

# SR Goes to the Movies

Arthur Knight

## 'Twas The Season To Be Jolly

ODD INDEED were some of the Christmas packages that the movie companies chose to deck their halls with this holiday season. Last year, of course, with an inscrutable instinct for bad timing, Columbia established a record of sorts with its release of *In Cold Blood*. This year, however, it was the sheer force of numbers that was so impressive—or perhaps better, depressive. Thanks to Hollywood, one could make merry with such items as *The Sergeant*, in which a sadistic Army topkick discovers that he is also a homosexual; *The Brotherhood*, depicting the happy home life of a Mafia capo; *Up Tight*, a chilling study of a Negro informer during the Cleveland riots; and *The Killing of Sister George*, whose

Lesbian theme Hollis Alpert will explore next week.

Certainly the most interesting and complex of these is *The Sergeant*, adapted by Dennis Murphy from his own novel, directed with taste and sensitivity by a youthful John Flynn (his first film), and featuring uncommonly persuasive performances by Rod Steiger and John Phillip Law. Before the titles, in what amounts to a black-and-white flashback to World War II, Sgt. Callan (Steiger) single-handedly wipes out two German machine gun nests, pursuing and killing one of the Nazis with his bare hands. But after the killing, he holds just a little too long, looks at the corpse a little too longingly. The film itself begins in 1952 when the Sergeant—older, greyer, his chest resplendent with hero's medals—arrives as top sergeant assigned to a petroleum depot in France. He moves swiftly to assert his authority over both officers and enlisted personnel, singling out one man, Swanson (Law), as his virtual slave, and making little effort to conceal his hostility toward the young fellow's French girl friend. The story reaches its climax when, after having been rejected by Law, Steiger kisses him passionately.

There is, however, a good deal more to *The Sergeant* than merely the case history of a homosexual. As soon as one poses the question of how he could have concealed his latent tendencies for so long, one realizes (as in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*) that the Army provides a base of power that not merely gives rein, but tacit approval to sadistic impulses. Callan's fall, his exposure, came because his friendship was rejected and his au-


thority challenged. When he felt he had lost control of young Swanson, he lost control of himself. The marvel is that at the end of the picture one feels, with Swanson, more pity than revulsion for Callan, and an awareness that the qualities that make a first-class soldier can also result in a pitiable human being.

No doubt some of the same sense of pity and understanding is intended for the finale of *The Brotherhood* as well but, as written by Lewis John Carlino and directed by Martin Ritt, the film fails to create either characters or situations that compel an emotional response. Perhaps it is difficult in any case to identify with Mafia types, but it becomes even more difficult when one can so readily identify them with Mafia types from earlier pictures. As a result, interest tends to center about subsidiary aspects of the film—such well drawn background materials as the wailing women at an Italian funeral, meetings of "the syndicate" as it draws up orderly, business-like plans to take over the entire electronics industry. Unfortunately, however, when the film tries to come to grips with its central themes—the contrast between the impassioned loyalties of the old Mafia (embodied in older brother Kirk Douglas) and the bloodless efficiency of the new "syndicate" (embodied in younger brother Alex Cord), and the duality of the roles these men must play in their homes and in society—the picture becomes trite and melodramatic, its people predictable.

Credit for the year's most preposterous picture must surely go to Jules Dassin, whose unhappy notion it was to take Liam O'Flaherty's (and John Ford's) memorable *The Informer* and translate it from Dublin "during the time of the troubles" to Cleveland immediately after the assassination of Martin Luther King. The giant Gyppo becomes Tank (Julian Mayfield), a disgruntled steelworker who informs on a fellow black militant for the reward. No doubt Dassin thought he saw a parallel here that would serve to make white Americans aware of, and perhaps also frightened of, the aims and aspirations of the black activists, while making Negroes a bit more understanding of the crosscurrents in their own movement. If so, he was presumptuous in the extreme. Blacks saw only one of their kind selling out to the hated police, and there was no mercy for him. One even called out, "Whitey wrote the script!" at the screening of *Up Tight* I caught. And although in fact the script is credited to Dassin and two Negroes, Ruby Dee and Julian Mayfield, together they have created a divisive, hate-filled, and hate-inducing, ugly movie. What makes it worse (or might it be better?), there is not a single character that one believes in or cares about for a moment. Peace on earth, indeed!

