

60s' cool returns with flair

By  Daniel Derksen

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Take a trip back to the 1960s with *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, a stylish take on the hugely popular 60s television series.

In *Sherlock Holmes* (and its sequel) Guy Ritchie brought a fresh perspective to the relationship between legendary sleuth Holmes and his colleague Watson, and now takes the buddy genre to another entertaining level with the exploits of CIA agent Napoleon Solo and KGB agent Illya Kuryakin.

Set against the backdrop of the early 1960s at the height of the Cold War, Solo and Kuryakin are forced to put aside long-standing hostilities and team up on a joint mission to stop a mysterious international criminal organisation that is bent on destabilising the fragile balance of power through the proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology.

What makes *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* work extremely well is the chemistry between Henry Cavill as Solo, the suave-and-savvy American, and Armie Hammer the moody and volatile Russian.



Interesting casting choice

It's an interesting casting choice: Cavill, who made a great impact as *The Man Of Steel*, and Hammer, who was sensational as *The Lone Ranger*, infuse their roles with a great sense of humour, allowing their characters to drive the adventure.

What also contributes to the superb translation from small screen to big screen, is the dynamic duo, writer-director-producer Guy Ritchie, and producer-writer Lionel Wigram, who previously collaborated on re-imagining of the two *Sherlock*

Holmes films.

"It's a zone I find fascinating, the way men interact with each other," says Ritchie. "Even going back to 'Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels,' I'm drawn to that male-to-male dynamic as kind of a genre unto itself."

"So in some respects, it's a buddy movie - apart from the fact that they kick the living daylight out of each other as soon as they meet," says Cavill.

The ultimate soldier

For Hammer, "Kuryakin is the ultimate soldier, always in line and giving his best. Then he's thrust into a position that he hates and there's nothing he can do about it. This guy he's working with, this Napoleon Solo, he's so unorthodox. He doesn't follow the rules. He doesn't even seem to know there are rules."

"What we found so irresistible," says Ritchie, "was taking these polar-opposite agents and forcing them together so that they start out trying to annihilate each other and end up cooperating, but maybe still not entirely trusting each other. The story is largely the evolution of their collaboration. The fact that one represents capitalist America and the other represents communist Russia, and these two superpowers have to team up to neutralise a threat with global stakes, is a great premise that you can have a lot of fun with, and that's really the spine of the story."

The film *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* is an origin story about how U.N.C.L.E. was formed. In the series, U.N.C.L.E. already existed; in the midst of the Cold War you had the CIA and KGB secretly teaming for the greater good at a time when East-West relations were at their absolute worst.



How UNCLE was formed

The film is a clever exploration of how the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement (U.N.C.L.E.) was formed.

"What I remember most about the series was its tone," Ritchie reflects. "And when the opportunity arose for me to make the movie, that's what inspired me. The idea of *The Man from UNCLE* just rang a bell for me. I had an intuitive response to it."

"The reason we were interested in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* initially was because we felt that we occupied a space that no one else was occupying. It felt like what we saw as the golden era of the thriller spy genre, if you will, but with retrospect, we could weed out the chaff and keep the weight in from our perspective. So it feels like it's a revisionist diversion - what we like to say in a positive sense - of the amalgamation of the early genre. We felt we had a unique voice in that."

In some ways, the 1960s depicted in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* is a rare and enticing moment in time that only really existed on screen.

The coolest decade

"For us, the '60s were the coolest decade and The Man from U.N.C.L.E. was a part of that," says Wigram. "We were always keen on doing a spy story. We loved the early Bond movies, which really made an imprint on our young minds, and then the Italian and French films of the time, like L'Aventura and La Dolce Vita. The other thing, which makes this completely different from any other spy title, is that there are two spies instead of a typical lone agent. And the idea of an American and a Russian, arch enemies at the height of the Cold War, is such fertile territory for storytelling. We couldn't resist."

It's their shared influences, combined with a passion for cinema and a simpatico sense of humour, that make Ritchie and Wigram such a tight writing team. "It's great having a producing partner who can write, because writing is fundamental to filmmaking and the story is an organic, living, on-going process," Ritchie acknowledges.

"We both love the idea of taking a classic genre and putting a twist on it," Wigram adds. "And Guy is constantly trying to do something new with the action, to give audiences something they haven't quite seen before."

There's a special pre-release screening of The Man from U.N.C.L.E. on 20 August at Ster-Kinekor's Cine Prestige cinemas and Imax theatres; all seven sites that boast the exclusive Cine Prestige theatres and the five sites with an Imax theatre, will be reserved for this special pre-release screening. For more information and to make bookings, download the Ster-Kinekor App on your smartphone. To find out what other promotions Ster-Kinekor has on offer, go to www.sterkinekor.com or sterkinekor.mobi.

5 Lucky Bizcommunity readers can win a super Man from U.N.C.L.E hamper worth R1500 that includes a black T-shirt, a Jersey T-shirt, Cabby Hat, Pen/Stylus/USB, Cosmetics Bag and laptop backpack. Tell us who directed the film and send you answer to daniel@writingstudio.co.za.

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