

New science fiction films owe more to Orwell than to Verne

AFTER A LAPSE of about 10 years, the science fiction movie seems to be coming back into vogue. But during its decade of unpopularity, the genre has undergone a few changes.

Back in 1950 science fiction fans thrilled to pictures like "When Worlds Collide," which imagined the first human expedition to another planet. These movies projected a future in which man's progress in technology had opened up new and exciting vistas. They were really the direct descendants of Jules Verne's ground-breaking book "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea."

But just as Verne's underwater craft became a reality—the submarine—scientists are now proving the exploration of space is within man's grasp. And the new science fiction writers are looking more to Orwell than to Verne in their fantasies of a future in which technology will have "de-humanized" man, or at least wrought great changes in his moral and ethical standards.

Stanley Kubrick's ironic and deliberately shocking "Dr. Strangelove" began to point the movies in the same direction. Jean Luc Godard's "Alphaville," which just won the grand prize at the Berlin Film Festival and had its Italian premiere in Spoleto, is almost a French "1984." Kubrick is now preparing "2001: A Space Odyssey."

At the moment, Joseph E. Levine and Carlo Ponti are making "The Tenth Victim," a story of legalized homicide set in the 21st Century.

The screenplay has been adapted from a short story in the book "Untouched by Human Hands," by U.S.

KILLINGSWORTH ON THE CINEMA



science fiction writer Robert Sheckley. It imagines a world without war in which the Big Hunt has been invented as "a safety valve for humanity's latent aggressive instincts."

The Hunt pits licensed international citizens against each other in a legal duel of death. Each participant alternates as "hunter" and "victim," striving for the ten kills which bring fame, money and unlimited political and moral privileges.

Like all science fiction, however, it is firmly grounded in existing fact. Says the Italian director, Elio Petri: "The struggle for existence in civilization today approaches the lethal intensity of physical violence. The futuristic setting of this film is really tomorrow morning—we exaggerate facets of contemporary life to fantasy proportions in order to show what mankind may soon make of itself."

Lest this message be too bitter a pill for the general public to swallow, "The Tenth Victim" will have a heavy sugar coating of glamour and satire. Stars are Marcello Mastroianni and Ursula Andress, an unbeatable team at any box office, and nobody is skimping on color film, exotic locations, fantastic costumes or paper for advance publicity.

Screenwriters Petri, Ennio Flaiano, Tonino Guerra and Giorgio Salvione, according to one person associated with the production, are "out-doing themselves thinking up anti-septic killings." At a Pop Art exhibition in New York (how much more contemporary can you get?) Ursula guns down her Oriental opponent with a rapid-fire metal brassiere. In a horse show in Rome Mastroianni attaches dynamite-spiked spurs to the boots of his German opponent, who blows himself out of competition—when he clicks his heels together.

Mastroianni then plans to dispose of Ursula, chosen as his huntress by the Big Hunt's computer, in a stunt involving an electronic beach chair which will eject her into an alligator-filled swimming pool. This scheme doesn't quite come off—but by the end of the film no one is supposed to care. Things like love are sacred in any century.

It all looks like a spectacular 90 minutes of "entertainment with a message" and it points up again the secret of Joe Levine's success—providing money and leaving others free to make full use of their talents.

