SPY TELEVISION

Wesley Britton

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Wesley Britton

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Introduction

In the 1960s, American popular culture depended more on "begats" than any book in the Old Testament. On the television screen, one success inevitably begat another. If a fair-haired young Dr. Kildare captured viewers, so would a dark-haired Ben Casey. If a beautiful blonde housewife turned the world on with her twitch in *Bewitched*, so too could a blonde girlfriend in *I Dream of Jeannie*. We were asked to *Make Room for Daddy* because *Father Knows Best*. The ghoulish humor of *The Addams Family* begat *The Munsters*. The cornpone jokes of *The Beverly Hillbillies* begat *Green Acres* and *Petticoat Junction*. The World War II action of *Combat* begat *The Rat Patrol*, *Hogan's Heroes*, and *McHale's Navy*. Private eyes operated on the coast (*77 Sunset Strip*), on tropical islands (*Hawaiian Eye*), and underwater (*Sea Hunt*). The science fiction of *The Twilight Zone* begat *The Outer Limits* begat *The Invaders* begat *Star Trek*. The most pervasive genre of the era was the Western, *Gunsmoke* begetting *Wagon Train*, *Wyatt Earp*, *Maverick*, *Bonanza*, and a host of others. And all of these programs aired on only three networks.

Into this American mix came a double-edged British sword. After the Beatles landed at New York's LaGuardia Airport in February 1964, they begat the Rolling Stones, the Dave Clark Five, Petula Clark, and seemingly any British Islander who could play an instrument or carry a tune. Suddenly, even the Americans wanted to speak with British accents. Neither could Broadway escape the British Invasion when Julie Andrews, Richard Burton, and Rex Harrison graced the stages of *Camelot* and *My Fair Lady*.

The other side of the British sword came in 1962 with the release of *Dr. No*, the first of the most successful film series in motion picture history. Although James Bond was a product of the 1950s, his first appearance in print being *Casino Royale* in 1953, the Bond of Ian Fleming's books and Sean

Connery's films came to prominence in 1960 when *Playboy* magazine published a Fleming story and when U.S. president John F. Kennedy listed *From Russia with Love* as one of his favorite novels in a 1961 *LIFE* magazine article. In 1964, *Goldfinger* became the first international megahit in film history. Not only did New York theaters run back-to-back screenings of *Goldfinger* twenty-four hours a day to meet the demand, a cornucopia of imitators filled both large and small screens in cinemas and televisions around the globe.

For example, Fleming's own *Casino Royale*, not available to the official Bond movie production team, became a Bond spoof allowing actors from David Niven to Woody Allen to portray six different comic 007s in one film. Saltzman supplemented his Bond success by producing three films based on spy novelist Len Deighton's character, Harry Palmer, in *The Ipcress File*, *Funeral in Berlin*, and *Billion Dollar Brain*. Another successful writer of spy stories, John le Carré, created a gritty world with ambivalent Cold War morals in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, which was also made into a 1965 film starring Richard Burton. Even Sean Connery's brother Neal took his turn in the Italian-produced *Operation: Kid Brother* (1967), playing 007's younger sibling.

The Americans struck back, attempting to out-Bond Agent 007 in the *Our Man Flint* and *In Like Flint* series starring James Coburn. Taking the genre to silly heights, comic Dean Martin portrayed a singing secret agent in the Matt Helm series. Fellow Las Vegas Rat Packers Sammy Davis Jr. and Peter Lawford also took up the mantle, playing the wisecracking team of Salt and Pepper in 1968. Another singer, Robert Goulet, played David March in the television series *Blue Light*. In 1968, the former Ben Casey, actor Vince Edwards, became a swinging spy in *Hammerhead*. Even the musical beach bum charmer Frankie Avalon took his turn defeating the nefarious Dr. Goldfoot in *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965).

Nowhere was the success of the Bond bonanza more evident than on network television. Espionage capers exploded as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Avengers*, *Secret Agent*, *The Champions*, *I Spy*, *The Wild Wild West*, *The Prisoner*, *Mission: Impossible*, *The Saint*, *The Man Who Never Was*, *Jericho*, and the inevitable parody, *Get Smart*, took over American living rooms. Popular anthology series of the era showcased espionage adventure, such as "Memorandum for a Spy," broadcast on *Bob Hope Presents the Chrysler Theatre* in 1965. The first made-for-TV movies included spy dramas, notably *The Scorpio Letter* (1967) starring Alex Cord. Saturday morning children's shows became spy happy as well, as Secret Squirrel worked with Morocco Mole, Winnie the Witch, and Squiggly Wiggly to battle Yellow Pinkie. *Lancelot Link, Secret Chimp*, featured live chimpanzees playing all the characters. Other shows without espionage elements rethought their approaches. From September 1965 to April 1971, *Hogan's Heroes*, although not a direct link to the spy boom, was espionage oriented with the World War II Stalig 13 underground cell blowing up bridges, kidnapping German generals, and smug-

gling secret agents in—and secret plans out—of Germany. The popular 1963 ABC program *Burke's Law*, in which Gene Barry portrayed a Los Angeles chief of detectives, was restructured as *Amos Burke, Secret Agent* in 1965. The same network offered Anne Francis as Honey West, a feline private investigator using Bondian gadgets. Spies visited on *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *My Favorite Martian*. Barbara Eden in *I Dream of Jeannie* frustrated enemy agents attempting to steal NASA's space secrets. In 1968, the otherwise innocent dolphin Flipper helped prevent a spy from delivering an aborted rocket's instrument panel to a hostile power. Nothing on television seemed able to avoid one connection or another to the 007 avalanche.

