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Scum
(BRITISH-COLOR)

**Tough subject, tough view-
ing.**

London, Aug. 7.

A Boyd's Co. production. Executive producers, Don Boyd, Michael Relph. Produced by Davina Belling, Clive Parsons. Directed by Alan Clarke. Features entire cast. Screenplay, Roy Minton; camera (color), Phil Meheux; editor, Mike Bradsell; sound, David John; art director, Mike Porter; associate producer, Martin Campbell; asst. director, Raymond Day. Reviewed at the Baronet preview theatre, London, August 6, '79. (BBFC Ratin: X). Running Time: 96 MINS.

Carlin	Ray Winstone
Archer	Mick Ford
Sands	John Judd
Richards	Phil Daniels
Banks	John Blundell
Eckersley	Ray Burdis
Davis	Julian Firth
Angel	Alick Riley
Woods	John Fowler
Taylor	Nigel Humphreys
Greaves	Philip Jackson
Governor Baildon	Peter Howell
Miss Biggs	Jo Kendall
Goodyear	John Grillo
Meakin	Alan Igpon

Given that "Scum," a relentlessly brutal slice of British reform school life, is strongly directed by Alan Clarke, and acted with admirable conviction, it is a pity as to the film's boxoffice prospects that Roy Minton's hard-hitting screenplay, on an important theme, is more passionate tract than powerful entertainment.

That is not to imply that the curse should have been taken off it. Rather that its appeal could have been wider with more dramatic light and shade, and its message more likely to find its mark if the basic point — that a youth penitentiary can kill, not cure — had been made through more investigative character-study, instead of via a catalog of horrific events.

Controversy value alone, however, should render the independent venture readily marketable in territories with lenient censorship, with returns okay but unspectacular.

Significantly, the plot of a "trainee" (young offender) whose means of survival in the corrupt reformatory is to become top dog by meeting violence with violence started life as a BBC-TV play. Although filmed, it was never aired on account of its alleged bias and unpalatability. It thus became more of a local cause celebre probably than if it had been transmitted.

In remaking it as a feature, Clarke (who directed the play) and producers Davina Belling and Clive Parsons have departed little from the original, and that's the root of the problem. Not that it needed enlarging for the bigger canvas, nor that an upbeat ending (for example) would have been appropriate. But unremitting bleakness is a likely effective recourse for a scripter in order to contrast the blandness of an evening's viewing on the tube, no-hope subjects seem to work best as theatrical fare. Minton's remorseless villains, victims or not, key only hate.

An exception to the one-dimensional characterizations is Mick Ford as an intelligent and insolent trainee who never breaks rules, but affects conscientious fads which the sadistic wardens are forced to accommodate — religious convictions, vegetarianism, and suchlike. Those scenes are both entertaining and telling.

Ray Winstone, although compelling here and there, never quite brings the central role to life, largely because the boy's early transformation into a vicious zombie deprives him of vulnerability, and so also of sympathy.

Technical credits are fine, and the production wears its slim cost

and tight winter location schedule commendably. Absence of music is well-judged, and Mike Bradsell's seamless editing a notable plus. Pic may be entry in the N.Y. Film Festival. —Simo.