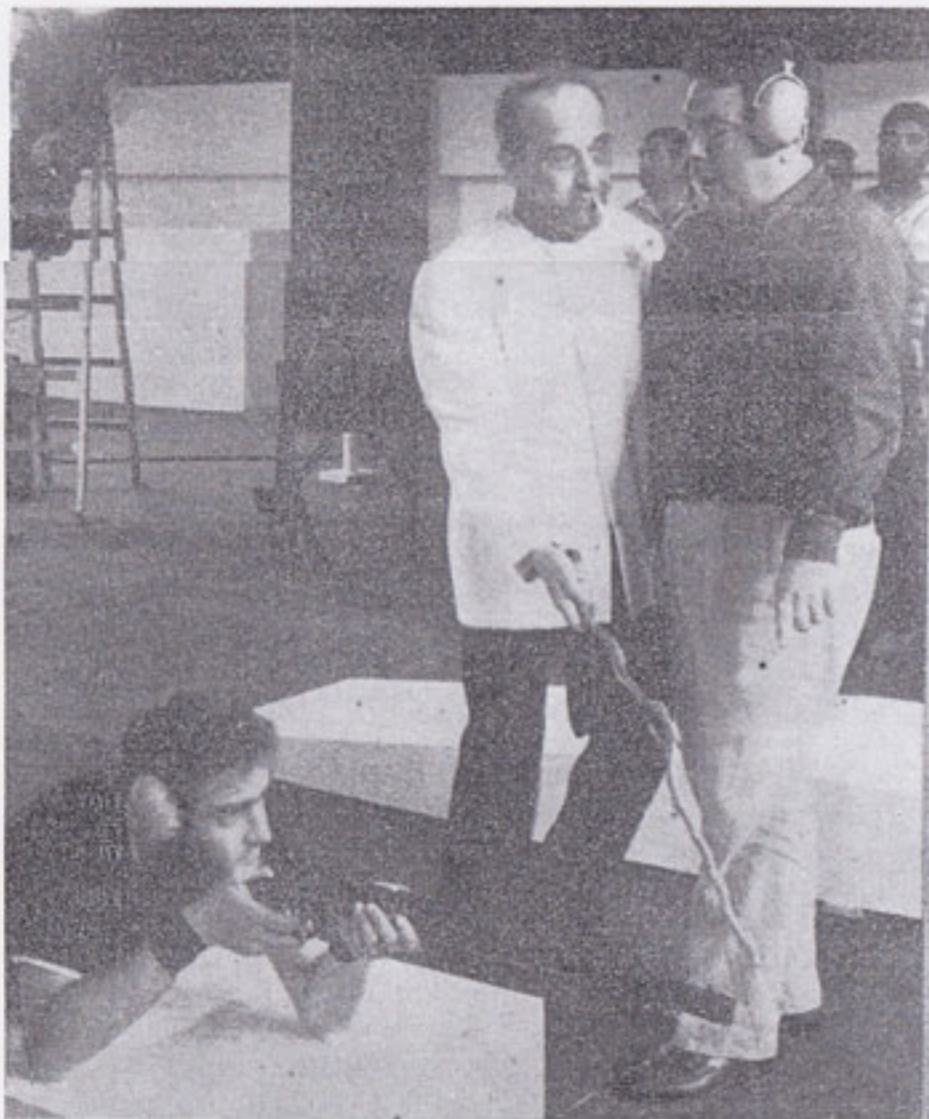
"The Tenth Victim" is an especially big break for Petri, a 36-year-old Roman who moved into the medium from journalism and screenwriting. He made his feature film debut with "L'Assassino," also starring Mastroianni, and has since directed "I Giorni Contati," "Il Maestro di Vigevano," and an episode of "Alta Infedeltà." The current picture will be his first to receive world-wide distribution, and ought to make his name on the international market.

ITALIAN WESTERNS have a pretty Latin flavor, but it's interesting to note that there is generally an American involved in some important facet of the production. Several American actors have starred in pictures made here, and at least one American musician has played an important part in scoring them.

About three and a half years ago a young California college graduate walked into the office of the artistic director at RCA Italiana, put his foot on the desk and began to sing a cowboy song.

