

The Man from U.N.C.L.E.: A Retrospective

article by Kathleen Crighton

Everything I Know About Life I Learned from *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

Jon Heitland, author of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Book*, believes most *U.N.C.L.E.* fans today who have been fans from the beginning are all about the same age - which would put them roughly in junior high school when the series first came on the air. I know he's right in my case: I was thirteen and in the eighth grade when my best friend, Elizabeth Tomlin, told me, "Ya gotta see this show, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* Especially Illya - he's so *cute*." So I sat down to watch my first *U.N.C.L.E.* episode on March 1, 1965. It was **The See-Paris-and-Die Affair**. I was hooked immediately, and from that day forward I watched faithfully every week. I read the magazine articles. I bought the paperback books and the record albums. I could recite the second-season episodes in order and tell you who were the guest stars in each. But by the time the third season rolled around, the series had started to slide. *Batman* was now the "in" show, and *U.N.C.L.E.* had followed suit by going campy. As things got really awful, I started missing some episodes. In all fairness, I was fifteen by then and starting to have other things to do on Friday nights. I came back for some of the fourth-season episodes, and I remember reading with sadness the announcement of its cancellation in *TV Guide*. I watched the two-part last episode, and it was sort of like attending the funeral of an old friend who had been ill for a long time.

And that was pretty much the end of it - or so I thought. In the mid-1980s, when the Christian Broadcasting Network started showing *U.N.C.L.E.* again, I started videotaping the late-night episodes. Unfortunately, I picked up on the series again as CBN was rerunning what I called the "stupid" episodes. By the time I hit **The King of Diamonds Affair**, I began to wonder just what it was I had seen in this series when I was thirteen years old. I decided *U.N.C.L.E.* must be just one of those childhood things I had outgrown and went back to watching *Miami Vice* on Friday Nights at ten - *U.N.C.L.E.*'s old time slot on NBC.

Late in 1991, I discovered that a man named Jon Heitland had written a book about the history of my childhood favorite, and I gave it to myself for Christmas. Suddenly I was hooked again, and I started scrambling to find episodes on TNT and on professional tape. Over the course of the following year, I discovered a small but dedicated cadre of *U.N.C.L.E.* fans still existed. I attended a fan convention in Chicago and got to meet and interview the author of the book that, well, changed my life all over again.

Early adolescence - that time when most of us present-day *U.N.C.L.E.* fans got hooked - must be the most vulnerable time of a young person's life. You're not a kid anymore, but you're not an adult, either. You're looking for heroes you can count on no matter what. You look to your heroes for clues about what you should think, how you should act, what you should do. And for many of us who fit into that searching category somewhere between 1964 and 1968, *U.N.C.L.E.* was where we found our clues.

Cindy Walker, longtime *U.N.C.L.E.* fan and college professor, told me she asks her students in her scriptwriting courses what TV shows they liked best when they were in junior high. What shows did they act out with their friends in the back yard? Today's college students are quick to respond - at least, the men are. Male college students tell her they liked *The A-Team*. Women students bury their faces in their hands, but under pressure they admit they really loved *Charlie's Angels*. Action and adventure. Heroes and heroines. Role models for the junior high generation.

So: what did I learn about life from *U.N.C.L.E.*? A few niceties about courtesy between men and women - '60s-style, that is. In junior high, boys slammed doors in girls' faces. In the world of *U.N.C.L.E.*, men hold doors open for women - even women THRUSH agents.

The importance of education, for another. *U.N.C.L.E.* was chock full of women physicists and biochemists (OK, there were a fair number of bimbos, too), and Illya Kuryakin had a PhD from the Sorbonne. I wonder how many kids were inspired to stay in school and even to study science as

a result of the influence of fictional characters like Illya Kuryakin and Mr. Spock? And our parents thought we were rotting our minds by watching TV!

U.N.C.L.E. was chock full of literary allusions, too, and how many action-adventure series can make that claim? Kuryakin quoted from a poem called *To His Coy Mistress* in **The Bow-Wow Affair**. Five years later, I wrote a paper on that poem for freshman honors English at college. In **The Gazebo in the Maze Affair**, when the nasty Squire Partridge kidnaps Kuryakin in order to lure Solo into a trap, he sends Solo the mysterious message, "Oh, to be in England/Now that Illya's there" - a paraphrase of Robert Browning's *Home Thoughts, from Abroad*. Later, in **The Mother Muffin Affair**, *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* would quote the same poem correctly: "...now that April's there." *Girl* also quoted Robert Herrick's poem *To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time*: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may/Old time is still a-flyin;/And this same flower that smiles today/Tomorrow will be dyin'."

U.N.C.L.E. even helped its fans expand their vocabularies. In one episode, Solo asked a salesclerk if she had a particular item in "puce". I had to look it up in the dictionary. (You don't know, either? It's a dark red.)

Many *U.N.C.L.E.* fans developed an interest in Russian culture as a result of their exposure to the character of Illya Kuryakin and ended up studying Russian language and literature. One wonders what beneficial effect Kuryakin had in softening American attitudes towards people from the Soviet Union in the Cold War era.

And on a personal note, I realized with some degree of horror that I ended up dating more than one Illya Kuryakin in my time! In retrospect, I urge anyone with the same inclination to stay away from the moody, mysterious type. At least you know what a Napoleon Solo has on his mind!

I grew up to be a journalist. Not a spy. But when I think about it, in many ways my career as a journalist has resembled that of an *U.N.C.L.E.* agent. I do research on new subjects for just about every article I write. Think of our men from *U.N.C.L.E.* infiltrating an industry and posing as experts on subjects they know virtually nothing about! I ask questions and get leads from each interview I do - much as our *U.N.C.L.E.* agents unraveled mysteries by talking to people. Finding a close-knit group of *U.N.C.L.E.* fans after reading a single book took a fair amount of journalistic skill: fans of thirty-year-old TV shows don't exactly advertise their whereabouts in the Yellow Pages. The abilities involved in tracking down a story are not that much different from those an *U.N.C.L.E.* agent uses to solve a mystery. Fortunately, I've never needed to use a gun in the course of my work!