This spy boom was a gold mine for tie-in merchandising. Toys, colognes, games, and trading cards would become a collector's dream in subsequent decades. To move off drugstore shelves in the 1960s, toys didn't need to be associated with any particular spy, merely secret agents in general. Secret Sam was a multipurpose attaché case equipped with a gun that could become a long-barreled rifle, a periscope, and a hidden camera. 0-M Sonic Blaster was a plastic air gun designed for playground counterespionage. Secret agent motifs sold products unrelated to the genre as in TV spots using sexy trench-coated women driving Aston Martins to promote Max Factor's Sheer Genius with 005-5 Secret Moisturizing Agents. Theme songs from films and television became chart hits, including the themes to *Secret Agent* and *Mission: Impossible*. For those hungry for literary adventures, paperback racks were filled with the good, the bad, and the ugly imitators of Fleming, Deighton, and le Carré alongside novelizations based on the hit television series. In addition, Gold Key comics issued illustrated stories of TV's favorite agents. Gold Key, Marvel, and DC Comics created superagents of their own from Nick Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D. and T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents to Sarge Steel, the secret agent with a literal iron fist. Characters from the Golden Age of radio were reactivated as in a Shadow comic book where Lamont Cranston became a superhero working with C.H.I.E.F. Even the Three Stooges got into the act. In one Gold Key comic, Larry, Curly, and Moe were recruited as spies by N.E.P.H.E.W.

As the 1960s wound down, the heyday of the spy was also on the wane. But the heroes of old continued to have long lives in popular culture and continue to influence television to the present day. In the 1970s, spies became gimmicky comic book characters in A *Man Called Sloane* and *The Six Million Dollar Man* or became demoralized figures on PBS's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. In the 1980s and 1990s, most of the earlier television series had reunions in one form or another. Many, such as *The Wild Wild West*, *The Avengers*, and *Mission: Impossible*, came to the large screen in new incarnations as a new century dawned. By the first years of the new millennium, new spies appeared again in every guise imaginable, notably in sci-fi series like *The Invisible Man*, *VR.5*, and The *Secret Adventures of Jules Verne*. Even before the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, a new interest

in the actual world of espionage developed as three new TV series, *The Agency, Alias,* and *24,* were already set for their fall debuts. Even with the end of the Cold War, espionage thrillers, both realistic and campy, still have a place in our culture. One question seems obvious: Why?

It would be too easy to dismiss the affection for old heroes and the interest in new versions of them as mere baby boom nostalgia. The many faces of James Bond demonstrate that each new generation discovers a love for old spies. Characters such as the Saint, who first appeared in print in the 1920s and reappeared on the screen in 1997, must have something that gives them longevity beyond Hollywood's long-noted laziness in looking for new ideas. Just what made the spy genre what it was, what it is, and what it may become is worthy of some exploration.

The following chapters will primarily focus on both the forgotten as well as the immortal characters from television's past and present, as the world of James Bond himself is already well chronicled in an increasingly expanding collection of analytical books and articles. Nevertheless, 007 casts a wide shadow over TV spies, and few chapters here will fail to mention Bond in one form or another. I will take it for granted anyone who has taken up this book has some interest and knowledge of Ian Fleming's characters, but I will also assume most readers are far less knowledgeable about the worlds of U.N.C.L.E., John Steed and his partners, or the other fictional spies discussed here.

Not surprisingly, I've dealt with each series and era quite differently from chapter to chapter. For example, because shows like *I Spy* and *Mission: Impossible* broke new ground in television history—notably with the inclusion of minority lead characters—their impact on entertainment culture will be an important aspect of those discussions. In the chapters discussing shows from the 1970s to the present, I've devoted considerable space to programs like *The Six Million Dollar Man, La Femme Nikita,* and *The X-Files,* which were all successful in their own right and influential on the television milieu of their decades. Series that lasted a season or less, of course, warrant much shorter overviews. The more-than one hundred TV spy series discussed in this book make for a wide palate of colors and approaches, so I cannot help but follow where they lead.

To adequately discuss TV spies in the wider context of popular culture, I've been unable to avoid making literary connections between novels that influenced the genre and storytellers who were, in turn, influenced by broadcast spies. TV does not work in a vacuum, so characters like Harry Palmer, George Smiley, and Jack Ryan deserve at least passing mentions here. In all instances, I've attempted to trace the cumulative and individual influences each show had on subsequent generations, demonstrating that fifty years of espionage adventures are a family history that is engaging, interesting, and important beyond the behind-the-scenes production notes that reveal much about the creative process of television as a whole.

One important concern to me while compiling the information for this book was accuracy, reliability, and credibility in what follows. While considerable—and enjoyable—research went into this project, this book was written for as wide an audience as possible. I know some readers will have special interest in particular shows, but I hope they will enjoy the other chapters, as many themes relevant to the spy genre are traced here from old radio to TV movies and miniseries made in the new millennium. I've endeavored to make each chapter self-contained, but naturally overlapping is inevitable. If you have a shelf of videos and DVDs of these shows, I suspect you'll come away with a new appreciation for the adventures you've enjoyed. If some of these names and faces are new to you, as many were to me, I sincerely hope you'll begin a search of your own to delve into a realm that has entertained so many for so long. Even experts will meet new friends here, and there will be ample surprises for living-room detectives to begin fresh hunts for adventures they never knew were filmed or written. Enjoy!

