

007 and a Grimy Cousin Are Out in the Cold

THUNDERBALL
with Sean Connery

THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD
with Richard Burton

The chief difference between *Thunderball* and *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* is that the former glamorizes amorality while the latter is appalled by it. The chief similarity between the movie versions of these famous spy tales is that they are not very successful.

The trouble with *Thunderball* is easily explicable: it is just like the three James Bond movies that preceded it. To put it bluntly, they are hung up on the formula that has brought them such stupendous success in the past and are clearly afraid to tamper with it, except to inflate it. *Thunderball* is, once again, a titillating but careless representation of a succession of physical sensations, some pleasant (the sexual ones), some not so pleasant (taking beatings and giving them out). These are pinned to a primitive story line—this time SPECTRE has bristled a couple of A-bombs and is blackmailing the world by threatening to obliterate Miami. Every time the essential vacuity of all this threatens to become obvious, the producers, as is their custom, distract us by introducing some futuristic gadget for us to gawk at like yokels at a county fair.

I'll give them their due. Some of the new hardware is marvelously diverting, their standards in girls are as high as ever and their generosity and general skill with action seems as lithe and brutal as ever. But their own past generosity in these matters is now rising up to haunt them, and they are straining, straining, straining to top themselves.

It's all obviously taking its toll of Sean Connery, too, for the weariness of his original characterization has now passed over the line into zombiehood. You can't blame him. Locked in by a character who was not very interesting to begin with, and which neither he nor his cohorts have dared develop, he gives the impression of a man hanging on, waiting for the next gadget, girl or gimmick to distract us from the knowledge that at the center of 007 there is only a cipher.

Alec Leamas, *The Spy Who*, is also a cipher. An expendable in the Cold War, he is all too easily betrayed by

the masters of the gray, grimy, Graham Greeneish secret world of espionage, as well as by their corrupt, perverse servants. Unlike Ian Fleming, John le Carré, the *Spy*'s creator, was trying to tell us something rather important about this world, principally that it dehumanizes all who live in it and, possibly, that such temporary advantages as we gain from participating in it are not worth their human or their moral cost.

Paul Dehn and Guy Trosper's screenplay is utterly faithful to this point of view, as well as to the intricately plotted story of multiple betrayals by which Le Carré aptly illustrated his point. Director Martin Ritt's visual style is a good approximation of the writer's literary style—flat, understated, deliberately lacking color or eccentricity. This, the camera says, is how it really is—filthy, repulsive, degrading.

But the camera alone can only recreate the surface of the novel, not the human depths from which its really significant tensions came. Leamas is a man discovering, very late, that he has given his life to a bad system, one that can only repay loyalty with disloyalty. The growth of simple human affection for the man he was sent out to trap begins the process of self-discovery: his loathing for the moral monster who, it turns out, is his ideological ally (and to whom he must betray his friend) takes him a step further; ultimate betrayal, at the moment of success, leads him to the ultimate defection in the shocking, tragic climax. But this process is imperfectly realized in the film, and so it and its people never really win our full involvement or sympathy; it is all grime and no grace. Richard Burton, as Leamas, fails to accept his performance from within, and he must, of course, accept a large share of the blame for the picture's superficiality and chilliness. But to judge from the other performances, Ritt was deliberately keeping all his actors under wraps. Only two of them play with the incisiveness *The Spy* demands. One is Cyril Cusack, the fine Irish actor, as Control,

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Leamas' inhumanly efficient boss. The other is Oscar Werner as the likable enemy Leamas destroys. He confirms here the talent he showed in *Ship of Fools*. He is a supple, subtle actor with enormous, yet easy, technical facility. When Werner is on, the

picture glows with authority and understanding. When he is absent, it is dull and cold, so much so that one wants to go out from it.

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