Most of all, *U.N.C.L.E.* reinforced in me a strong sense of justice, an urgency for the triumph of good over evil. *U.N.C.L.E.* showed us that being on the side of right has nothing to do with national borders or political philosophies. It's a question of knowing innately what's right and what's wrong and sticking by what we believe, no matter what.

One scene from an *U.N.C.L.E.* episode has stuck with me all my life. It's in **The Foxes and Hounds Affair**, an episode perhaps best remembered for Vincent Price's exploding handkerchief. Throughout the episode, we know it's an exploding handkerchief, and we know his THRUSH rival has a bad cold...we just wait for that final scene when he offers the handkerchief to his rival, and we're not disappointed. But that's not what I remember. I remember the scene where Solo, Kuryakin, and the timid innocent, Mimi Doolittle (Julie Sommers) are imprisoned by THRUSH. Solo and Kuryakin are trying to persuade her to flirt with the guard so they can overpower him, and she wails that she just doesn't know how. Kuryakin takes her aside, looks sternly into her eyes, and tells her, "Inexperience is not inability, young lady, and you can do anything that you believe you can do." With that one line, he sent a generation of young women on their way into the world to accomplish far greater things than learning to flirt.

The Birth of U.N.C.L.E.

Norman Felton was a successful TV producer in the early '60s. His company, Arena Productions, was flying high with the success of *Dr. Kildare*, and he was looking for new projects to undertake. Prime-time TV was crammed with Westerns, doctor shows, and police shows. He thought the timing was right for a completely different kind of show, featuring stories of espionage

and international intrigue.

In the fall of 1962 he approached Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond book series, with a concept for a new television series based loosely on Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. After some prodding by Felton, Fleming came up with an outline for a series about a spy with certain similarities to his creation James Bond. He made a number of suggestions, including the name of the spy - Napoleon Solo. He suggested that Solo's boss would have a secretary, similar to Miss Money Penny in the Bond series, and that her name be April Dancer.

Due to contractual problems with the producers of the James Bond movies, Fleming had to withdraw from the project, and most of his ideas had to be dropped due to their similarity to the Bond series. The name for the spy, Napoleon Solo, was retained. April Dancer was reincarnated years later as the girl from *U.N.C.L.E.*

Felton brought in Sam Rolfe, whose television credits as creator, producer, and writer included *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Playhouse 90*, and *The Eleventh Hour*. Rolfe fleshed out the character of Solo and created his partner, Illya Kuryakin, and Mr. Allison, the original head of U.N.C.L.E., was later replaced with the character of Alexander Waverly. Rolfe created U.N.C.L.E. as well - an international organization devoted to maintaining order in the world yet not connected to the government of any one country.

One aspect of *North by Northwest* that Felton particularly liked was that an innocent character (Cary Grant) was mistaken for a spy and swept into a web of intrigue, murder and deceit. As he and Rolfe developed the idea for the television series, they decided that the involvement of an innocent character would be an integral part of each episode, giving the television audience something to identify with. Through all the changes in *U.N.C.L.E.* in the course of its four-year run, that one element remained a constant factor - from a suburban housewife in the first episode, **The Vulcan Affair**, to the various people kidnapped in the final episode, **The Seven Wonders of the World Affair**.

Another aspect of *U.N.C.L.E.* that was instilled from the beginning was that the hero be an "average" person - not a tall, muscular figure like the heroes of so many Westerns. Indeed, all three actors selected to star in the show were under six feet tall, and none of them would have been mistaken for a bodybuilder. Although the show had the usual number of fight scenes for television in the '60s, the underlying theme was that the heroes won out through their smarts rather than their ability to beat up everybody else in the room.

Felton wanted a "Cary Grant type" to play Solo - dark, handsome, and debonair. He picked Robert Vaughn, who had been in Arena's cancelled series *The Lieutenant*.

Rolfe came up with the idea to have a Russian agent in the organization to give it a truly international flavor. To have an American and Russian working together at the height of the Cold War was a daring concept. David McCallum, a British actor who had come to America to film *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, was selected to play Illya Kuryakin.

Will Kuluva was selected to play the head of U.N.C.L.E., known only as Mr. Allison. Although his role did not survive past the pilot episode, Kuluva appeared in other roles later in the series.

The pilot, written by Rolfe, was shot in November 1963, with additional footage for the movie version shot the following April. President Kennedy was assassinated during the filming of the pilot, and work on it was halted during the period of national mourning. At that time the show was called *Mr. Solo*. Because of legal problems with the producers of the James Bond movies - a minor character in *Goldfinger* is named Solo - the title of the series was changed to *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

Rolfe called the pilot his favorite episode of the series - hardly surprising in light of all the work he put into it. The plot involves an industrialist named Andrew Vulcan who is negotiating to build a plant in an emerging African nation. U.N.C.L.E. believes Vulcan has ties to a criminal organization known as WASP and that he will attempt to assassinate the premier of the African nation when he visits Vulcan's plant. Solo (known only as Mr. Solo, not Napoleon, in the pilot) is sent to recruit Vulcan's college girlfriend to get close to him. The girlfriend, now a suburban housewife and mother, is transformed into a glamorous wealthy widow, and she and Solo go to Washington to track down Vulcan.

The original seventy-minute version of the pilot no longer exists. When it premiered on NBC September 22, 1964, it was a one-hour black-and-white episode titled **The Vulcan Affair**. A feature film in color, incorporating additional footage, was created from the pilot. It includes a subplot involving Luciana Paluzzi as a redheaded sexpot who lures an U.N.C.L.E. agent (named Dancer, interestingly enough) to his death and later tries to do the same thing with Solo. This footage later turned up in a first-season episode called **The Four-Steps Affair**.

The movie version was released in theaters as *To Trap a Spy* in the summer of 1966. It appeared on a double bill with *The Spy with My Face*, a feature-length version of the first-season episode **The Double Affair**, in which THRUSH uses plastic surgery to create a double of Solo. Fans who flocked to the movies expecting to see new U.N.C.L.E. stories were angered to find they had paid to see what had already run on television. Thereafter, future U.N.C.L.E. movies ran chiefly in overseas markets.