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CHAPTER 1

Defining a Genre

LONE WOLVES, PROFESSIONAL INVESTIGATORS, AND SECRET STRIKE FORCES

> We operatives have different styles of course: some work in patent leather and some prefer hobnails. But we are as one in fighting the fight for high ratings.
>
> —David McCallum (quoted in Wolfe 1965)

> Within the bounds of a convention, there is still room for novelty and surprise. And that is what we should be striving for, all the time.
>
> —Leslie Charteris's advice to TV scriptwriters (quoted in Barer 1993, p. 136)

In 1966, author Leslie Charteris claimed he worried about issuing new editions of his Saint books capitalizing on the growing fame of Roger Moore, whose picture would adorn the new paperbacks. In his foreword to the new publication of his 1931 *Alias The Saint*, Charteris wondered if he should update the old tales. He admitted the archaic telecommunications and transportation technologies in the Saint's early adventures had changed significantly. In a similar foreword to his 1965 edition of *The Saint Overboard* (1935), Charteris said his Jules Verne–like machines used by mad scientists were outdated as quickly as the books went to print, making his futuristic aqualungs and bathyspheres commonplace and uninteresting thirty years later. So Charteris said he was reluctant to bring out new editions thinking readers would be better served by new books with new settings and new topical references.

After his editors assured him new readers would want to backtrack through the years and see how the Saint had evolved, Charteris changed his mind. In the various apologies opening his mid-1960s editions, Charteris said many readers should simply see his novels as historical fiction. After all, how could he alter the adventures of yesteryear satisfactorily, he wondered, and how often would the updates need to be updated themselves? Would the Sherlock Holmes stories be as durable if they had been translated from the idiom of hansom cabs to helicopters or a jet-powered antigravity belt? Perhaps our tastes have grown more subtle, he speculated, our monsters darker, and our panoramas larger. Such questions were not Charteris's alone; however, many would wonder how to preserve, continue, update, and create anew the very sorts of adventures Leslie Charteris had done so much to popularize.

Such questions have much to do with the chapters that follow, but before exploring the history, production, and contexts of TV spies, we must come to some understanding of what defines a secret agent in the broadcast media. For example, many might wonder how Simon Templar, Leslie Charteris's Saint, can be considered a secret agent when he is largely remembered as the "Robin Hood of modern crime." As explored in Chapter 7, we shall see that the Saint was indeed as much a secret agent as any other crime fighter in the genre. In fact, Simon Templar was an agent of the British Secret Service in the 1930s long before Ian Fleming began his first James Bond novel in 1952. Certainly, many fictional spies throughout the decades were professional agents working for real or imagined law enforcement agencies from MI5, the CIA, the National Security Agency (NSA), U.N.C.L.E., or unnamed, mysterious organizations. In other cases, as in *Mission: Impossible*, secret agents were semiofficial investigators and saboteurs who were apparently only part-time spies.

In many cases, such agents worked outside of legal charters because their goals were to obtain extralegal results when sanctioned law enforcement was powerless due to official constraints. Like the Saint, many secret agents were "gentlemen amateurs" pulled into clandestine service as were the first three partners of John Steed in *The Avengers*. Drawing from the "Clubland" tradition of the novels of Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, and John Buchan, many such spies were morally driven or patriotic adventurers stumbling into espionage and foreign intrigue by chance rather than official design. One notable trend that virtually defines the spies of the 1970s to the present is the tradition of reluctant secret agents coerced into government or quasi-government service by threat or trickery.

Some secret agents are lone wolves. Others work in pairs. Others, in the spirit of *Mission: Impossible*, work in strike forces in which various specializations are brought together in ensemble casts. Some agents primarily deal with East versus West political battles; others work against various Mr. Bigs threatening commercial interests more so than governmental matters. In

some cases, secret agents are international globetrotters; in others, as in *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, professional and amateur sleuths alike work primarily in settings close to their home base. Another important concern when discussing TV spies is the overlapping of creative concepts. Crossovers between genres can make it difficult to label a given television series any more specifically than as "action adventure." For example, in Mark Phillips and Frank Garcia's *Science Fiction Television Series* (1996), the authors profiled a number of programs with both secret agent and science fiction (SF) elements, including *The Bionic Woman*, *The Champions*, *Wonder Woman*, and *World of Giants*. Such connections had long been established, as in Gary Gerani and Paul Schulman's *Fantastic Television* (1977), which discussed *The Prisoner* alongside series like *The Twilight Zone* and *The Invaders*. Later series like *The X-Files*, *VR.5*, and *7 Days* were also both fantasy oriented and secret agent adventure, continuing to blur the lines between genres. Credit should go to Hollywood scriptwriter Danny Biederman for coining the term defining these series—"Spy-Fi."

Another quasi-sci-fi series, *The Wild Wild West*, was also often as much Western as spy drama. Much of the continuing success of *Get Smart* can be attributed to the fact that it was a situation comedy in the mold of *Bewitched* or *The Addams Family*, giving the series a double life in the syndicated rerun market. More straightforward police shows like *Hawaii Five-O* (1968–1980) also employed espionage themes, beginning with its pilot about the death of an intelligence agent murdered by Chinese spies. In this episode, Steve McGarrett (Jack Lord) was stuck in a yellow scuba suit and placed in a sensory deprivation tank to be brainwashed. This circumstance was more typical of secret agents than cops. More complex are the overlapping characteristics between overt espionage shows and the even more popular private investigator (PI) genre. As Symons noted, most espionage literature in the mid-twentieth century resulted from crime writers grafting spy elements onto detective stories to give murders and related crimes a greater scale of consequence (Symons 1972, 241). On one side, secret agents were often more international crime fighters than true undercover operatives. On the other, many private investigators, such as McGill in *Man in a Suitcase* and *The Equalizer* in later decades, were ex-spies looking for work related to their skills and backgrounds. Still another approach was shown in the 2000 Tom Clancy's Op-Center novel, *Divide and Conquer*, by Jeff Rovin, in which a CIA operative described himself as a "diplomatic private investigator." Because of such variations on standard models, for some observers, the lines of distinction between independent private eyes and secret agents are virtually nonexistent.