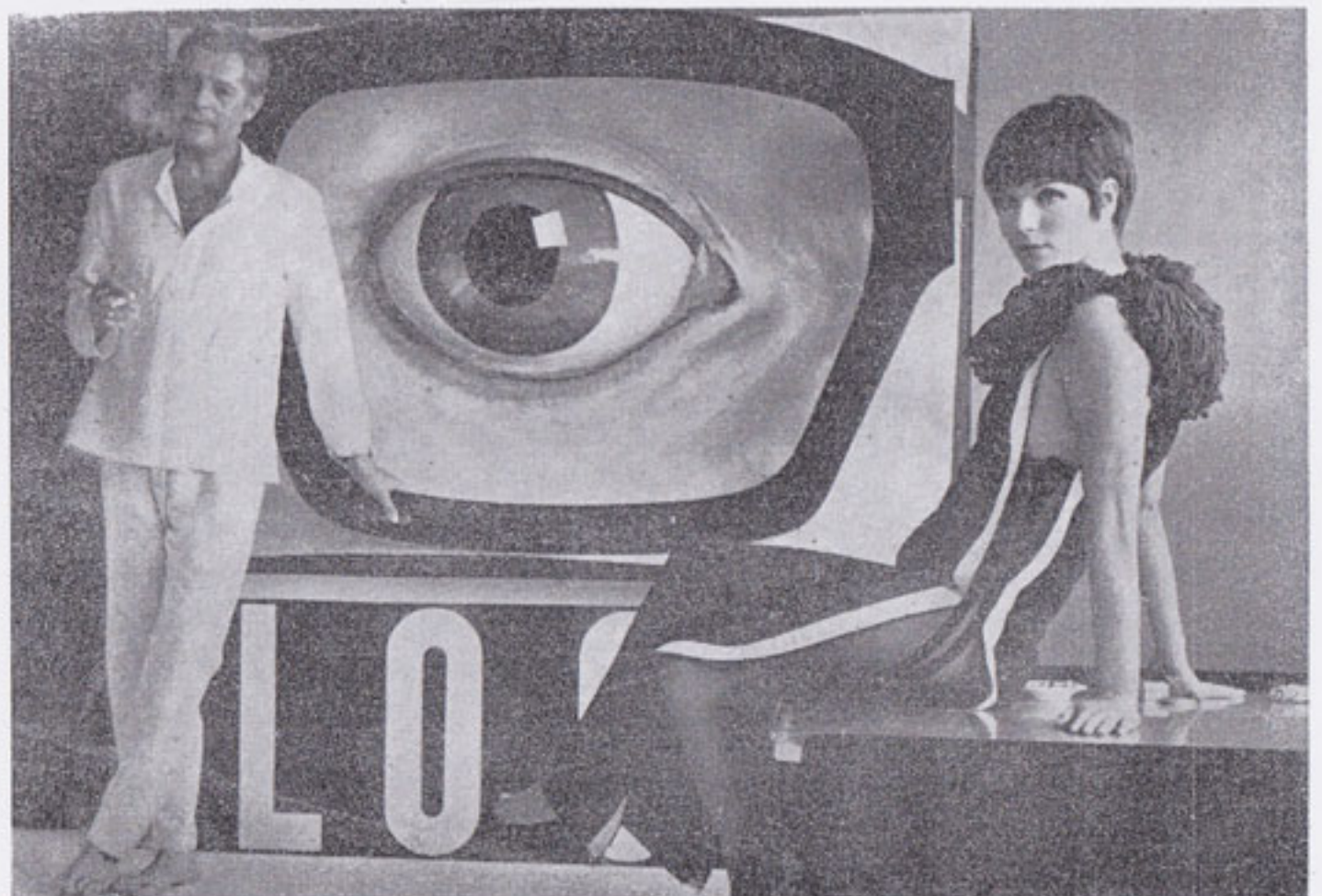
"You've got a contract," said the director when he finished. And Peter Tevis, a handsome singer, guitar player and composer, had simultaneously launched himself and a new kind of music in Italy.

His initial record for RCA here was the first western song ever re-



CHECKING on electronic devices, Petri dons earphones in the 21st Century relaxatorium constructed for a scene in the picture

(Photos from film by Tazio Secchiarioli)



POP ART, POP ART and futuristic fashions play a great role in the science fiction comedy-thriller. Here Mastroianni and Elsa Martinelli, who plays his mistress, relax in front of a gigantic eye. Elsa wears one of the daring black and white outfits designed by Giulio Coltellacci and made by the Fontana Sisters of Rome in synthetic and metallic materials