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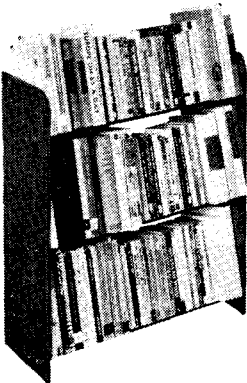
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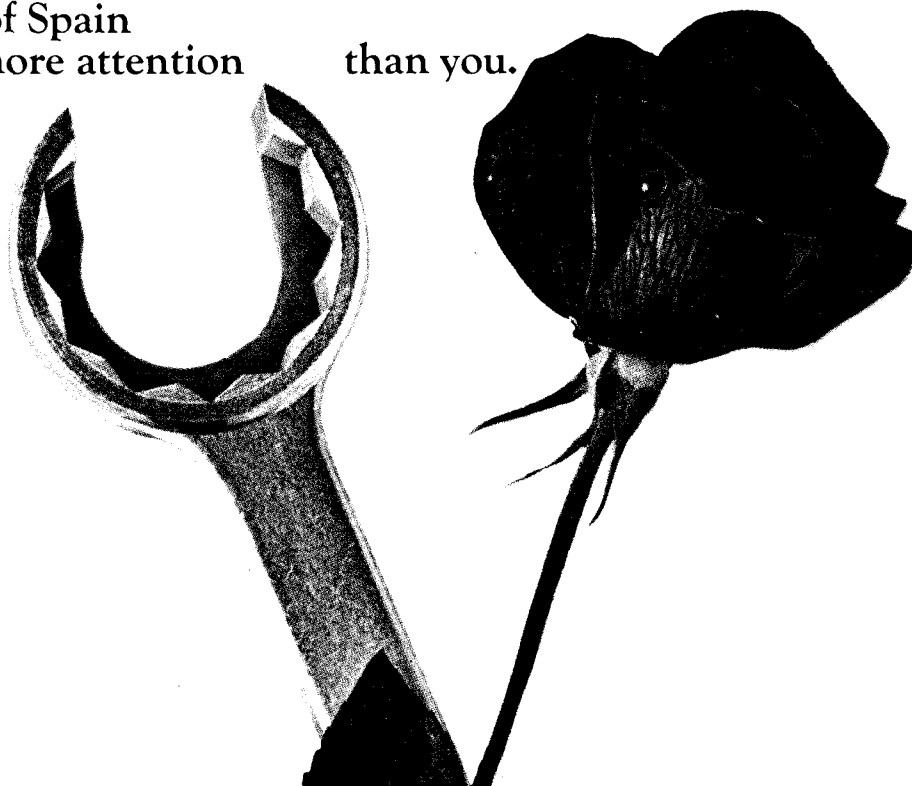
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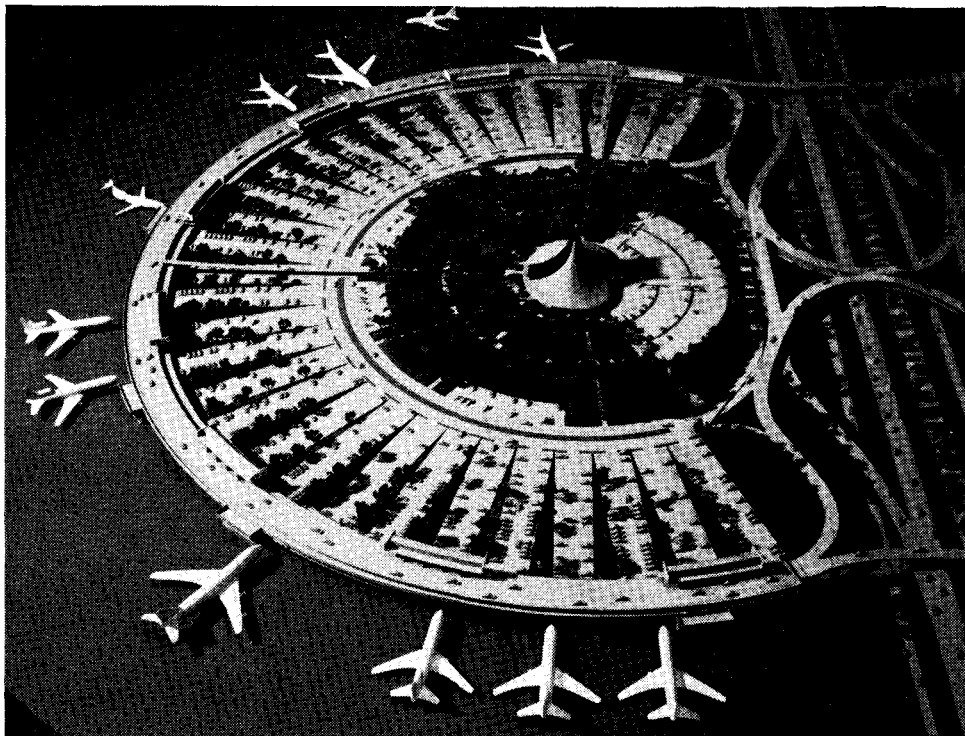
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# TRAVEL 1969: High Road or Low?



## *A Special Section*

**F**OR YEARS they all went their own ways, the trains rattling into the twilight, losing money and then coaches, the jets whisking away the business but flying into locust clouds of stacked-up planes, the steamships altering their hallowed trade routes (and their *raison d'être*) to survive, the airports and hotels trying to pour concrete and cut ribbons in the same motion, and suddenly in 1969 all the paths converge. You would have to hark back fifty or sixty years to find a time when travel or transportation was arriving at a crossroads so crucial. (Think of the milkman easing old Betsy into a parking stall just ahead of a faltering Stanley Steamer while a flying orange crate stutters overhead.) Yet by comparison the 1969 convergence will be of greater moment, as *SR's* traditional World Travel Issue undertakes to illustrate in the following pages.

If a single event keys the crossroads theme, it is the arrival of the Boeing 747 Super (née Jumbo) Jet, scheduled for its first commercial flight in December. Will it bring the long-awaited luxury its makers have promised, or will it hang a millstone on the already bowed neck of aviation? These and other points are taken up in the opening article. At a time when astronauts are getting ready to stake out the moon, the imponderable reality exists that a friendly Fanjet often has to dawdle in the air for two hours before it is cleared for a landing at Kennedy Airport. This is only one symptom of an illness afflicting both airways and airports, and as Evert Clark, a *Newsweek* science and transportation reporter, observes

*(Continued on page 66)*