For one thing, the narrative structure of such shows, whether spy or PI, often seem to be roughly the same, inspiring the numerous parodies of the often too-predictable plots. One typical plot, first seen in John Buchan's early novels, was to transport a code, person, or device from point A to point B,

getting past any number of obstacles. The spy was often uncertain about his or her mission's goals, so the viewer learned what was going on just as the agent did. According to Robin Winks, usually the agent didn't know friend from foe and was as worried about the local law enforcement as the opposition (Buchan 1988, iv–x). Often, he couldn't seek help as this would compromise his cover, and there was usually a time frame with an ominous deadline. Typically, both then and now, investigators sought out messages or tips from fellow agents or a snitch, only to find the informer was murdered before he could reveal the missing clue.

The more detective-oriented shows emphasized scientific methodology and the follow-up of puzzling clues or leads (Cawilti and Rosenberg 1987, 34). When a team of investigators was involved, one partner usually took the direct approach while the other surreptitiously blended into the background. Typically, the evil "Mr. Big" captured one of the investigators and interrogated and tortured him or her, always to no avail unless an innocent civilian was on hand to be threatened instead. The villain then left the unguarded prey in a diabolical death trap just before the commercial break—a device still employed today.

Escapes and chases followed such encounters, with the hero or heroine rescuing a partner or a kidnapped innocent civilian or a scientist or political leader from being manipulated or coerced into doing the villain's bidding. Inevitably, the conflict ended with shootouts or physical fights and, in the world of secret agents, the utter destruction of the villain's headquarters.

But the enemies of TV spies came in many molds and were not always predictable. Bad guys were not all deluded villains with clearly evil intent. True, spies dealt with defectors, mercenaries, assassins, revolutionaries, hijackers, rebel guerillas, bogus religious leaders, double agents, and the obligatory literal double—exact duplicates of the agent. Still, Patrick McGoohan's John Drake was likely to be found infiltrating the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or Israeli commandos debating terrorist ethics with pleas for legal rather than vigilante justice. In *Danger Man* scripts, opposition agents duped innocent civilians into thinking that they all were working together for England. Other double agents were torn between love and duty to their masters.

Many adversaries didn't see themselves as evil or criminal but rather as exponents of new and improved world orders or defenders of the ideology of their homeland. When John Steed dealt with his Russian counterparts, each side clearly viewed the opposition as paid professionals who happened to work on different sides of the chessboard. During the 1960s, both heroes and villains lost the stereotypical trappings of decades past, with agents on both sides as svelte and seductive as the other (Newcomb 1997). There were friendships and love affairs between agents, with numerous regrets that their governments happened to be at war.

Secret agents often worked hand in hand with criminals whose wrongdoing was illegality rather than villainy, whose goals were unlawful gain, not devastation. For example, James Bond hooked up with criminal bosses in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and *For Your Eyes Only* when the greater good demanded such allegiances and when the criminal demonstrated redeeming characteristics, such as avoiding drug trafficking. When *Octopussy* told 007, "We're two of a kind," she was on target, as independent operators were frequently crossing legal lines as often as their prey (Black 2001, 100).

In this climate, especially in the British novels, films, and TV series, a tone of civility was seen in images of gamesmanship such as animal hunts, chess, card games, and jigsaw puzzles (Newcomb 1997). Agents fought deadly obstacle courses in literal mazes. *The Avengers* wasn't the only series in which villains forced their prey to engage in contests to both test their own abilities and give the hero a "sporting chance." Such sportsmanship was merged with elegant style, as in one episode of *The Avengers* when a professor of assassins praised John Steed's grace and flair in the least of all gentlemanly arts, surrendering.

In the mold of Ian Fleming, many secret agents or their counterparts, like the Saint, were either wealthy or comfortable with the trappings of wealth. For other spies, money was rarely an important incentive for their actions, rather they were inspired by personal or political ideals or simple professionalism. Most fictional spies were portrayed as operating from higher motives than materialism, with greed and lust for power necessarily being the domains of their opponents. More often than not, rather than fighting foreign powers, government agents battled private criminals whose goals threatened the health and wealth of a nation.

WORKING CONDITIONS

From the beginnings of the espionage genre, the boundaries between commercial crime and political intrigue overlapped. In addition, having secret agents serve as crime fighters rather than international spies helped keep television networks out of political hot water. According to Eric Barnouw, the secret agents programs of the 1960s inevitably reflected the limitations handed to scriptwriters by the networks, which preferred euphemisms for Communist countries to avoid becoming entangled in international relations. Some countries, like China and East Germany, were fair game. More likely, however, spies would battle THRUSH, KAOS, unspecified "oppositions," or simply "the enemy." Barnouw noted first drafts of some *Mission: Impossible* scripts used specific locations that were modified later to suit the various teams of censors from networks or sponsors (Barnouw 1990, 370).

No matter who the enemy might be, the secret agent often worked for a government or quasigovernmental agency that could give them extensive and expensive support with gadgets and helpful secondary characters. When producer Chris Carter described his *X-Files* agents as those called in to investigate crimes or situations defying established techniques or confounding conventional investigators, he emulated the missions of teams like *The Avengers*, who dealt with "extraordinary crimes against the people and the state." More often than not, the organization behind the scenes was mysterious and apparently part of a shadow government, as in *I Spy* and *Mission: Impossible*, where it remained a mystery for whom the spies worked. In *I Spy*, *Secret Agent*, and especially *The Prisoner*, undercover operatives often questioned the motives and methods of such agencies.

