

# Movies

I can tell you how good these movies are, and I don't even have to kill you.

They have operatives, deception, chases, twists and subterfuge — the fundamental requirements of the spy thriller.

Naturally, the genre reached the zenith of its popularity during the Cold War, when secret agents were glamorous, sleek and servicing the side of good against the Russians.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a turning point, of course, as was the 1970s era of Vietnam and Watergate, which shone a dispiriting spotlight on the grim, grey netherworld of government malfeasance.

Now the genre is as dark and disconcerting as the age-of-terror in which we live. Consider Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies*, which detailed the messy political machinations of the spy game in the 21st century.

Scott's film didn't make my list of cinema's best espionage entries — it's good, not great — but these 10 movies did.

## 1 The Spy Who Came in From the Cold (1964)

Alec Leamas, the protagonist of John LeCarre's stark, cynical breakthrough, is the anti-Bond: A British operative stationed in West Berlin during the height of the Cold War. As Leamas, Richard Burton is depressed, flawed and, unlike so many of his fictional ilk, human. As he says, "What do you think spies are? They are a bunch of seedy squalid bastards like me."

## 2 The Third Man (1949)

Set in post-Second World War Vienna, this masterpiece of mood, written by Graham Greene, follows an American writer (Joseph Cotton) who has been offered a job by an old friend named Harry Lime (Orson Welles). Predictably, nothing is as it seems — and it already seems quite sinister. Welles delivers this classic observation: "In Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love; they had 500 years of democracy and peace. And what did that produce? The Cuckoo clock."

## 3 The Lives of Others (2006)

This superb foreign-language Oscar-winner takes place in East Germany in 1984, when the country was under the oppressive grip of the secret police. At its centre is a middle-aged, lonely Stasi agent who finds himself identifying and empathizing with the couple he has under surveillance.

## 4 The Bourne Identity (2002)

The two sequels directed by Paul Greengrass — 2004's *The Bourne Supremacy* and 2007's *The Bourne Ultimatum* — are faster engines of action, but Doug Liman's original established all that makes the *Bourne* franchise remarkable: The realistic, grounded thrills; the titular character's hunt for redemption and distrust of himself; and Matt Damon's steely turn as the amnesiac, endlessly resourceful assassin.

# 10 SPY MOVIES THAT CAME IN FROM THE COLD

Pssst ... Kevin Williamson discloses his favourite espionage films from the past 50 years



The Lives of Others



North by Northwest



The Third Man

## 5 From Russia with Love (1963)

Of course it's Bond, James Bond. But which one? I choose Sean Connery, who remains the best (Daniel Craig being an excruciatingly close second) and, more importantly, the first. His ice-blood swagger, unstoppable efficiency, bone-dry wit and casual disregard for human life will continue to serve as a template for all future Bonds, long after Craig has retired his licence to kill.

## 6 North by Northwest (1959)

Alfred Hitchcock's classic of mistaken identity remains a milestone — and one that continues to be referenced to this day. Cary Grant stars as a suave executive swept up in a covert plot. Along the way, he's chased by assassins and crop dusters and aided by an icy blond (Eva Marie Saint). By the conclusion he's hanging on for dear life atop Mount Rushmore. As *Inception* director Christopher Nolan observed when I interviewed him recently, Hitchcock — a genre unto himself — bridges the gulf between 1940s film noir and the 1960s-cool action-adventures, which evolved into our modern-day thrill rides.

## 7 The Conversation (1974)

Director Francis Ford Coppola's essay in paranoia encapsulates the post-Watergate culture. Gene Hackman's Harry Caul is a freelance surveillance expert who jealously guards his own privacy. But his professional detachment from those he's observing is soon tested when he begins to believe the woman he's been spying on is in danger — and that he may end up an unwitting accomplice in her murder.

## 8 Three Days of the Condor (1975)

Robert Redford is The Condor — real name Joseph Turner — a CIA bookworm who winds up the sole survivor of a massacre of American operatives. Who can he trust? And who wants him dead? As he takes Faye Dunaway hostage, he has to unravel a conspiracy that may connect back to Middle East war games and America's addiction to oil.

## 9 The Manchurian Candidate (1962/2004)

Both the original and Jonathan Demme's remake have their strengths. Denzel Washington is obviously a finer actor — and the character is more deeply developed here — than Frank Sinatra. And Meryl Streep does her scene-gobbling best to match Angela Lansbury's demonic performance as a maternal figure that makes Joan Crawford look like Mother Teresa. And both versions — about a U.S. soldier brainwashed by enemy forces — grant insight into the culture from which they sprang. The 1962 version is pure Cold War paranoia, while the remake speaks to our present-day distrust of the military-industrial complex.

## 10 The Good Shepherd (2006)

Director Robert De Niro's devastating exploration of the origins of the CIA is a brooding, bleak chronicle of not only the morally ambiguous nature of the espionage game, but the personal price it exacts on Edward Wilson (Damon), a stalwart Yale student recruited during the Second World War.