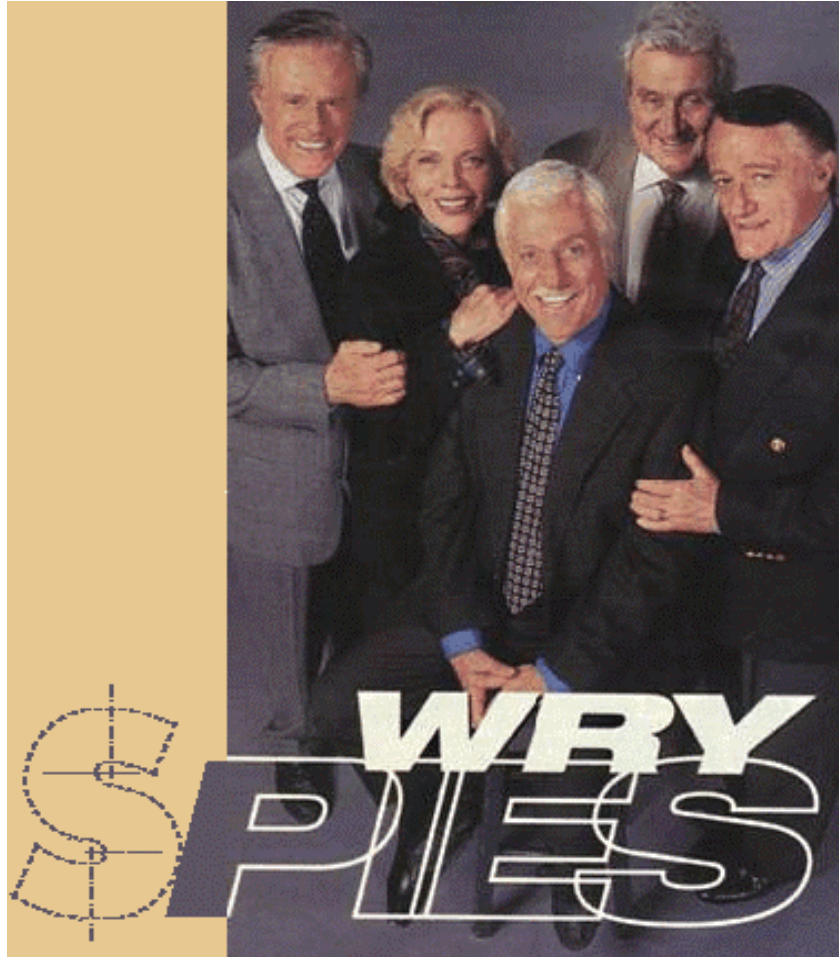


# WRY SPIES

By Ted Johnson



Our favorite TV secret agents come in from the cold on *Diagnosis Murder*, and dish about their license-to-thrill days. They once led lives as counterintelligence agents working for top-secret international organizations, their hours filled battling insidious foes bent on world domination. Sadly, those days are long gone. But TV's spies of the '60s remain as suave as ever. Robert Vaughn, 64 (*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*); Robert Culp, 67 (*I Spy*); Barbara Bain, 63 (*Mission: Impossible*); and Patrick Macnee, 75 (*The Avengers*), guest on CBS's *Diagnosis Murder*. "It's always nice to have somebody my own age with whom I can reminisce," says *Diagnosis* star Dick Van Dyke, 71, of the casting. TV Guide arranged a summit of these spies to get their take on TV espionage then and now.

**TV Guide:** The Cold War is over. Would your characters have a job now?

**Robert Vaughn:** I don't know. The Cold War was all around us at the time and

very real, and the plots of [*U.N.C.L.E.*] and the Bond pictures were very unreal. We did high-tech warfare, tongue-in-cheek fashion, as opposed to being blown up by the real atom bomb.

**Barbara Bain:** Mission was a fantasy. People saw it as a fantasy. And that's how it was geared. Nobody for a minute at that time thought any of that stuff was going on.

**TVG:** All of your series are being developed as or have been made into pricey features. ["The Avengers," starring Ralph Fiennes and Uma Thurman, recently completed production.] What do you think of this trend?

**Bain:** I intended to see [the feature "Mission:Impossible"], and then I didn't. From what I understand, they did indeed do what they set out to do. They made a star vehicle for Tom Cruise and made a hit picture.

**Patrick Macnee:** Well, I think it's marvelous, as long as [the movies] are good. I hope "The Avengers" is good because the leading man so rightfully said, "I'm going to do something that you created back in the 1960s. I'm not going to carry a gun." In 1960, when people said to me, "You carry a gun," I said, "I'm not going to." When they asked why, I said, "Because I've been through five years of the Second World War and have seen most of my friends blown to bits, and I'm not carrying a gun." And they said, "What will you carry?" "An umbrella," I said, off the top of my head. So it stuck with me.