In the realm of Flemingesque espionage, issues were more gray than black and white, a notable shift from the anti-Communist G-men of the 1950s. Such concerns provided a variety of dilemmas for scriptwriters. For example, to justify government agencies' use of dirty tricks, according to Eric Barnouw, the major premise was that Americans lived in a world of unscrupulous conspiracies requiring a response in kind, allowing agents to employ the same means of deceptions and violence used by the enemy (Barnouw 1990, 369). Although some saw spy films as aggrandizing a contemptible business, one May 1952 Sunday *New York Times* reviewer noted such movies were perfect vehicles in which "lone heroes could wander at will in any disguise, through any social milieu, and in which acts of violence and promiscuity were vaguely condoned by the fact that the heroes were always fighting for 'our side,'" without need for elaborate explanation (quoted in Shaw 2001, 57). Later, *Mission: Impossible* enshrined the official lie—the government must be able to disavow its agents' actions. This would prove to be an important issue by the end of the 1960s, when social and political concerns resulted in another important shift in programming as the lies about Vietnam and Watergate made such sanctioned deception more difficult to accept.

SOCIAL SCIENCE FICTION

Another clear distinction between the heroes of the 1950s and the TV series after 1964 was the presence of science fiction motifs. On the surface, viewers were entertained by the new technologies on both sides of the chessboard. Extraordinary adversaries with extracapabilities gave superspies interesting adversaries and obstacles beyond the gray-haired and gray-suited Commies of old. Often, such new wizardry was merely an extension of what Alfred Hitchcock termed "MacGuffins." For the director of numerous films important to the spy genre, a MacGuffin was a plot device unimportant in itself. The missing codebook, secret plan, or new marvel was only the means to start a story. Such MacGuffins didn't need to be explained. What mattered

was how the MacGuffin was found, protected, stopped, or destroyed. In "Spy-Fi" terms, such MacGuffins were usually a visually interesting and clever means to dream up new special effects. But in the final moments, these devices were usually utterly destroyed, apparently never to plague scriptwriters or the world again.

On another level, SF and fantasy elements allowed writers to bring in clichés from other genres to spice up story lines. TV scriptwriters reached back as far as Fritz Lang's 1927 *Metropolis*, which featured the first "fembot" (female robot), a sexy device later seen in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Bionic Woman*, and *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*. Tapping into the trappings of Gothic horror films, series from *The Avengers* to *The X-Files* had secret agents investigating usually fraudulent supernatural phenomena, from ghosts to golems to voodoo-stricken zombies. Even the rational *Mission: Impossible* conned superstitious adversaries with spirits and ancient curses. Plots and characteristics based on *Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and H. G. Wells's *Invisible Man* allowed both the SF and spy genre to expand their boundaries. The original nineteenth-century versions of such stories emphasized personal dramas in which the workings of a mad scientist or criminal only affected a small circle of people in one town or locale (Cawilti and Rosenberg 1987, 33). In the hands of adversaries of U.N.C.L.E. or the Avengers, such monsters posed a much greater threat to the world.

To a large extent, the "Spy-Fi" TV series of the 1960s and beyond were also extensions of the monster and space alien films of the 1950s, often cautionary fables about technology in the new atomic age. Likewise, secret agents contended with mind and body switches, artificial intelligence machines gone amok, genetically enhanced plants or animals, miniaturization rays, and deadly laser beams. Before worries about biological warfare became headlines after the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States, TV spies had long fought terrorists of every stripe employing artificially enhanced diseases as weapons. Long before *The X-Files* and the 2001 version of the *Invisible Man* employed new twists in stories about cryogenics, spy shows used the old motif of artificial immortality to resurrect Hitler, transfer scientists' minds into robots or computers, and seek out real and bogus fountains of youth. Ironically, after September 11, much of this imaginative speculation seemed prophetic. For example, when in October and November 2001 powders carrying anthrax germs were found in mailed envelopes, this author immediately recalled that this had been one MacGuffin in a 1969 *Avengers* story, "You'll Catch Your Death."

In "Spy-Fi," Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was as influential as Ian Fleming, at least in terms of the goals of modern villains. Supervillains were typically "zealous puritans intent on cleaning up social decadence" and earthly corruption by destroying humanity so that the species could progress (Donovan 1983, 161). Villains in series like *The Wild Wild West* were often

social activists to the extreme, with one terrorist wishing to use tidal waves to destroy polluters.

Each week, independent, freewheeling secret agents brought down egomaniacs who had utopian designs for reshaping and controlling the world. Private investigators solved crimes against particular people; realistic agents solved crimes against society. But secret agents opposing SF masterminds fought crimes against nature. In the 1950s, this notion allowed writers to portray Communism as a force against nature, particularly human nature. The theme reached its height in *The Prisoner*, whose seventeen episodes were designed to be cautionary parables about the rights of free minds in a world seeking conformity and enforced order. Even in the shows created for pure entertainment, themes that warned of the dangers of ill-used technology—chemical and biological tampering with genetics and the environment—took the spy out of the sometimes claustrophobic Cold War atmosphere into wider vistas of adventure. And, as Cawilti and Rosenberg noted, the technological trappings allowed for ambivalent parables about the meaning of new gadgetry. Whatever devices secret agents had were used up before the final confrontations, when one man stood alone against fantastic machines. If technology was the deciding factor, the enemies of law and order would have won (Cawilti and Rosenberg 1987, 138).

