I SPY
by JOHN TIGER

I SPY #2
Masterstroke
A novel by John Tiger

I SPY #3
SUPERKILL
A novel by John Tiger

I SPY #4
WIPEOUT
A novel by John Tiger

I SPY #5
COUNTERTRAP
A NOVEL BY JOHN TIGER

I SPY #6
DOOMDATE

I SPY #7
DEATH-TWIST

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE
By JOHN TIGER

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE #4
CODE NAME: LITTLE IVAN

Chapter 7
COLORED-EDGE PAPER, ALTERNATE REALITIES
—AND A PROFILE OF WALTER ("JOHN TIGER") WAGER
American TV Tie-Ins from the 50s through the early 70s

This chapter—the initial seed whence The Novelizers *sprouted—was originally written for the anthology* Tied In, *edited by Lee Goldberg, a collection of essays by members of IAMTW about the craft of tie-in writing. It has sustained only minor tweaking and revision for inclusion here. I did, however, add the closing sidebars.*

One of the most important facts to consider in any history of tie-in fiction from the 1950s through most of the 1970s is this: in any meaningful sense, as a common household appliance, the VCR didn't exist. To be sure, the invention of home video recorders goes back to the early 60s, but models that were affordable, practical and easy to operate, with likewise inexpensive cassettes to feed them, weren't a staple of everyday life until the early 1980s.

What's more, home computers didn't start to become a mandatory part of the writer's toolkit until the early 90s. Manuscripts were typed on plain white bond; if a writer wanted a file copy for himself, he used carbon paper, because ready access to Xerox machines was rare and expensive.

And slow.

And speaking of slowness, it wasn't until the 70s that overnight delivery services started to flourish. There was no Internet through which to send document files. A finished assignment was sent via snail mail or messenger or delivered by the author's own hand, if he lived in or within reach of New York City, as many did, just to be close to the major publishing houses.

The absence of the high-tech devices and conveniences we now take so much for granted is crucial to how original TV tie-ins (and to a lesser extent, movie novelizations, covered elsewhere in this book) were approached by most of their authors and editors; and to how they were perceived by their readers. Not only crucial, but in retrospect ironic, considering that the books took their source materials from television—the most revolutionary invention of the 20th century. Indeed, relative to the immediacy and power of television, the tie-in book biz co-existed in a state of technological primitivism. And this was reflected in the content of the books themselves, in ways that were both utterly inspired…and utterly abusive…at times even within the same volume.

The technological discrepancy even had bearing on what got published and what didn't. In the current marketplace—reflecting a transition that began in the 90s—it has become rare for a TV tie-in to appear without its source show having first made enough high-ratings impact for a publisher to risk forking over the substantial licensing fee to the underlying rights holder; but in the 60s it was more of a crap shoot.

Opposite—**The complete original TV tie-ins of thriller-master Walter Wager as "John Tiger"**
(Illustration for *I Spy #4: Wipeout* by Gustav Rehberger)

As Patrick O'Connor, editor-in chief at Popular Library, reminisced to tie-in historian Kurt Peer: "At the beginning of the season, [we editors would] pack a lunch and go to the various networks and watch pilots all day. It was a fun day. And then afterwards we'd have some very serious decisions to make. We'd pick the shows we liked and then negotiate, sometimes in competition, sometimes not…Some shows worked [as the basis for books] and others didn't…We'd pass [the authorship of] the books out to our friends who needed money or were working on other projects…the important thing was fast. The writers were always up against the deadline. Once the decision was made, the books had to go into production fast. So, first we were interested in fast, and second we were interested in good, and very few people were able to do that. Walter Wager was one of the best." (Remember that assessment.)

The notion of *fast* and *good* explains why certain bylines of certain key players kept recurring throughout the era. You'll meet some of them—including Mr. Wager—later.

Meanwhile, let's look at what they were required to do, and the tools they were given for doing it.

There are two kinds of assignment to consider: The TV tie-in that, as nearly as possible, was packaged to hit the bookracks *in tandem* with, or *shortly after* the show's premiere broadcast date (there's no official industry name for this kind of tie-in, so let's dub it the Debut Companion); and the tie-in that appeared after its source show had established itself as popular enough to warrant a book or series of books based on it (we'll dub this one the Ratings Winner). Worth looking at too is what sometimes happened when the one led to the other.

The Debut Companion

The thing about living in a world before VCRs, if you're a tie-in author, is that you don't even *think* about not having one. What you don't know about can't make you wistful. And no one from the studios would actually send you an authorized reel of telefilm, *even* if you had a home projector with speakers. You just take for granted the challenge of crafting a story based on a show you'll never see until your work is done. But you've got to work from *something*. So what *do* you see?

Probably a pilot script.

Likely some production stills.