**Bain:** We were not armed, either. It was a mind game. It all had to do with outfoxing the other people and getting them to do themselves in. We didn't do them in.

**Vaughn:** On our show -- I don't know whether it was the first year or the second year -- the dictum came down that there would be no more bullets but sleep darts. There were all kinds of strange rules. One of the rules was -- and I'm sure you guys know this-- that the firer and the person being fired on couldn't be filmed in the same scene.

**TVG:** Who should play your characters in the feature films?

**Vaughn:** I'd like Ellen DeGeneres. She's smart, she's witty, and she's soft. [Laughter] Well, E.G. Marshall is in his 80s and is now reprising his role in The Defenders [on Showtime], the role he created [more than] 30 years ago. So I'll go for me first. Failing that, Sean Connery.

**Robert Culp:** I'll go with Bob-- Sean Connery.

**Bain:** I don't think about it that much. Nor do I think about Cinnamon Carter. I've been asked to [recreate the role] many times, and I didn't want to. But [Diagnosis Murder] came up, and it was kind of the right moment to consider it. In particular, it's Dick's show, and I have a soft spot in my heart for him.

**TVG:** Had any of you ever met one another back then?

**Vaughn:** I met Robert on Trackdown [a Western starring Culp that ran from 1957 to 1959] because I went on the set and got a picture of him for my mother.

**Culp:** What were you doing there?

**Vaughn:** Getting an autographed picture of you. [Laughter]

**TVG:** Why did these spy shows take off in the '60s?

**Culp:** Because of James Bond.

**Bain:** I always felt it was because Mission was so superbly well done.

**Macnee:** My show started [in 1961] before [the] James Bond [films]. And we were very good.

**TVG:** Were these expensive productions? I Spy, for example, was shot around the world.

**Culp:** People always asked me, "How did you do that?" And the answer was always very simple. The boss, Sheldon Leonard, was able to get nine scripts pre-approved by the network, which has never happened before or since. And consider, if you will, the possibility of today trying to get three or four scripts approved by the network so that you could shoot them continuously. That's an impossibility.

**Vaughn:** Another example of what Bob was talking about: When the decision was made to cast me, all it required was one phone call from [executive producer] Norman Felton to one person in New York telling that person that I wanted to do it. That person said yes, and it was over. The deal was done. It wasn't 18 committees and three tiers meeting dozens of people that the kids go through today.

**TVG:** How did each of you get your spy roles?

**Vaughn:** It was very simple. "Here, read the script, tell us if you like it."

**Culp:** I wrote a piece that I wanted to do, a half-hour adventure comedy. It didn't occur to me that you couldn't possibly afford to do such a thing. I took it to Carl Reiner, who was working on The Dick Van Dyke Show at the time. Reiner said, "I hope you don't mind- I showed it to a friend of mine, and he wants to talk to you. He's over there, a guy named Sheldon Leonard." So I went over to meet him, and he said, "I liked your idea, kid. But I like mine better." And I said, "What's yours?" And he told me in a couple of sentences. I said, "You're right. Yours is better."

**Bain:** The part was written for me by [executive producer] Bruce Geller. And he got me approved up to a certain point, but they were a little nervous, like, "The girl, who is she?" [Lucille Ball] owned

the show. I was told to go to her bungalow on the Paramount lot and to bring along the latest piece of film I had done. The latest at the time was a comedy. And I wasn't about to walk into her bungalow with a comedy. I couldn't do it. I was just going to walk in with me. So I did. And she just looked me up and down and said, "Looks OK to me." That was it.

**Macnee:** What a lovely story.

**TVG:** Patrick, how did you come to your role?

**Macnee:** It's so boring and so long ago. It's like remembering the Second World War. You try and forget it. Let's just say I got in.

**TVG:** What would your characters be doing today?

**Vaughn:** CBS did a two-hour movie 14 years ago called Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E. That was 15 years after we finished the show. It wasn't really clear what I was doing. I was just a retired spy or something.

**Macnee:** I don't think you can relate them to reality. We did The New Avengers with this perfectly gorgeous girl named Joanna Lumley, who has achieved enormous success on Absolutely Fabulous. But the show was awfully bad. Nothing related to the other show, which was frightfully good.

**Culp:** Kelly would be dead of alcoholism somehow. Either that or he might be a kept man. But they'd have to lock him up to keep the booze away from him.

**Bain:** Cinnamon would be having a good time somewhere.

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