The pilot was shot both in black-and-white and in color because Felton hoped to get the go-ahead from NBC to do the series in color. The network, however, insisted on black-and-white in order to save money, an unfortunate error in judgement. The show went to color in the second season and thereafter. Most fans of the series today agree the first-season episodes were the best of all, but because they are in black-and-white, they have been less attractive to syndicators.

By the time of the series premiere, WASP had become THRUSH (the name WASP remains in the movie version), and Kuluva's Mr. Allison had been replaced. Leo G. Carroll stepped in as Alexander Waverly, head of U.N.C.L.E., and his scenes were spliced into the pilot in place of Kuluva.

In perhaps the most fortunate miscommunication of the entire series, an NBC executive, after viewing the pilot, told Felton to get rid of the guy with the K name. Felton assumed he meant Kuluva, but the executive actually meant Kuryakin. The NBC executive didn't think American audiences would go for a Russian agent. (One wonders if this is the same NBC executive who ordered the cancellation of *Star Trek* a few years later.)

WASP was dropped for legal reasons and after much debate was replaced with THRUSH. In the beginning, no one knew what any of these acronyms - not even U.N.C.L.E. itself - actually stood for.

After trying several possible combinations for U.N.C.L.E. Rolfe settled on "United Network Command for Law and Enforcement". The United Nations had objected to the name U.N.C.L.E. on the grounds that people would connect the real international organization with the fictional one. In fact, many people did, even applying for jobs with the U.N. in the hope of becoming international spies. To quiet the legal eagles, Felton came up with the tag line used at the end of the credits for each episode: "We wish to thank the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, without whose assistance this program would not have been possible." True...sort of. Not all viewers got the joke.

As for THRUSH, the name behind the acronym was never revealed in the series. One of the writers of the paperback U.N.C.L.E. novels, David McDaniel, came up with "The Technological Hierarchy for the Removal of Undesirables and the Subjugation of Humanity" in his book *The Dagger Affair*. It's probably as good a mouthful as any.

The U.N.C.L.E. Organization

The early first-season episodes open with an introduction to the organization to give viewers an idea of what the show is all about. We see a skyline shot of New York City from the East River, the United Nations building prominent on the shoreline. Then the scene cuts to a street of storefronts and brownstone apartments, and we see Solo and Kuryakin strolling casually into Del Floria's tailor shop, just below street level. An announcer says, "In New York City, on a street in the East Forties, there's an ordinary tailor shop...or is it ordinary?"

The scene cuts to the interior of Del Floria's, where Solo and Kuryakin nod to the proprietor and disappear into the dressing room. Del Floria presses the steam iron twice, and the back wall of the tailor shop opens into the reception area of a rather austere office. A receptionist pins triangular badges on the left side of the agents' jackets, and they walk down a corridor lit from above by a

panel of flashing lights. The announcer explains, "We entered through the agents' entrance, and we are now in U-N-C-L-E Headquarters. That's the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement. U.N.C.L.E. is an organization consisting of agents of all nationalities. It's involved in maintaining political and legal order anywhere in the world."

The two agents enter a control room filled with telecommunications equipment and banks of computers with flashing lights. An older man is seated at a desk, busy with the controls. The first agent checks settings on the computer, then turns to the camera. "My name is Napoleon Solo," he says. "I'm enforcement agent in Section Two here - that's Operation and Enforcement."

The second agent, who is busy putting together a gun, says, "I am Illya Kuryakin. I am also an enforcement agent. Like my friend Napoleon, I go and I do whatever I am told to by our chief." He turns to the older man at the console.

The chief turns around, somewhat confused. "Eh? Oh. Yes. Alexander Waverly, Number One, Section One, in charge of this, our New York headquarters. It's from here I send these young men on their various missions." The scene freezes, the music comes up, and the title of the week's episode appears on the screen.

After the first several episodes, the opening was changed to show only a scene from the beginning of **The Vulcan Affair**. We see a shadow on the wall of a man with a gun. He sees a darkened figure standing before him and fires at it. The figure is standing behind a transparent wall of glass or plastic, and as the bullets strike the wall it splinters but does not collapse. The lights then come up to illuminate the man behind the shattered wall. He raises his own gun at the intruder, pointing it directly at the camera, and we see the face of Napoleon Solo. Again the scene freezes, and we hear the music and see the title of the week's episode.

From the second season forward, this opening was dropped in favor of a short introductory scene which segued into the opening credits. The introductory scene was preceded by a shot of the U.N.C.L.E. logo - a black globe banded horizontally and vertically in white, with a series of semicircles extending from the top of the globe. To the right of the globe is the black silhouette of a man holding a gun at his side, and a black band beneath the globe and the man features the name "U.N.C.L.E." in outlined letters. The logo is superimposed on a map of the world - plain yellow continents with no country borders (a tribute to the one-world philosophy of U.N.C.L.E., perhaps?) and blue seas. We also see the logo in the black-and-white first season, but the background map has the names of countries and cities on it.

Each episode was divided into four acts, and each act had a title related (sometimes marginally) to some event within it. The act titles picked up on dialogue, puns, literary allusions, and other devices. Fourth-season episodes had no Act I titles.

Another trademark of *U.N.C.L.E.* was the "flash" shot spanning two scenes, where the camera panned in a rapid multi-color blur with musical accompaniment. In addition, scenes just before commercials often ended in a freeze, then blurred out.

Rolfe envisioned U.N.C.L.E. as being organized into overlapping directorates. They were:

- Section One: Policy and Operations
- Section Two: Operations and Enforcement
- Section Three: Enforcement and Intelligence
- Section Four: Intelligence and Communications
- Section Five: Communications and Security
- Section Six: Security and Personnel

Aside from Sections One and Two, these divisions of U.N.C.L.E. were seldom mentioned during the course of the series. Waverly was said to be one of five directors of Section One stationed in various offices around the world.

