.

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