EXPANDING VISTAS

In addition, unlike private eyes, the new type of spy worked in a larger palate of exotic, international locations so the viewer could vicariously pick up interesting details about the global village. As in the richly descriptive James Bond novels, the secret agent's preoccupations with expensive clothes, cars, food, and leisure pursuits were a collage of little facts about what to eat, what to wear, and how to behave in a sophisticated world in which few viewers could ever expect to participate. Glimpses into the realms of exclusive clubs like London's Blades were accessible to most viewers only in the glamorous films and TV shows starring secret agents. Such agents had to be worldly enough to go anywhere at any time and seem at home no matter the language, customs, or culture. Viewers learned about these agents' tastes and habits, which were often signature trademarks, as in Bond's preference for shaken martinis. In the pop 1960s, the sexy cars of secret agents helped define their characters, from Simon Templar's "ST-1" Volvo to John Steed's Bentleys and Emma Peel's powder-blue Lotus Elan. Such details gave spy stories a degree of realism and credibility (Pearson 1966, 204). To achieve this plausibility, the production teams behind *Danger Man* and *I Spy*, among others, tried to give their adventures a visual travel documentary look by filming on location. In short, the spy genre offered viewers new kinds of heroes, new vistas in which they operated, and an encyclopedia of a world well beyond small-town America. When viewer interest in such trappings

diminished in the 1970s and 1980s, the spy genre underwent major changes in character development, an important theme in explored in Chapters 11 and 12.

In a sense, examining all of the espionage-oriented television programs created before, during, and after the1960s spy renaissance is like inspecting wings of a venerable old museum. Each wing has many rooms, and each section represents the times and attitudes of successive generations of spy buffs and the general public alike. In many ways, the Bond bonanza of the 1960s was merely the most visible era in a genre that has been many things in its fifty-year history. Heroes must act out the principles we demand of them, and our desires shape how we perceive the covert world of fact and fancy. But beyond these matters, the political, sociological, cultural, and artistic issues reflected in spy TV series make them more than examples of escapist entertainment. Our attitudes toward McCarthyism, the Cold War, and changing technologies, as well as American values and tastes have all been mirrored in TV spies. Therefore, the fifty years of TV's secret agents must be seen in a wide context, and the following chapters have as much to say about American culture as they do about one television genre.

But I've jumped ahead of the story—to begin where it began, we must return to those thrilling days of yesteryear, to the beginnings of a century when even radio was but an experiment in Mr. Marconi's lab. Before television, literary and broadcast spies had their own fifty-year history, and these radio and book heroes planted the seeds for all entertainment media to follow.

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CHAPTER 2

The Roots of a Family Tree: 1900 to 1961

WHEN SPYING WASN'T COOL

> When one country knows something it doesn't want another country to know, a state secret is born. Then the international fight for custody begins, government official versus government official, diplomat versus diplomat, espionage agent versus counter-espionage agent. And the others, the men who never wear striped pants or frock coats and who always carry guns and grudges, those who buy secrets large and small like vegetables on the open market. Men only loyal to the franc, the dollar, the shilling, the mark, the men living among us as one of us but dying among us differently.
>
> —Secret Agent Christopher Storm in *Foreign Intrigue*
> (quoted in MacDonald 1985, 105)

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, few would have imagined that anyone so disreputable as a spy could ever be considered a hero in popular culture. In the literature of the times, spies were largely portrayed as treacherous, duplicitous, and immoral anarchists, revolutionaries, or sexually deviant betrayers like Delilah, Mata Hari, or Benedict Arnold. Most Americans felt spies should be dealt with as suggested in the *Encyclopedia Britannica:* "When a spy is discovered, he is hanged immediately" (quoted in Symons 1972, 230). Judging from dialogue in Alfred Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* (1935) spies preferred the euphemism "secret agent" to avoid negative connotations.

The U.S. government was equally uneasy about espionage. Diplomats and their aides and attachés were discouraged from intelligence gathering

as it was considered unseemly conduct (Richelson 1995, 3). More ominously, in October 1929, Secretary of State Henry Stimson disbanded the most successful covert office in the United States, Herbert Yardley's "Black Chamber" code-breakers, because the new Hoover administration believed "gentlemen don't read each other's mail."

Still, during this era, Hollywood offered its share of spy yarns such as *After Tonight* (1933) and *Espionage* (1937), featuring beautiful Russian spies gifted in the use of invisible inks, secret jewelry compartments, and seductive wiles. But such stories were merely love-conquers-all yarns as the exotic women inevitably fell under the spell of English-speaking men of courage and character (Strada and Troper 1997, 22–25). Simultaneously, action adventures were an entertainment choice in old time radio. Perhaps the first network spy drama was NBC's 1932 to 1933 series *Secret Service Spy Stories*. In 1935, Herbert Yardley's spy work came to NBC in *Stories of the Black Chamber*. Another notable early fifteen-minute serial was San Francisco–based *Dan Dunn: Secret Operative Number 48*. 1938 saw three new radio spy serials, *Spy at Large*, *Spy Secrets*, and Mutual Broadcasting's four-year success, *Ned Jordan Spy Stories*. Although most such shows turned to World War II themes in 1939, surviving copies of that year's *Secret Agent K-7* show there was still listener interest in pre-Nazi bad guys brought down by the G-men of the Treasury Department, Secret Service, and fictional law enforcement agencies. Popular anthology shows also drew from secret agent files. The Lux Radio Theatre adapted *The 39 Steps* in one 1937 broadcast and brought an army intelligence officer onstage to make a pitch for "good spies," that is "patriotic spies versus mercenary spies"—those who ply their wares for mere money.

