How geeks took over TV, from Netflix to 'Mr. Robot' to Intel reality show

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Hollywood and Silicon Valley are having a love fest.

HBO earns rave reviews for its geeks-gone-wild take on the tech world's stomping ground. Intel and Apple jump in with their own reality TV shows, while a slew of YouTube and web-TV projects suss out the valley's zeitgeist.

As Hollywood looks north for inspiration, the valley looks south, with tech companies cranking new digital tools that are upending the way Tinseltown tells stories. With the silicon and screenplay factions locked in a sloppy wet kiss, Silicon Valley looks increasingly like, well, something out of the movies.

"Silicon Valley and Hollywood are now joined at the hip," says Bill Baker, co-founder and CEO of the Celebrity Food Network, based in Southern California.

Why now? Tech billionaires who've become overnight celebrities; Hollywood's star-making culture seeking to exploit that fame; and the sheer preponderance of tech in our lives, starting with the smartphones most of us are now glued to. And Hollywood, Baker says, is being powered by cutting-edge technology like never before.

"The new kinds of cameras, the digital-editing machines, the fiber, the satellites," he says. "These are the guts of what Hollywood does, and a lot of it comes from the tech world. So you have this mutually symbiotic

relationship."

The ensuing confluence can be dizzying as valley companies create their own shows instead of just offering entertainment produced by others: Netflix embraces its inner-Hollywood, moving increasingly from its core streaming video business to producing its own television series and full-length original movies, including the 2015 Idris Elba war drama "Beasts of No Nation" and this year's "Pee-wee's Big Holiday." Big-screen impresario Harvey Weinstein has said Netflix is at "the forefront" of a film industry that's "evolving quickly and profoundly."

And in a big nod to the valley's startup culture, Seattle-based Amazon brought us "Betas," as well as director Ridley Scott's critically acclaimed series "The Man in the High Castle."

Even some of the valley's biggest tech icons are getting into show biz: Intel recently wrapped up the first season of "America's Greatest Makers," a reality TV show starring its own uber-nerdy CEO. And Apple has been doing casting calls for its upcoming "Planet of the Apps," a series co-produced with the TV veteran behind "The Biggest Loser."

Meanwhile, HBO digs deeper into the Bay Area with "Silicon Valley," bringing us Mike Judge's fictionalized depiction of today's tech culture. The comedy also includes cameos by real-life tech stars such as former Twitter CEO Dick Costolo - who served as a consultant for the show's third season - and Yelp's Jeremy Stoppelman.

In the process, the valley's unique "fail fast, fail often" startup culture seeps further into Hollywood's content-creation apparatus, says Alec Berg, executive producer for HBO's award-winning take on high tech's Holy Land.

"There's something to be said for all these new players coming into the

game," says Berg. "With Netflix and Hulu and even at HBO, the way they do business is much different than the entrenched ways of the TV networks, which are still moored in management strategies of a 100-year-old system that goes back to radio."

Berg says that in Hollywood there's increasingly "an emphasis on being nimble and favoring the creators and not forcing people to change things against their will. That's a very Silicon Valley influence" on how Hollywood does its thing these days.

"I don't think Silicon Valley has invented a new management style in Hollywood," says Berg, who also produced episodes of "Seinfeld" and "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

"But it's simply that advantage of having new players in the game that makes everyone rethink the way they're doing their work."

At the same time, the tech world is having a profound impact on film production. "The way digital is changing the way I shoot is amazing," Berg says, "because with digital editing, if I don't like those palm trees in a scene, we just take them out."

At the same time, powerful new technology helps Hollywood do things it could never do before, like vastly increasing studios' ability to manipulate massive amounts of video for editing, says Art Kazmierczak, director of network and business development for network-infrastructure giant Telia Carrier. He says the company's cutting-edge technology lets companies like Amazon and Netflix move content through cyberspace faster and more securely than even just a few years ago.

Telia and other giant carriers, he says, also help with remote production, "so we can have cameras in different locations remotely controlled from a central production center, where you'd transmit your raw video footage

and do production, then push the edited footage back out to other places, all in real time."

Kazmierczak says Hollywood now has almost unlimited storage in the cloud "to help create these shows and movies." Just five years ago, people used what's called "sneakernet," which meant using UPS to move external hard drives or other removable media back and forth for production.

Nowadays, he says, the collaboration between Silicon Valley and Hollywood is stronger than ever: "Content is being produced in a much more dynamic way, thanks to this technology."

The list of new tech tools being used in Oscarland, many of them from Bay Area companies, is endless - from Teradici's PC-over-IP technology helping postproduction collaborations for filmmakers, securely and in real time, to startup Carbon. The firm's cutting-edge 3-D printer technology, funded in part by Google Ventures, is being used by special-effects and makeup artists at Legacy Effects to build out scenes for films such as last year's sci-fi thriller "Terminator Genisys."

So while the techies help Hollywood, the screenwriters, directors and producers in LA continue their love affair with life in the valley. It's not the first time Silicon Valley has gone center-stage, with earlier efforts like "The Social Network" in 2010 and "The Internship" three years later. But now the floodgates on tech-inspired entertainment seem to be wide open.

Among the latest offerings is the award-winning "Mr. Robot" on the USA Network, starring a young anti-social computer programmer doubling as a vigilante hacker, the kind of guy who keeps the valley's cybersecurity engineers up at night. Another is "Scorpion," an action drama series starting its third season this fall on CBS and inspired by the

life of computer expert Walter O'Brien.

O'Brien, the show's executive producer, sits literally at the intersection of tech and entertainment these days. He's a beneficiary of the revenge-of-the-geeks trend that now has California's two largest metropolitan areas feeding off of each other's talent pools.

"What we have here is a merging of Silicon Valley and Hollywood," says O'Brien, pointing out the valley nerd culture that's boosting Hollywood's tech cred while bathing in its cinematic glow. "My show's about a dysfunctional family of superheroes saving the world but forgetting where they parked the car."

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