Next to Del Floria's, the two things most people remember about U.N.C.L.E. are the guns and the communicators. The U.N.C.L.E. Special originally was a modified German Mauser pistol. It had various attachments, including a shoulder stock, an extended barrel and a silencer. Later in the first season, the gun was changed to a Walther P-38, which was more reliable and cost less than the Mauser. Solo's gun had a white letter S on the grip, while Kuryakin's sported a K. The THRUSH guns were based on the M-1 carbine, with a large night scope added for dramatic effect.

In the first season, the U.N.C.L.E. communicator was disguised as a cigarette case. In order

to operate the communicator over long distances, it was necessary for the agents to connect it by wires into some sort of telephone line. Thus in **The Gazebo in the Maze Affair**, when Solo is forced against his will to call Waverly from England, he has to hook his communicator to a phone line. He explains the delay in reaching Waverly by saying, "It takes a minute. It has to bounce off the Telstar satellite." (Telstar, one of the first communications satellites, was perhaps the only one to have a piece of popular instrumental music named in its honor.)

Midway through the second season, the cigarette case communicator was replaced with the famous pen communicator, presumably a newer model which didn't require hooking up to a telephone line. The agent would pull the cap off the pen, twist the barrel, raise a small antenna, and speak into the tiny microphone. "Open Channel D" became the show's most famous line, similar to *Star Trek's* "Beam me up, Scotty".

There was also an U.N.C.L.E. car, a custom-designed vehicle featuring gull-wing doors like the DeLorean. It was outfitted with all sorts of special props, much like the cars used in the James Bond movies. It had only problem: it couldn't seem to run for very long without breaking down. Consequently, it is seen in only a few episodes in the third and fourth season. Solo and Kuryakin are most often seen chasing the bad guys in Chrysler Corporation sedans and convertibles. We also see them driving a baby blue Triumph in some later episodes.

Napoleon Solo, Illya Kuryakin, and Alexander Waverly

When Rolfe wrote the prospectus and series pilot, he created a detailed character sketch of Napoleon Solo, but Illya Kuryakin was a vague figure, a minor character in the original plan. Solo was first conceived as a Canadian, later as an American who had served in the Korean War. He had been married at nineteen, but his wife was killed shortly afterward in a car accident. He had an apartment decorated with nautical items overlooking the East River. He also owned a thirty-foot sailboat. Aside from the military service (mentioned in the first-season episode **The Secret Scepter Affair**, when he comes to the aid of his former commanding officer), very little of this detail survived to the actual series.

Illya Nickovetch Kuryakin was Russian. He was supposed to live in a small apartment and keep a record collection under his bed, but neither of these details were ever shown in the series either. Beyond that sketchy description, David McCallum was left pretty much on his own to develop his character. He decided to make Illya a mysterious figure, telling an interviewer at the time, "No one knows what Illya Kuryakin does when he goes home at night."

Alexander Waverly didn't even exist when the pilot was first shot. The original head of U.N.C.L.E., Mr. Allison, was described as a pedantic man in his fifties. Leo G. Carroll was much older - in his seventies, in fact - when he took the role of Waverly. Carroll had played the Professor, the head of the unnamed espionage agency in *North by Northwest*. That character and Waverly are so similar that one could almost imagine that they are one and the same.

Did Vaughn and McCallum also have film roles they might have drawn on in developing the characters of Solo and Kuryakin? In 1958, Vaughn appeared in *The Young Philadelphians* with Paul Newman and was nominated for an Academy Award as best supporting actor. He played a dissolute young man named Chet, whose family had annulled his marriage to a girl he loved. We see Chet at a dance, decked out in a white dinner jacket and making witty repartee with his buddy, played by Newman. It's easy to make a connection here between Chet and the debonair Napoleon Solo exchanging bon mots with his Russian partner. Ironically, Chet later becomes an alcoholic and is accused of murdering his rich and nasty uncle (!).

McCallum played a British naval officer named Eric Ashley-Pitt in the 1962 movie *The Great Escape*. Ashley-Pitt is clever and resourceful, like Kuryakin. As the POWs plot to dig a tunnel out of their prison, they worry about how to get rid of the dirt they dig. Ashley-Pitt comes up with an ingenious scheme to stuff the dirt in their pockets and scatter it about the exercise yard. Later, after the POWs escape from the camp, he flees on a German train, disguising himself as a German citizen in a suit and wire-rim glasses. Kuryakin is portrayed as a master of disguises, particularly in the first-season episodes of *U.N.C.L.E.* Finally, Ashley-Pitt sets up a diversion in the railway station to help his friends escape. He makes a gallant sacrificial run down the station

platform and is shot to death by the Germans - just the sort of thing Illya Kuryakin would do. Aside from the minor detail that Ashley-Pitt gets killed and Kuryakin never does, it's easy to see the seeds of Kuryakin in this character from the World War II movie.

In later series such as *Hill Street Blues* and *Cagney and Lacey*, the off-duty experiences of the characters are as fully developed as their roles at work, reflecting the reality that people do bring their private lives to work with them. But *U.N.C.L.E.* - intentionally - is virtually devoid of any information about the principal characters' lives. We pick up bits and pieces, some contradictory, scattered throughout the course of the show.

In the first-season episode, **The Green Opal Affair**, Solo tells the "innocent" his grandfather was a country lawyer. Kuryakin says at the end that according to Solo's dossier, one grandfather was an ambassador and the other was an admiral. Solo replies mysteriously, "Maybe it was another grandfather - or an uncle."

Was Solo really married at one time? In **Mad, Mad Tea Party** he tells the innocent, a bride-to-be who's not sure she really wants to go through with this, "Some people get nervous before their weddings - so I'm told."

At any rate, we do know that Solo's primary off-duty hobby is women. (On-duty, too, come to think about it.) He gets the girl even when we see him only in the first and last scene, as in **The Galatea Affair**. We learn in the first-season episode **The Terbuf Affair** that Solo had a serious love affair with a woman named Clara Richards which ended seven years earlier when she grew tired of playing second fiddle to U.N.C.L.E. in his life. And he is supposed to have a continuing relationship with a cold, cold THRUSH agent in a Corvette named Angelique. We meet her only once, in **The Deadly Game Affair**. Angelique would just as soon kill Solo as kiss him.

