

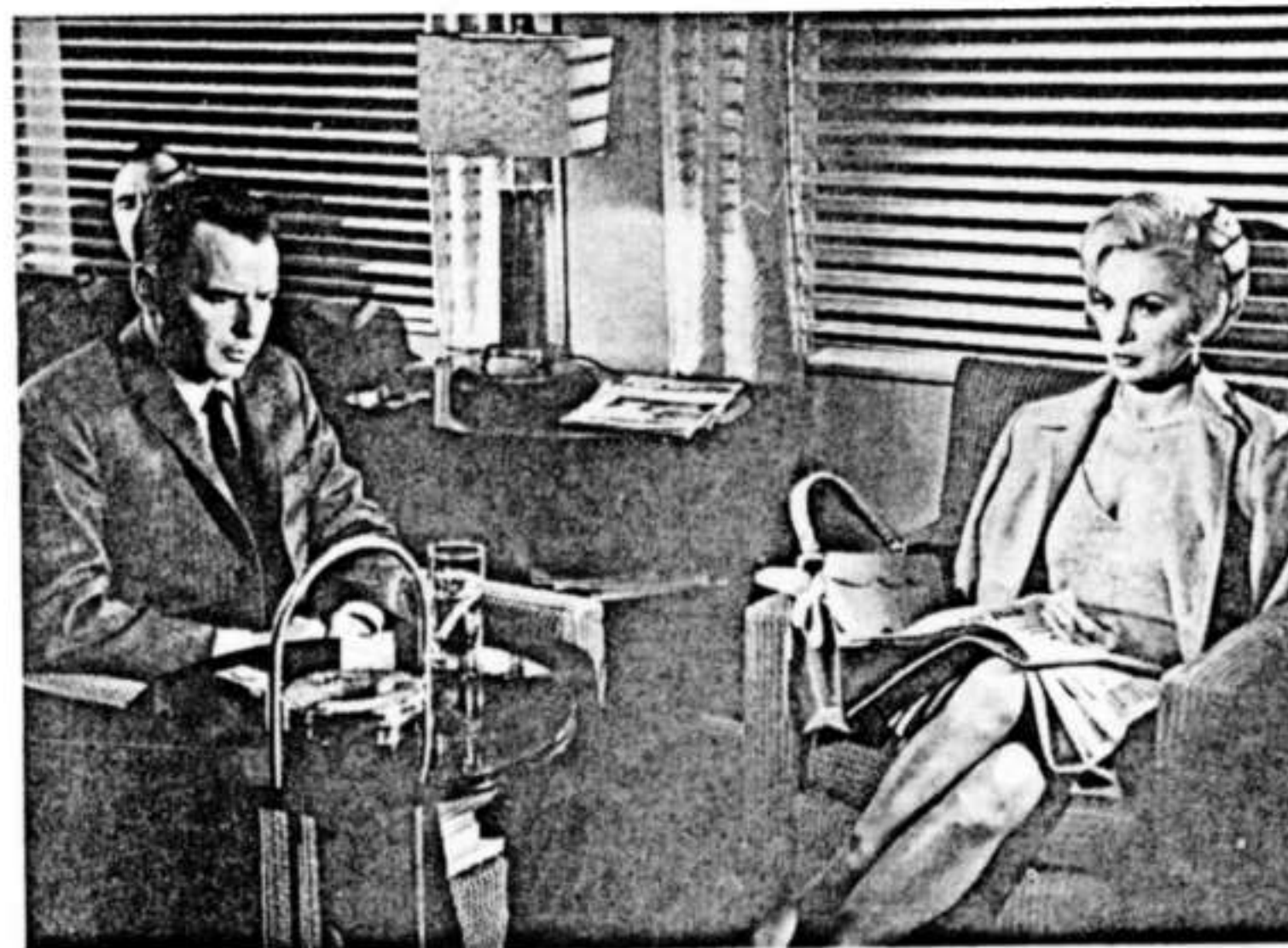
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a Martian castaway. Guaranteed good returns by a growing public interest in the space race, astronautical films thrived. *Marooned* (John Sturges, 1970), the story of three astronauts stranded in orbit, incorporated an extended apologia for space flight expenditure, and gained substantial publicity when the Apollo-13 failure conveniently coincided with general release, but meticulous recreations of a Cape Canaveral launch did not neutralise flat and predictable acting. More imaginative, if less generously financed, *Countdown* (Robert Altman, 1968) used talented newcomers James Caan and Robert Duvall in a story combining *Marooned's* documentary realism with a perceptive look at the problems of sending a man alone through space to beat a Russian crew to the Moon. Frictions among members of the team are carefully drawn, restricted but appropriate use made of hardware, and the tensions between hard-driving teacher Duvall and dumb pupil Caan rigorously pursued by a director whose later *M*A*S*H* (1970) was to make him a major name.

Films relating technology to contemporary problems seldom went beyond plush versions of the bomb-scare films so popular in the nervous Fifties. Still working in Europe, Stanley Kubrick created *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), a nightmare comedy on the global balance of terror, whose similarities to Sidney Lumet's *Fail Safe* (1964) caused the latter's producers to consider a lawsuit for plagiarism. Unconcerned, Kubrick continued with the exploration of science fiction as an expression of his personal ethic, making in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, again in England) the cult film of the age. Overshadowed by competitors at the time, *Fail Safe* better resists the years, Lumet's nervous shooting inside the cramped war headquarters exercising a grim fascination. John Frankenheimer's *Seven Days in May* (1964) underlaid the recreation of a military plot to overthrow President Frederic March with a subliminal comment on the growing power, even intelligence, of our technological environment, extending the message of *Dr. Strangelove* and *Fail Safe* — that human control of technology must eventually lead to a tragic accident — to suggest that the machines, becoming aware of their power, may dictate their own decisions through their ability to put into any skilled hands the weapons of destruction.

Few films implied that one man or group of men could stem this tide. Our only answer, most suggested, was to be prepared. *Panic in Year Zero* (1962), efficiently directed by star Ray Milland, showed an urban family reacting with heartless efficiency to the problems of survival after atomic



THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE: Frank Sinatra, Janet Leigh

attack, and James H. Harris's *The Bedford Incident* (1965) a microcosm of national types facing world disaster when American and Russian vessels meet in an Arctic confrontation. Frankenheimer's superb *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), in a script of force and sensitivity from George Axelrod, analysed the planting of a Communist killer in the highest circles of American government who has been programmed to murder a politician and guarantee the elevation of a Red Chinese stooge to the Presidency. A key film in modern cinema — its importance has been compared to that of *Citizen Kane* in the new depth it brought to Hollywood acting styles — with uniformly effective performances from Frank Sinatra, Laurence Harvey, Janet Leigh, James Gregory and Angela Lansbury, *The Manchurian Candidate* discards slick drama to explore the human impact of psychological manipulation. The blandness of Karl Malden's *Time Limit* (1957), whose plot and even the role of buddah-like Chinese inquisitor Kheigh Deigh anticipate those of Frankenheimer's film dramatises the latter's instinctive understanding of psychological war and its dangers, his

belief in the necessity for mental as well as physical freedom.

Films of the Sixties