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In the Sign of the Gemini/Lion/Scorpio Reflections of Light

In the wake of the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s, filmmakers around the world began to test the limits of legal and community standards by creating entertainments that combined traditional storytelling with male and female nudity. U.S. Customs agents inadvertently helped launch the new hard- and soft-core sub-genres by seizing the pseudo-scientific Swedish yawn-fest **I Am Curious (Yellow)** and putting it on trial, thus ensuring a box-office bonanza. (A few years later, **Deep Throat** and **Hustler** magazine would be similarly tested by government censors, whose batting average was closing in on .000.).

After successfully importing **I, A Woman**, **Radley Metzger** would begin churning out such gauzy fare as **Therese and Isabelle**, **Camille 2000**, **Carmen**, **Baby** and **The Lickerish Quartet**, films that essentially paved the road for the hard-core **Deep Throat** and **Behind the Green Door**. Soft-core went arthouse two years later, with the fabulously successful French travelogue, **Emmanuelle**. The rest is cinematic history. Through the miracle of DVD, early specimens of soft-core filmmaking have begun to surface via niche distributors, such as MVD Visual, S'More and Severin, looking nearly as fresh as they did 30-some years ago.

By 1969, Denmark legalized all forms of pornography, awaiting a report that ultimately would show an increase in consumption didn't necessarily result in a boost in sexually based violence. Thus cleared of Original Sin, filmmakers were free to produce entertainments that addressed the particular interests of a wide spectrum of viewers, and they could do so without hiding behind aliases and phony "scientific" motivations.

One popular series, **In the Sign of the ... Gemini/Lion/Scorpio/Virgin ...** demonstrated just how playful and entertaining adult-oriented fare could be when treated as if it were as credible as the titles in any other genre. The series of six films, directed by **Finn Carlsson** and **Werner Hedman**, represented spoofs of spy pictures, period romances and other familiar subjects. Unlike the soft-core movies of the time, **In the Sign of the ...** supplemented its frontal nudity and heavy petting with male and female genitalia, insertion and, rarely, ejaculation. While the women are beautiful, a few of the male actors are on the homely side. It hardly matters. Fans of vintage, non-gonzo porn probably would enjoy sampling the delightfully bawdy installments in the series.

Italy also has a rich tradition of soft-core filmmaking, producing international sex symbols at approximately the same frequency as Ferrari turned out F1 champions. **Sophia Loren** went topless in the early 1950s, then pretty much covered up for the rest of her career. She would be followed by such bombshells as **Gina Lollobrigida**, **Claudia Cardinale**, **Monica Vitti**, **Laura Antonelli**, **Mariangela Melato**, **Clio Goldsmith**, **Monica Bellucci** and **Asia Argento**. Although Tinto Brass is the most widely recognized brand name in Italian erotica, there was no shortage of capable directors who found ways to inject some spice into the country's various horror, crime and comedy niches. **Mario Bianchi** contributed some new twists to the **Emmanuelle** saga and

added a bit of trademark depravity to **Reflections of Light** (1988), in which a wheelchair-bound composer treats his son, wife and secretary so badly that they turn to each for comfort. **Laura Gemser**, one of the most prominent of the era's sex stars, plays the musician's irreplaceable first wife.

- Gary Dretzka