And what about Kuryakin? Legend has it that in the early days of shooting, McCallum forgot to remove his wedding ring for the part of Kuryakin. Fans spotted the ring and began to write in, asking if Kuryakin was married. McCallum played along with the joke, continuing to wear the ring until mid-1966, early in the filming of the third season, when his marriage to Jill Ireland ended. After that, we never see Kuryakin wear the ring again, even after McCallum's remarriage in 1967 shortly before the series ended.

In the first-season episode **The Bow-Wow Affair**, Kuryakin goes to the hospital to interview a woman who has been attacked by her dog. The woman, who is older than Kuryakin and not particularly attractive, flirts with him. She asks him point-blank, "Young man, are you married?" He responds by paraphrasing Andrew Marvell's 17th-century poem *To His Coy Mistress*: "Had I but world enough and time..." This seems to be a "no", but it's sufficiently vague enough to be a "yes". In any case, it delights the older woman. (CBN cut this scene from the version it broadcast, possibly to make room for more advertisements. TNT restored it when it began running the episodes.)

At various times, Kuryakin is said to be from Kiev, holder of a PhD from the Sorbonne, a member of the Russian navy, and a graduate of U.N.C.L.E.'s training school, class of '56. Considering that the time involved in getting a bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees can easily run ten years, one wonders just how old Kuryakin must be to have accomplished all this.

Waverly is married, although we never see his wife or even learn her name. (They must not see a lot of each other, because he never seems to go home from work.) The mysterious intruder in the first-season **Mad, Mad Tea Party Affair** turns out to be his wife's brother. In the first-season **Bow-Wow Affair**, Waverly sends Kuryakin to guard his cousin, Lester Baldwin, and Baldwin's niece, Alice. In a later episode, we are treated to pictures of Waverly's nephew.

These confusing, often conflicting tidbits of the agents' lives were both deliberate and accidental. In the beginning, the vagueness of the agents' backgrounds was intended to make them more mysterious and pique viewers' curiosity. In later seasons, conflicting information arose simply from the sloppy attention to detail that came about as a result of the continuing parade of producers, each eager to place his own stamp on the series.

This much we can pick up of the general character of Solo, Kuryakin, and Waverly: Solo is the personable agent, the one who recruits most of the innocents. He makes acquaintances easily, knows just when to smile, and is an expert at flirting with women. He is the risk-taker, the intuitive one.

Kuryakin is the quiet agent, the tinkerer, the scientist, the intellectual. He figures out how things work, defuses bombs, gets the nasty, smelly jobs. He is both amused and disdainful of his partner's preoccupation with women. Kuryakin is the one in the black turtleneck, climbing a brick wall with a rope, while Solo is inside the mansion at the formal dance, natty in his tuxedo.

Waverly is the absent-minded professor, favoring tweed suits and a briar pipe. He is formal, addressing everyone but close friends by their courtesy titles and last names. (In one early episode he addresses Kuryakin as Illya, but we never see him step out of character again.) He sits beside the control panel twenty-four hours a day, it seems, waiting for his agents to call in, unless he decides to surprise them and turn up on an assignment himself. One of his favorite lines seems to be, "What do you suggest?"

Waverly is supposed to be a tough, hardnosed boss, one who knows he's probably sending his agents out to certain death every week, but more often he comes across as a lovable old grandfather. In **The Vulcan Affair**, Solo kills an intruder to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. Waverly chastises Solo - appropriately - for not keeping the man alive so they could interrogate him. Solo and Waverly very nearly have an argument during a transatlantic communication in the first-season **Dove Affair**: Waverly is brusque, Solo is exasperated.

But by the third season, Waverly seems to have mellowed. Perhaps it was felt the viewers preferred him that way. In **The Concrete Overcoat Affair**, Solo objects when he learns Kuryakin has been sent to the Caribbean on a suicide mission. Waverly reprimands Solo sharply for questioning his authority, then allows Solo to go to his partner's rescue. As Solo dashes off for the airport, Waverly walks down the hall, muttering to himself, "Alexander Waverly, sentimental grandmother of the year." In **The Matterhorn Affair**, also third season, Solo and Kuryakin come into the office after blowing an assignment and getting their contact killed. Rather than chewing them out, Waverly merely shrugs, "Fortunes of war". Everyone should be so lucky as to have a boss like this when they mess things up.

The Evolution of a Hit Series

U.N.C.L.E. wasn't enormously popular at first. From its debut in September 1964, the Nielsen ratings were only so-so. Its first time slot was Tuesday nights at 8:30 Eastern time, opposite the immensely popular *Red Skelton Show* on CBS. The show was floundering, and NBC decided to move it to Monday nights at eight, beginning in January 1965. It didn't do well at this time either, so the show's publicist launched a promotional campaign to boost ratings. For several weeks, Vaughn and McCallum spent their weekends on the road, making public appearances in key Nielsen cities and taping promotional spots at local television stations - after a full week's shooting schedule. At the same time, it was noticed that the show was developing a following among college students. The Nielsen ratings failed to reflect this trend because college dormitories were not included in its surveys of television viewers. Word of mouth began this great new show with the two cool spies and lots of adventure and humor.

Perhaps the biggest boost of all for the series was David McCallum's surprising transformation into a national sex symbol. Originally, Illya Kuryakin was to have been a minor character in the series, and in fact McCallum was signed for only seven of the first thirteen episodes. He doesn't appear at all in such first-season episodes as **The Iowa-Scuba Affair**, **The Dove Affair**, and **The Yellow Scarf Affair**, and makes only minor appearances in such episodes as **The Neptune Affair**, **The Green Opal Affair** and **The Finny Foot Affair**. But female *U.N.C.L.E.* fans couldn't get enough of him. With a black turtleneck and pants to accent his longish blond hair, McCallum turned the mysterious Illya Kuryakin into the top TV star of the season. He soon found himself mobbed like a rock star every time he made a public appearance, with teenage girls screaming and fighting furiously to get a piece of his clothing or a lock of his hair. Vaughn, too, was swamped when he made public appearances, but it was McCallum who drew feeding frenzies.

