

OMAR SHARIF

By PEER J.
OPPENHEIMER

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WHEN RUDOLPH VALENTINO appeared in "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," one of the greatest screen idols of the era was born.

Now, some 40 years later, many observers feel that a handsome 31-year-old Egyptian named Omar Sharif may duplicate this feat with his portrayal of Sheik Ali in "Lawrence of Arabia." Even before the film was released, he was acclaimed the find of the year—and a new Valentino.

"Ridiculous," Omar commented when I talked with him in Madrid where he was costarring in "The Fall of the Roman Empire," Samuel Bronston's 16-million-dollar production. "The only comparison between the two of us is that we both played sheiks, but Valentino's style of acting went out with the tango."

But there is at least one similarity between the two "sheiks of Araby": their tremendous success with women. Valentino, however, made a mess of his private life when he married Winifred Shaughnessy De Wolf Hudson before his divorce from his first wife, Jean Acker, was final and thus was arrested for bigamy. Omar Sharif has been much more coolheaded in his relationship with his wife, Faten Hamama, Egypt's No. 1 film star. For instance, she is the reason for his being in movies in the first place.

A director friend offered Omar the lead in an Egyptian film, dependent upon the approval of the feminine star, Faten. "After the producer okayed the test," Omar recalled, "he took me to Faten's house for a cup of tea. She told me to 'play something.' I knew she didn't know English, so I started with the soliloquy from 'Hamlet,' which I had played while at Victoria College in Cairo. Of course, she couldn't understand a word—which is what I had counted on. I figured she would be too embarrassed to admit it. She was—and I got the part."

Omar needn't worry about getting into divorce trouble as Valentino did. In Moslem Egypt, all you have to do to get a divorce is go to court and say three times that you don't want to be married any more. A divorced hus-