Meanwhile, long before television shows like *The Wild Wild West* dealt with pressure groups opposed to media violence, prewar radio confronted the same issue on two levels. First, educational, parental, and women's organizations such as the PTA complained about airwave violence. Such groups feared children would emulate Jungle Jim and the Green Hornet. Parents disliked the fisticuffs and gunplay of *Gangbusters*, the eerie stories of *The Witching Hour*, and even *The Lone Ranger* (MacDonald 1979, 45). In response, NBC promised in 1936 to uphold law and order, sobriety, good morals, fair play, democratic principles, and clean living. No James Bond could flourish under these constraints.

Simultaneously, as World War II dawned in Europe, isolationist spokespeople pushed for programming that didn't encourage calls for American intervention. Networks told writers to avoid including sabotage, subversion, or spying inside the United States in their plots. Radio characters couldn't take one side or the other in the war. Such thinking influenced the White House, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt was discouraged from openly working to establish a central intelligence service despite calls from General William "Wild Bill" Donovan and two British envoys worried about

America's lack of awareness regarding European matters. One of these envoys was Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming of the British Royal Navy.

The indifference ended after December 7, 1941, when every fictional hero was called to war against the Axis powers; now the international gangsters were to be crushed with fists, patriotic zeal, and dime novel wit. Scorn, derision, and overt hatred for Axis agents replaced the earlier squeaky-clean tone of radio dramas. Counterspying on American soil was now both adventure and propaganda. Superman, Tom Mix, and the once disreputable Green Hornet were now expected to deal with Axis spies with maximum prejudice. In movie serials, Batman took on Japanese spies. In England, even Sherlock Holmes worked undercover against Nazi agents on film and radio.

Radio series featuring secret agents now came to the fore, and they came with a vengeance. The *Man Called X* (1944–1952) featured Ken Thurston (Herbert Marshall) as an American intelligence agent sent "wherever intrigue lurked and danger was the by-word." (Dunning 1998, 344). The concept also made for a short-lived syndicated TV series in 1956 starring Barry Sullivan. Known for intrigue rather than romance, one TV episode featured X taking on a gang of female spies. From 1943 to 1944, *Foreign Assignment* established the format of reporters as spies. Other such series included *David Harding, Counterspy* (1942–1957) and *The Man from G-2*, also known as *Major North, Army Intelligence* (1945–1946). Many of these anti-Nazi shows continued after the war, including *Cloak and Dagger* (1950), a series of fictionalized accounts of World War II operatives working for the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the predecessor to the CIA. Known for avoiding formulas, the tense dramas invariably began with a question by the "Hungarian Giant" (Raymond Edward Johnson): "Are you willing to undertake a dangerous mission for the United States knowing in advance you may never return alive?" Earlier, the juvenile serial *Don Winslow of the Navy* starred Johnson in its 1942 season as a young naval officer assigned to wartime intelligence. One popular anthology series showcasing Hollywood talent, *Intrigue* (1946), cast notable character actors like Vincent Price in a variety of spy outings. In 1948, *I Love Adventure* had Jack Packard (Michael Laseto), formerly of American intelligence, sent to London to work for the top secret "21 Old Men of 10 Gramercy Park." These keepers of international peace met behind a large two-way mirror where Jack could hear but never see them. NBC's *Top Secret* (1950) starred sultry voiced Hungarian actress Alana Massey as a Mata Hari–style operative during World War II. In the same year, radio stalwart Jack Armstrong became *Armstrong of the S.B.I.* for one season working as a counterspy for the Scientific Bureau of Investigation. Most swashbuckling of all was Errol Flynn's 1952 *The Modern Adventures of Casanova*—lover Christopher Casanova that is. Trying to live down the reputation of his famous ancestor, Christopher was a secret agent for "Worldpol." Another Hollywood heartthrob, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., played a variety of federal agents in *The Third Man* from 1951 to 1952.

Other series shifted their targets to Communist infiltrators at home and abroad. Between 1952 and 1954, popular actor Dana Andrews starred as Matt Cvetic in *I Was a Communist for the FBI*, a concept repeated in a number of television series and a 1951 film of the same name. Based on the book by Cvetic, the unabashed plug for the House Un-American Activities Committee featured a heroic Pittsburgh steelworker working undercover to identify blue-collar Communists. One important trend in these formative years was quasi-realism, which helped give films, radio programs, and finally television shows credibility and an excuse to use violence in the name of public information. Many radio series were ostensibly based on true case files with the consultation of police veterans and local law enforcement departments. On both radio and TV, "true life" stories included *Secret Missions* (1948–1949), based on files of the Office of Naval Intelligence and featuring perhaps the first germ warfare scripts on radio. *Spy Catcher*, a 1960-to-1961 BBC radio series was based on the memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Oreste Pinto of Allied Counterintelligence Services. *Counterspy* and *Gangbusters* producer Philip Lord, who established the recurring tone of praise and tribute for law enforcement agents, created many such shows employing real-life FBI agents who provided introductions and audio wanted posters for the series. Writers for both radio and TV shows with such formats considered themselves lucky. Instead of having to create a new plot every seven days, they merely dramatized already existing files.