Female viewers had definite ideas of just what sort of person Illya Kuryakin must be, and they let the producers know in no uncertain terms what behavior was acceptable and what was not. In **The Bow-Wow Affair**, the first episode in which Illya carries the show, he becomes involved

with a relative of Waverly's, Alice Baldwin. In one scene, she asks him to kiss her, and he replies, "If you insist," whereupon she kisses him. A few minutes later, he kisses her back. This one scene drew a firestorm of angry fan mail. Illya, it seemed, was not supposed to kiss girls - at least, that's what his fans said. Perhaps it was this particular girl they objected to. From the moment she first met Illya, it's obvious that she has the IQ of a gnat:

Illya: My name is Illya Kuryakin.

Alice: And I'll bet you're the only man around here who can make that statement honestly.

Illya: So I believe. Lester Baldwin?

Alice: No. He's my uncle.

In any case, we never see Illya pursuing a girl after that, although some do pursue him. He seems to show an interest in a girl named Tavia (possibly Russian?) in the mid-second-season **Birds and the Bees Affair**, but that episode was silly enough that fans probably didn't notice.

By the beginning of the second season, *U.N.C.L.E.* was a certified hit. The show moved to Friday nights at ten, a time slot which is more likely to kill than promote most shows. But *U.N.C.L.E.* thrived. One could hardly pick up a newspaper without reading some reference to the show. Ministers even mentioned it in their sermons. The series was parodied by other shows, ranging from the situation comedy *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (which starred Patricia Crowley, who played the suburban housewife in the *U.N.C.L.E.* pilot) to the British spy series *The Avengers*. Vaughn and McCallum did guest shots on variety shows and were interviewed by dozens of publications.

The show was merchandised to the hilt. Toy *U.N.C.L.E.* guns and cars were big hits. There were *U.N.C.L.E.* dolls, board games, comic books, magazines, paperback novels, and record albums.

After the first two *U.N.C.L.E.* feature films were made from single episodes with additional footage, future movies were created from two-part episodes. Thus the two-part **The Alexander the Greater Affair**, which opened the second season, became *One Spy Too Many* in its theatrical release. **The Bridge of Lions Affair**, also in the second season, became *One of Our Spies is Missing*. **The Concrete Overcoat Affair**, a third-season two-parter, became *The Spy in the Green Hat*. **The Five Daughters Affair** became *The Karate Killers*. In the fourth season, **The Prince of Darkness Affair** became *The Helicopter Spies*. The series finale, **The Seven Wonders of the World Affair**, became *How To Steal the World*.

In the middle of *U.N.C.L.E.*'s second season, a television version of the comic book *Batman* debuted to much media hoopla. The chief premise of *Batman* the television series was that it was "camp", which Webster's defines as "something so outrageously artificial, affected, inappropriate, or out-of-date as to be considered amusing." The show immediately began stealing *U.N.C.L.E.*'s thunder and soon reached the fad proportions *U.N.C.L.E.* had achieved the previous season.

The response of *U.N.C.L.E.*'s producers was to jump on the bandwagon. In retrospect, it's doubtful that anything could have revived the show its former fad proportions; a fad, by definition, is short-lived. But turning an action-adventure show with humorous overtones into a silly parody of itself was a recipe for disaster, and the show began sliding into the dismal swamp of the Nielsen ratings. In the third season it was still on Friday nights, but moved from 10:00 to 8:30 p.m. Not all third-season episodes fell into the "camp" category, but there were enough of them to drive away many loyal fans.

In the fourth season, it was recognized that drastic measures would have to be taken to save the show. A new producer was brought in, and the shows returned to a serious tone - perhaps too serious. It was moved to yet another time slot, Mondays at 8:00. In all, *U.N.C.L.E.* had five different time slots in its three-and-a-half-year run.

Internally, there were changes going on as well. Vaughn was working on a PhD in mass communications at the University of Southern California and getting more and more interested in politics, particularly in regard to the Vietnam war. He eventually received his doctorate, writing his dissertation on the Hollywood blacklisting that took place during the McCarthy era. In the meantime, McCallum went through a messy divorce and remarried shortly thereafter. By the time the show was canceled, it's fair to say that both stars had other things on their minds.

Guest Stars

As *U.N.C.L.E.*'s star of popularity rose, it became quite a coup to do a guest shot on the hottest show on TV. Among the movie stars who made appearances on *U.N.C.L.E.* were Joan Crawford (**The Five Daughters Affair**), Boris Karloff (**The Mother Muffin Affair** on *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*), Vincent Price (**The Foxes and Hounds Affair**), George Sanders (**The Gazebo in the Maze Affair** and **The Yukon Affair**), Elsa Lanchester (**The Brain Killer Affair**), and Jack Palance and Janet Leigh (**The Concrete Overcoat Affair**). Some guest stars became more famous in later years as they starred in popular television series and movie roles: Carroll O'Connor (horribly miscast with a goatee and an English accent in **The Green Opal Affair**), Leslie Nielsen (playing it straight in **The Seven Wonders of the World Affair**), Ricardo Montalban (**The Dove Affair** and **The King of Knaves Affair**), Martin Landau (**The Bat Cave Affair**), Robert Culp (**The Shark Affair**), Kurt Russell (a child when he appeared in 1964's **The Finny Foot Affair**), Angela Lansbury (**The Deadly Toys Affair**), Joan Collins (**The Galatea Affair**), and Barbara Feldon (**The Never Never Affair**), for example. Even popular rock stars got into the act, such as Sonny and Cher (**The Hot Number Affair**) and Nancy Sinatra (**The Take Me To Your Leader Affair**). Because of their big-name guest stars, many of these episodes are now available on pro tapes. Unfortunately, some of the episodes these stars appeared in are products of the "camp" era and are embarrassingly bad.

Perhaps the two most famous television stars who appeared in an *U.N.C.L.E.* episode while relative unknowns were William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy. They first appeared together on TV in **The Project Strigas Affair**, a first-season episode. Shatner and Nimoy fans who expect to find some glimmers of Capt. Kirk and Mr. Spock in their *U.N.C.L.E.* roles will be sorely disappointed. Shatner plays the hapless owner of an exterminating business who is hiding from bill collectors when Solo recruits him for an *U.N.C.L.E.* mission. Nimoy is the bumbling assistant to an Eastern European ambassador *U.N.C.L.E.* is trying to discredit. On its own merits, it's a good episode - we get to see Kuryakin in one of his wonderful disguises - but for *Star Trek* fans, there's the delight of watching the future Capt. Kirk and Napoleon Solo walking down the street together. P.S.: Nimoy's character triumphs over the ambassador at the end.

