

P. Raffetto, Francis Peck, Gregory

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'Chairman' Has Chinese Intrigue

By FRANCIS RAFFETTO

The part that Gregory Peck plays in his new 20th Century-Fox movie, "The Chairman," literally calls for him to have a hole in his head.

In a frightening gimmick, scientist John Hathaway (Peck) has a transmitter implanted in his head, set without his knowledge to explode if he is exposed by his Red China hosts.

Peck described the movie to the visiting American press in London recently where the filming is underway. The story involves the discovery by a Chinese professor, Peck's former teacher, of a revolutionary enzyme (an organic substance which in this case invigorates plant growth and erases the effect of climate). It will enable the Red Chinese to grow crops anywhere, any season.

The Chinese professor needs Peck to complete the project, and the United States sends Peck in, transmitter and all, to find what he can and broadcast the knowledge back via satellite.

"It's not an action picture but more of a suspense picture," Peck said at dinner in London last week. "It has a slow build-up. I don't think the mainland Chinese will like it. You see, I'm an idealist.

"WHEN I HAVE the formula, I make a hair's breadth escape over the Russian border (sanctuary?). I get wounded and get knocked about, I bring the formula out in good form, break it down. Then I have a heated argument with the CIA chief. He wants to put it in top-secret category — but I think the whole world should have it."

Does he think "The Chairman" is anti-CIA (that U.C. activity is never mentioned by name in the film)?

"I have no desire to malign the CIA," Peck said earnestly. "It's true that this film is pretty close to the bone. My quarrel is with a particular man. I'm not at all concerned that it will turn out anti-CIA."

Peck added, "If it would, I don't want anything to do with it. I'm a Johnson man, myself. My own views are pro our Vietnam policy."

THE MOVIE, "The Chairman" is based on Jay Richard Kennedy's novel to be published this year. Supporting Peck in the cast is Anne Heywood, who scored brilliantly in this year's "The Fox."

Arthur Hill, Broadway actor, plays Lieutenant General Shelby, the man with CIA undertones who confronts Peck and who controls his destiny in China. He never tells Peck that the transmitter in his head can be made to explode if necessary.

Actor Conrad Yama is the ideal movie "Chairman" for Red China's Mao TseT-ung, the real Chairman.

A potential star is pretty Zienia Merton, born 23 years ago in Pegu, Burma, to an English father and a Burmese mother. As a child, she moved to England and has played everything from Shakespeare to "The World of Suzy Wong." In "The Chairman," she meets Peck in Hong Kong and lures him into a rendezvous with Red China's secret police.

"I SEDUCE Gregory Peck in this picture," she smiled. How about the disparity of ages? She giggled: "It didn't cross my mind."

Peck, who looks exactly as he does on screen, uses gold-rimmed spectacles occasionally now. He is slim, intense and, of course, handsome.

Producer Mort Abrahams res-

ponded quickly to Dallas. "I did Route 66 on television and we shot some segments around your City Hall," he said. "Dallas is so amazingly cosmopolitan. The women are so chic, so very 'au courant' in fashion."

Peck recalled that he spoke in Dallas on April 7, 1966, for that year's cancer drive.

ARTHUR P. JACOBS, president of APJAC, Ltd., is producing the film for 20th Century-Fox. "There was never any doubt as to who would play Dr. Hathaway," he said. "Peck is the only one who can do it. He embodies Hathaway's strength, intellect, compassion and involvement. I think it is a role which best typifies Peck as an involved private citizen as well as an actor."

JACOBS, in turn, is deeply involved now in planning a sequel to his successful "Planet of the Apes."

"Our present title is 'Planet of the Apes Revisited,'" he said.

"But we've offered \$5,000 to any of our people who come up with a better title. We believe we must use 'planet' and 'apes' to take advantage of the first film's success."



Gregory Peck as a brilliant American scientist, and his wife, Anne Heywood, are involved in a fight for a new enzyme which could control the world's food supply in "The Chairman," movie laid in Red China. Peck discussed the film in London last week.