

Alan Burton

# Looking-Glass Wars

*Spies on British Screens since 1960*

SERIES IN CINEMA AND CULTURE

## Summary

Looking-Glass Wars: Spies on British Screens since 1960 is a detailed historical and critical overview of espionage in British film and television in the important period since 1960. From that date, the British spy screen was transformed under the influence of the tremendous success of James Bond in the cinema (the spy thriller), and of the new-style spy writing of John le Carré and Len Deighton (the espionage story). In the 1960s, there developed a popular cycle of spy thrillers in the cinema and on television. The new study looks in detail at the cycle which in previous work has been largely neglected in favour of the James Bond films. The study also brings new attention to espionage on British television and popular secret agent series such as *Spy Trap*, *Quiller* and *The Sandbaggers*. It also gives attention to the more 'realistic' representation of spying in the film and television adaptations of le Carré and Deighton, and other dramas with a more serious intent. In addition, there is wholly original attention given to 'nostalgic' spy fictions on screen, adaptations of classic stories of espionage which were popular in the late 1970s and through the 1980s, and to 'historical' spy fiction, dramas which treated 'real' cases of espionage and their characters, most notably the notorious Cambridge Spies. Detailed attention is also given to the 'secret state' thriller, a cycle of paranoid screen dramas in the 1980s which portrayed the intelligence services in a conspiratorial light, best understood as a reaction to excessive official secrecy and anxieties about an unregulated security service. The study is brought up-to-date with an examination of screen espionage in Britain since the end of the Cold War.

The approach is empirical and historical. The study examines the

production and reception, literary and historical contexts of the films and dramas. It is the first detailed overview of the British spy screen in its crucial period since the 1960s and provides fresh attention to spy films, series and serials never previously considered.



## About the author

**Alan Burton** is an experienced teacher and researcher of the British screen. He has taught at De Montfort University, the University of Hull and the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom, and at Klagenfurt University in Austria. He is currently Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in History of Art and Film at the University of Leicester, Research Associate at the Cinema and Television History research centre at De Montfort University, and an advisor on cinema and television for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. He has published widely on the history of British cinema, including studies on left-political film, film directors, and genre. His *Historical Dictionary of British Cinema* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013, co-authored with Steve Chibnall) was Winner, Library Journal Best Reference of 2013 (US), and his *Historical Dictionary of British Spy Fiction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) was Winner, Outstanding Reference Source, RUSA Committee, American Library Association, 2017. He is co-founder of the *Journal of Popular British Cinema* (1998-2003) and the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (2004-). In 2014, he was awarded a three-year, full-time research grant by the Austrian Science Fund for the project 'British Spy Fiction: Genre, History, and Popular Culture.' *Looking-Glass Wars: Spies on British Screens since 1960* is a major outcome of the grant award.

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