Oh, yes - James "Scotty" Doohan turned up as a sailor in **The Shark Affair**, too, but you need a good eye to spot him.

McCallum's first wife, Jill Ireland, appeared in five *U.N.C.L.E.* episodes - **The Quadripartite Affair** and **The Giuoco Piano Affair**, two related episodes in the first season; **The Tigers Are Coming Affair** in the second season; and the two-part **Five Daughters Affair** in the third season. By the time **Five Daughters** was filmed, the McCallum marriage was on the rocks. It is interesting to observe that in the scenes in which both actors appear, they keep a distance apart and have no dialogue with each other.

U.N.C.L.E. fans got a special treat in **The Giuoco Piano Affair** (Giuoco, by the way is pronounced "zhwocko"). Jill Ireland's character, Marion Raven, has a nonstop party going on in her apartment for four days. Among the guests at this party are a chess player (executive producer Norman Felton), a Texan (producer Sam Rolfe), a drunk (director Richard Donner), and a sleeping writer with a typewriter (associate producer Joseph Calvelli).

Vaughn's long-time girlfriend, Joyce Jameson, also had a role on *U.N.C.L.E.* She played Jojo Tyler, the namesake of **The Dippy Blonde Affair**, in the second season. She also appeared in a *Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* episode, **The Carpathian Capers Affair**.

The U.N.C.L.E. Sets

U.N.C.L.E. was an international organization, and Solo and Kuryakin pursued bad guys in every corner of the world - New York, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Europe, South America, the Caribbean. Yet *U.N.C.L.E.* the television series rarely left the MGM back lot. A regular viewer of the show would probably have felt quite at home on the back lot, since the same sets were used over and over. The white-columned mansion facade with the circular drive out front appeared in more episodes than you could shake a shtick at - as everything from a Long Island girls' school in the

Her Master's Affair to a Louisiana plantation in the **Take Me to Your Leader Affair**. The high brick wall with iron gates turned up often, too, in episodes as diverse as **The Bow-Wow Affair** and **The Seven Wonders of the World Affair**. Whenever you saw that brick wall, you knew Solo and Kuryakin were either going to scale it or smash a car through those gates. The U.N.C.L.E. agents frequently drove down a long road with straight rows of trees on either side; it's featured in such episodes as **The Gurnius Affair**. There was also a lake with a dock that made a nifty tropical setting in episodes from **The Green Opal Affair** to **The Tigers Are Coming Affair** to **The J for Judas Affair**. The lake was always handy to stock with a couple of crocodiles or perhaps to toss a bomb into.

The occasions when the *U.N.C.L.E.* crew did location shooting were so rare that they're easy to spot. Scenes from the pilot of Andrew Vulcan's chemical plant were shot at a Lever Brothers facility in Los Angeles. The mountainous scenes in **The Quadripartite Affair** were shot in the Santa Monica Mountains above Los Angeles. Some scenes from **The Neptune Affair** were shot at Santa Monica Beach. The Griffith Observatory stood in for a Swiss hideout for THRUSH in **The Double Affair**. And the crossed arches over Robert Kingsley's secret utopian hideout in the final episode, **The Seven Wonders of the World Affair**, were obviously shot at then-new Los Angeles International Airport.

It would be nice to think we could go to New York City and find Del Floria's Tailor Shop, Cleaning and Pressing, somewhere in the East Forties. Alas, wrong! It was part of the MGM back lot too. Sadly, it burned down even before the series ended, and stock shots of the exterior had to be inserted into the later episodes.

Even though U.N.C.L.E. the organization was headquartered there, not a single scene of *U.N.C.L.E.* the show was filmed in New York. In fact, the entire series was shot in Southern California.

The Four Seasons

Sam Rolfe, listed in the credits as developer of the series, was its first-season producer. Most fans credit him with establishing the world of U.N.C.L.E. and laying the framework for the series. Rolfe was meticulous about detail, a factor glaringly absent in later years of the show after other producers took over. For example, in the first-season episode **The Love Affair**, Waverly rips an incoming message from the Los Angeles U.N.C.L.E. office from the teletype machine. The top line gives the time as 10:15 PDT. At that moment, Waverly's secretary Sarah (Leigh Chapman) returns from lunch and Waverly chides her for being late. When it's 10:15 in Los Angeles, it's 1:15 in New York. In later years we see cars in London with left-hand drive, U.N.C.L.E. agents not wearing their badges in the office, and other slips.

Rolfe left the series after the first season to rest and work on ideas for other projects, while Felton remained as executive producer throughout the run of the show. There were three producers in the second season, each handling approximately a third of the episodes: David Victor, Mort Abrahams, and Boris Ingster. The second season had a lighter tone than the first, with more humor and bantering between Solo and Kuryakin. The shift from black-and-white to color probably contributed to the less serious "feel" of the show. Ingster remained as producer for the third season and can probably be credited - if that is the right word - for the "silly spoof" period of the series. Anthony Spinner was the fourth-season producer, when the show returned to serious adventures. The show was canceled midway into the fourth season after sixteen episodes. In all, there were one hundred and five episodes of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

The four years from November 1963, when the pilot was filmed, to November 1967, when production ended, were turbulent times in the history of America. U.N.C.L.E. reflects some of the turbulence of those years. The early black-and-white episodes from 1964-65 have sort of a '50s feel to them: ladies wear demure knee-length dresses in traditional styles; men wear hats. By the second season 1965-66, we see fashions and tastes beginning to change. There's an episode from October 1965 called **The Discotheque Affair** which heralds the changes in pop music. Yet in **The Foxes and Hounds Affair**, shown a week earlier, Solo asks the "innocent" caught with them in a THRUSH jail to give him her stockings to help them escape. Pantyhose hadn't yet come into

fashion, but it would by 1967. By the third season we see girls in plastic minidresses with cut-out circles at the waist. The third season gave us such dreadful episodes as **The Pop Art Affair**, in which the changing culture becomes the focus of the episode. The producers were too old to understand the hip youth culture, yet they were pressured to create a show that appealed to that audience. The result was an embarrassment for all concerned. The fourth season, while toned-down substantially, still gives us **The Gurnius Affair**, with Judy Carne in bright orange and Solo in white socks and black shoes and a bathrobe, no less, and other fashion atrocities. Looking back on these episodes after nearly thirty years, the first season looks closer to our present time than the later ones.

