

Scorpio
(COLOR)

**Tired spy stuff. Confusing,
for saturation bookings.**

Hollywood, March 24.

United Artists release of Scimitar Films production, produced by Walter Mirisch. Stars Burt Lancaster, Alain Delon, Paul Scofield. Directed by Michael Winner. Screenplay, David W. Rintels and Gerald Wilson, from story by Rintels; camera (Color by Deluxe), Robert Paynter; editor, Freddie Wilson; music, Jerry Fielding; art direction, Herbert Westbrook; sound, Brian Marshall; asst. director, Michael Dryhurst. Previewed at Academy Awards Theatre, L.A., March 23, '73. (MPAA rating: PG.)

Cross	.....	Burt Lancaster
Laurier	.....	Alain Delon
Zharkov	.....	Paul Scofield
McLeod	.....	John Colicos
Susan	.....	Gayle Hunnicutt
Filchok	.....	J. D. Cannon
Sarah	.....	Joanne Linville
Pick	.....	Melvin Stewart
Zemetkin	.....	Vladek Sheybal
Anne	.....	Mary Maude
Thief	.....	Jack Colvin
Harris	.....	James Sikking
Morrison	.....	Burke Byrnes
Mitchell	.....	William Smithers
Lang	.....	Shmuel Rodensky
Heck Thomas	.....	Howard Morton
Helen Thomas	.....	Celeste Yarnall
Malkin	.....	Sandor Eles
Novins	.....	Frederick Jaeger
Dor	.....	George Mikell
Man in hotel	.....	Robert Emhardt

Despite its anachronistic emulation of mid-1960s' cynical spy melers, "Scorpio" might have been an acceptable action programmer if its narrative were clearer, its dialog less "cultured" and its visuals more straightforward. In its present inchoate and pretentious shape, only Burt Lancaster's presence will allow United Artists to make a modest dent in the domestic market via saturation bookings. Overseas prospects, thanks to casting of Alain Delon and a splattering of unmotivated violence, look somewhat brighter.

First half-hour of the Walter Mirisch production is exasperating while the David W. Rintels-Gerald Wilson screenplay disentangles its many plot stands. Pic opens with the assassination of an Arab government official, but his identity and relationship to the protagonists remain puzzlements beyond the film's conclusion. Even more irritating is nearly total confusion about other characters' occupations or moral positions, clarified only after viewer has ceased to care. Rare are the action fans who enjoy being made to feel like dunces.

Ultimately, pic settles down into the usual is-he-or-isn't-he-a-double-agent gimmick, with CIA-black-mailed Delon pursuing supposed Soviet defector Lancaster from Washington to Europe. While ducking his would-be assassin, Lancaster takes refuge in the Viennese home of Paul Scofield, a Russian agent who counsels him that "there are no more secrets—at least any worth stealing" and who deplures all the "keepers of machines and pushers of buttons" who have replaced his breed. Such thematic became ho-hum long before the spy cycle stopped spinning five years ago.

Considering the many liabilities imposed by this ill-begotten project, the three above-title players all do well. Scofield particularly impresses with his effort to wring life out of his stereotypical assignment. John Colicos hams up the role of a nasty CIA exec, while Gayle Hunnicutt lacks presence in the seemingly superfluous role of Delon's girlfriend. None of the principals or supporting players is assisted one whit by flat post-synchronization.

Nor are they helped by Michael Winner's grab-bag of visual tricks. As if to demonstrate his technical "virtuosity," the British director employs zooms, pans, extreme closeups, jump cuts, low-angle and overhead shots in a dazzling display of irrelevant mise-en-scene. He is by no means the only contemporary director to dragoon an audience's attention via cinematographic hype but he may be the only filmmaker not to have outgrown such pointless exhibitionism after 13 previous features. It seems a long, long time since his visually economical and moving "The Girl Getters" ("The System" in U.K.) nine years ago.

Technically "Scorpio" is below the level set by previous Mirisch Corp. productions. In addition to Brian Marshall's unresonant sound recording, Robert Paynter's color photography is cursorily lit and granularly processed. Freddie

Wilson's editing makes the pic look like a hodgepodge, though the fault may well be shared with Winner. Only real plus is Jerry Fielding's music, which thumps away energetically and on occasion persuades the viewer that more is happening on screen than meets the eye.

Beau.