If a show bible exists—that being the blueprint for the show's concept, characters and tone, used to sell the series to the network, probably revised in the wake of shooting the pilot and given to potential scriptwriters—you may see that.

(Distributable bibles play a bigger part in television series during this relatively early era than they will in decades beyond, because the innovation of a writing staff—a group of dramatists who work on a single show throughout a season or more, toward a consistently unified tone and longform continuity—is a development for the future.

(If you're a tie-in scribe during the 50s through the 70s, though, most TV series are being written by Hollywood free-lancers who pitch for assignments [which is why, if you're an alert TV viewer, you'll often notice the same scriptwriters' by-lines on multiple series within a given season—or even over the course of a given decade, for the most successful of them]. Continuity and consistency of tone are the province of each particular show's head writers—who *do* dedicate themselves for full seasons—who are usually also the showrunners, and therefore the people who tend to do most or all of the rewriting deemed necessary.)

Most TV series in this period are also episodic—meaning that their episodes can be viewed pretty much in any order without any significant loss in the audience getting its bearings. Characters, themes and lore do often develop over time, yes, but most often in background flourishes. It's rare to take a main character through a journey that doesn't essentially return him close or exactly to the state in which we found him, a state that can be usually rebooted cleanly next week for a brand-new story.

So, as a tie-in scribe, you're not obligated to fit your novel that exactingly into a continuity—just to "sell" the basic idea and the characters, much as the pilot episode does. And to do so in a book that usually runs between 128 to 190 pages, the latter being unusually long. (The average book length tends toward 144 or 160, and type sizes vary hugely, thinner books generally featuring smaller print. Cover prices will rise from 35¢ to about $1.50 through the decade—pausing consecutively at the 50¢, 60¢, 75¢, 95¢ and $1.25 markers—and the edges of the pages are dyed. To survey but a few publishers, Bantam books always favored yellow, Pockets usually favored red, Ace and Pyramid bright orange; Lancers started with light green, but once the publisher's non-tie-in line started to emphasize sexploitation novels, attained a renegade, almost forbidden look with royal purple; Dell was always a deep turquoise; and Popular Library bounced happily and randomly from red to yellow to green to blue and back.)

Richard Wormser

How close you manage to hew to the ideal prose rendering of a TV series depends on your own artistry and instincts…what you're able to extrapolate from the source material you're given…and what the source material may inadvertently omit. Because where there are omissions, you're left having to intuit what fills in the blanks. And as the saying goes, God is in the details.

But remember, an original TV tie-in isn't merely a novel about a specific set of characters in a specific genre and milieu; it's a about a specific set of characters *as played by a specific set of actors.* Their voices, diction, interpretation, tics, physicality are factors that readers look forward to your having absorbed into your literary portrayals. And those godlike details are a lot more challenging to navigate when you haven't seen the actors performing in context. Or at all.

Some examples:

If you're Richard Wormser (writing for Lancer Books under your oft-used pseudonym, "Ed Friend"), your job is fairly easy. Your 1970 novel based on *The Most Deadly Game* will hit the racks *before* the show premieres. But

happily, you don't have to know much to get near the mark. Only that the leads are three criminologists, who's playing them, and the general tone.

A thumbnail description of the show proves powerful ammo:

"In *The Most Deadly Game,* wealthy Mr. Arcane (Ralph Bellamy) teams with former military intelligence officer Jonathan Croft (George Maharis) and beautiful criminologist Vanessa Smith (Yvette Mimieux) to solve unusual murders."

All the actors are famous and active, you can't guess far wrong here. Bellamy's a renowned old timer, obviously senior to Maharis and Mimieux, so figure he's paternal. Maharis has always been a wry leading man, so he's the muscle and the wisecracks. Mimieux is unusually beautiful, even as beautiful women go, so she's the alluring one who can charm men, work women and express feminine compassion. Finally, since Arcane is wealthy, you know the mysteries will be set against elegant backgrounds. And that means no gritty realism, but rather classic puzzle-solving; a near-"cozy" approach would not be inappropriate. You craft your mystery and title it *The Corpse in the Castle.* If the result isn't a classic, it does no harm.
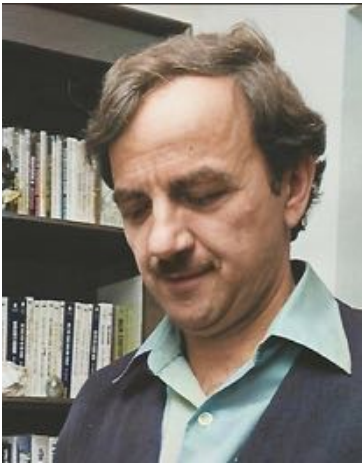
Michael Avallone

But if you're Michael Avallone, writing for Popular Library in 1967 what will turn out to be the only original *Mannix* novel ever[46] (named for the series), you have to make a few chancier intuitive leaps. In this, *Mannix*'s debut season, a little different from the ones that will follow, our hero, Joe Mannix, is an anti-establishment, old-school private investigator who is paradoxically (inevitably?) working for a new-age firm, specifically a high-tech computerized detective agency called *Intertect* (actually, in the early planning stages, that was the show's original title), run by the quintessential, yet consequential button-down corporate man, Lew Wickersham.