Another major upheaval in American society during those years, of course, was the Vietnam War. In 1964 Americans were just beginning to realize how serious the war actually was; by 1967 it was impossible to ignore. *U.N.C.L.E.* studiously avoided any references to the conflict, either pro or con. However, in the first-season episode **The Hong Kong Shilling Affair**, the "innocent" is described as a twenty-six-year old Marine decorated three times in Vietnam. But considering all the klutzy mistakes he makes in the course of the story, it is doubtful that anyone connected with that episode actually understood what it meant to be a decorated Vietnam veteran - and a Marine at that.

Robert Vaughn, a supporter of Robert Kennedy, was opposed to the war but made a point of checking his politics at the door when it came to *U.N.C.L.E.* One wonders, however, if he had anything to do with decorating a blackboard used in the final scene of **The Thor Affair**, a third-season episode shown in the fall of 1966. The blackboard, which appears only in the background, is supposed to be part of a kindergarten classroom, yet we see scribbled on it the algebraic equation $a^2 + 2ab = b^2$. [Bill, this is supposed to be superscript, but I don't know how to do that. The Key caps was no help] And at the bottom of the board is the notation LBJ = HHH = H3 = RFK, referring to Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert H. Humphrey, and Robert F. Kennedy.

The final episode of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* was the two-parter **The Seven Wonders of the World Affair**. It concerned a renegade U.N.C.L.E. agent who tried to establish a utopian society. At the end of the story he is killed, and in the final scene we see his coffin being loaded onto an airplane. Solo, Kuryakin, and Waverly follow the coffin aboard the jet. Waverly says to Solo and Kuryakin, "Good job, gentlemen." It was his epitaph for the series. *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* died on American network television January 15, 1968. Our four-year affair was over. Or so we thought.

Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.

After *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* disappeared from network television in 1968, it made the rounds in syndication. Norman Felton made an early attempt to bring it back, and Sam Rolfe tried with a script for a two-hour TV movie in 1977. Two U.N.C.L.E. fans, Danny Beiderman and Bob Short, launched a serious effort to do a return movie, lining up a number of people to work on the project. They did not contact Vaughn and McCallum, however, to ascertain their interest. Their efforts were halted when they learned that television producer Michael Sloan had gotten the go-ahead from MGM to do a "return" movie with Universal. Sloan had taken the opposite track from Beiderman and Short, contacting Vaughn and McCallum first thing.

Sloan served as executive producer and writer of *Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.: The Fifteen Years Later Affair*. He hired Short to serve as technical advisor on the two-hour TV movie. It ran as a CBS Tuesday Night Movie on April 5, 1983.

Leo G. Carroll had died in 1972. The role of the head of U.N.C.L.E. was taken over by Patrick Macnee, best known to American audiences as John Steed in *The Avengers*. He played the role of Sir John Raleigh much like Steed. Interestingly enough, the director Sloan picked for *Return* was Ray Austin, who had worked on *The Avengers* as well.

Vaughn and McCallum were both around fifty by then, but they looked much as they had in the television series. They had appeared in numerous films and TV shows over the intervening years, but neither had ever found other roles with which they were so closely identified as Solo and Kuryakin.

What happened to the world of U.N.C.L.E. in the past fifteen years? In Sloan's vision, Solo

has gone off to sell computers and gamble, while Kuryakin is a popular fashion designer. When Solo returns to the site of Del Floria's tailor shop, there's a new owner who has no earthly idea why he is so interested in the back wall of the dressing booth. A taxi driver suggests that Solo really wants to go to a novelty shop, which we in fact never see, but it gets him into the new U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. There are newer computers, and Raleigh's very British-decorated office has much more warmth than Waverly's spartan one from the '60s.

Just like its parent, *Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.* never shot a single scene in New York City. Shooting was done in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and at Hoover Dam. The casino scenes were filmed at Caesar's Palace.

Prior to shooting *Return*, Sloan watched some third-season *U.N.C.L.E.* episodes but never looked at any from the first season. Fans of the show felt this omission hindered the final product. *Return* has more of the feel of a James Bond movie than an episode of *U.N.C.L.E.* - in fact, it even pays tribute to Bond in a silly chase scene where a mysterious figure named "JB", played by George Lazenby (who was Bond in one film, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*), helps Solo and a defecting ballerina flee the bad guys. There's even a climactic scene where one character must defuse a bomb that's ticking down to nothing, similar to the climactic scene at Fort Knox in *Goldfinger*.

It seemed woefully out of character that Illya Kuryakin, with his background in science and mathematics, would become a fashion designer. Or that the clever and resourceful Napoleon Solo could have run himself so deeply into debt at the gaming tables. All in all, fans of the series felt the TV movie was only so-so. One wonders how a revival done by Sam Rolfe would have turned out.

The Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E. won its time slot in the ratings that night, but it failed to recoup the \$2 million plus it cost to make. Rolfe cited its failure to make money as a hindrance to putting together future U.N.C.L.E. projects.

Nonetheless, *Return* sparked renewed interest in the show and probably influenced CBN to begin showing the old episodes on cable, and for that we can be grateful. The conservative Christian-oriented network had a tendency to severely edit the old episodes, perhaps to remove violent or suggestive scenes or just to make room for more advertisements. As a result, some scenes in the episodes don't make a lot of sense. Turner, while doing some editing to make room for commercials, has done a better job of preserving the sense of the episodes. The professional tapes, of course, are the best of all; in general their quality is excellent. We can only hope to see more of them.