These old-time radio series had much to do with the formation of early television and consequently the secret agents in the 1960s and beyond. In television's first decade, writers and actors came from radio, film, and the stage. Private investigator Richard Diamond was originally a 1949-to-1950 radio detective (Dick Powell) before TV featured David Janssen, the legs of Mary Tyler Moore, and Diamond's gal Karen Wells, played by future *Mission: Impossible* temptress, Barbara Bain. *Hallmark Hall of Fame*, *Suspense*, and *CBS Radio Workshop* music composer Jerry Goldsmith later wrote the theme and background music for *Our Man Flint* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, influencing all TV spy themes that followed. *U.N.C.L.E.* cocreator Sam Rolfe had scripted episodes for *Suspense*, *Hollywood Star Playhouse*, *Richard Diamond*, and *Sam Spade*. His *U.N.C.L.E.* production partner, Norman Felton, had been a longtime NBC radio director and producer for such shows as *Author's Playhouse*, *Grand Hotel*, and *The Guiding Light* (Anderson 1993, 10). Future *Wild Wild West* costar Ross Martin gained early experience in radio's *Cloak and Dagger* and *Lights Out* in 1949. Radio comedy writer Leonard Stern took the tried-and-true technique of radio catch-phrases and kept television audiences laughing with "Sorry about that, Chief" and "Missed it by that much" in his 1965 cocreation *Get Smart*. One script contributor to *Get Smart* was *I Love Lucy* creator Jess Oppenheimer, who'd also written for Jack Benny and George Burns on radio. Television producer Sheldon Leonard had also cut his teeth in radio, as an announcer and voice for various radio charac-

ters, notably for the *Jack Benny Show*. When he conceived *I Spy*, he gave his ideas to writers Mort Fine and Dave Friedkin who developed the series and helped shape the characters of Kelly Robinson and Alexander Scott. Fine and Friedkin were chosen for their radio experience in high-adventure shows such as *Suspense*, *Bold Venture*, and *Broadway Is My Beat*, on which Leonard was a stock player.

BROADCAST CENSORSHIP

A number of political and market forces also shaped early television. In 1952, the year Congress established the House Subcommittee of Legislative Oversight to investigate morality on radio and television, networks had little clout. Advertisers dictated programming, and television networks had few affiliates. In 1952, NBC had sixty-four stations, CBS thirty-one, and ABC a mere fifteen. Many markets had but one or two stations on the air, and many only broadcast from dawn until dusk. While networks grew in the 1950s (ABC had sixty stations by 1959), the 1958 and 1959 game show and payola scandals gave the Federal Communications Commission reasons to threaten stations with losing their licenses if they didn't adhere to strict practices of broadcast behavior.

In addition, the Hollywood blacklist, publications such as *Red Channels* and *Counter Attack*, and watchdog groups like Aware had much to do with 1950s TV spies—and all broadcast ventures afterward. TV spies began in fact before fiction. "Real life espionage reached American television screens in the early 1950s when Congressional investigations of Communism went before the cameras . . . The spies were few but viewers did get insights into tradecraft from undercover agents for the FBI." In fact, the McCarthy hearings "drew one of the largest audiences in television's short history" (Polmar and Allen 1997, 547). Bringing both commercial and governmental pressures together, Former Navy intelligence officer Vincent Hartnett became a subversion consultant who compiled lists of suspicious leftist writers and directors. He sold his list to sponsors, who in turn pressured the industry to drop or cancel series with "questionable" ties to Communism. As a result, the spy shows of the era went to great lengths to demonstrate their prodemocracy themes and portray Communism as the dark side of black-and-white programming. McCarthyism created a climate of fear in Hollywood that, according to Eric Barnouw, resulted in an industry shaped by caution and cowardice from which it has never recovered (Barnouw 1990, 217).

As the rise of television began almost precisely with the growth of Cold War thinking, the two new developments in American culture were quickly joined at the hip. America had moved far away from the isolationism of the 1930s and instead was making ever-increasing entries into every corner of the world stage. As a result, one dominant theme of 1950s film, radio, and

TV spies was undisguised propaganda for U.S. interests. One source for this collusion was NBC founder and Brigadier General David Sarnoff, a powerful executive keenly interested in military intelligence and how broadcast technology could assist anti-Communist efforts. As a result, in 1952 NBC trained CIA operatives in overseas propaganda efforts in Europe and the Far East (Barnouw 1990, 190). During this era, more than thirty-five movies dealing with domestic Communism were produced. Production peaked in 1952, when twelve titles were released in a single year (Strada and Troper 1997, 95). In short, to keep the blacklisters at bay and to capitalize on the popularity of "true crime" radio success, television executives quickly aligned themselves with government law enforcement agencies, which resulted in the first major trend in TV spies.

THE FIRST TV SPIES

> These are the stories of America's intelligence agents, our country's first line of defense.
>
> —Preamble to each episode of *The Man Called X*, 1956

The history of TV spies begins in 1951 with the debut of three series, *Doorway to Danger*, *Dangerous Assignment*, and *Foreign Intrigue*. First of its kind in many ways, *Doorway to Danger* ran on both NBC and ABC over its three-year run. Narrated by Westbrook Van Voorhis, the show began as a summer replacement series originally titled *Door with No Name* to indicate the secret nature of the agency's work. Mel Ruick, Roland Winters, and finally Raymond Bramley each played the central role of John Randolph who sat in the secret office beyond the entrance of the show's title. In quasi-documentary style, Randolph, an intelligence supervisor, dispatched various agents on international assignments. The program's first and third years featured recurring characters, including Grant Richards and Stacy Harris each playing agent Doug Carter in separate seasons. During the second year, Randolph supervised a new agent each week.

Dangerous Assignment starred Hollywood leading man Brian Donlevy, who played government agent Steve Mitchell, the role he'd created on the 1948-to-1953 radio series of the same name. In each thirty-minute adventure, the "commissioner" of some unnamed government agency dispatched the suave Mitchell to Mexico City, Casablanca, Burma, or behind the Iron Curtain. Mitchell did considerable stunt work, leaping from cars and electrocuting enemies with light sockets (Brooks and Marsh 1999, 233).

A different approach distinguished the syndicated *Foreign Intrigue*. The cast consisted of one hotel operator and four alternating wire correspondents for the fictional Consolidated News Service who each infiltrated European spy rings. Filmed in Europe, the location shooting was the only constant in the series as new characters were based in different cities as