What you have to work with are some photos showing broad-shouldered, square-jawed, dark-haired man's man Mike Connors (a former college football lineman, born with the Armenian moniker Kirkor Ohanion, whose first professional acting name was "Touch" Connors) in the title role; and slim, slightly craggy, world-weary Joseph Campanella as Lew.

And you have the pilot script, called *The Name is Mannix.* Which contains a particularly memorable exchange—indeed what will become a famously signature moment—that defines the Mannix/Wickersham relationship in one bold stroke:

> **MANNIX**: Lew, we've been here before. I know you won't change the system. I know I won't change the system. It's logical. Can me.
> **WICKERSHAM**: You're my best man.
> **MANNIX**: I know.
> **WICKERSHAM:** *I know you know!*

It's so good you appropriate it for your otherwise original story, thus:

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[46] Avallone's first season original is not to be confused with a 1975 final-season 4-book series of Belmont-Tower episode novelizations written—rather poorly—by Peter Rabe and Peter McCurtin under the house name "J.T. MacCargo."

"Apple sauce," Mannix said. "Let's not argue it again. You know, if I were you, I'd fire me."

"You're right, Mannix. We've been over this ground before. You're not going to change the system."

"I don't fit into the system."

"You're my best man," Wickersham said without emphasis.

"I know."

*"I know you know!"* It shot out of Wickersham before he could check himself.

But on the script page it, and the pilot mystery, are a bit misleading. What you don't really get is a sense of is the lead actor's persona: tough guy on the outside but a warm, compassionate crusader on the inside. Stuff that will become more apparent in subsequent episodes as the alchemical fusion of actor and role becomes more pronounced—as it always does. So you wind up extrapolating from the character in the pilot, over-emphasizing Mannix's irreverence and devil-may-care iconoclasm. If he's not quite as hard-boiled as Mike Hammer, he's still not quite the humanized Mike Connors iteration.

One other thing the materials don't tell you: the show is set in Los Angeles. That's often the setting that crime show scriptwriters on the West Coast take for granted because it's the metropolis they know. But *you*, Avallone, live in East Brunswick, New Jersey. And the metropolis *you* know is nearby New York City. Which seems like a perfect match for Intertect. So that's where your novel is set.

You're not the only tie-in novelist to take this mildly jingoistic liberty either. If television writing is a predominantly West Coast career (since that's where Hollywood is), tie-in writing is a predominantly East Coast career (since that's where the publishing business is centralized) and the "tell" of geography can sneak into the prose. Indeed, William Johnston, in his first *Get Smart!* novel (named for the series, 1965, Tempo Books)—based on the spy parody sitcom—placed the location of the hero's secret agency employer, CONTROL, in NYC rather than Washington DC.[47]

Which brings us to the author of our final, and most extreme, example:

Let's say you *are* William Johnston. It's 1968 and, thanks to that *Get Smart!* book kicking of a stunningly successful series of novels based on the spy satire, you've already carved out a reputation as the go-to guy for novels based on sitcoms. You have a unique

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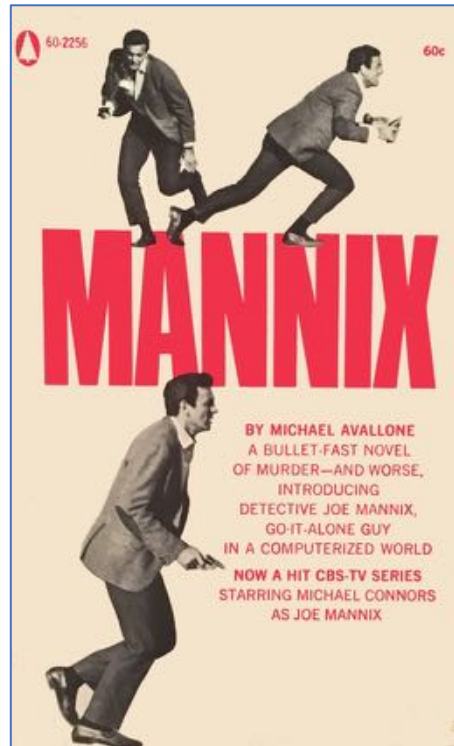
[47] Subsequent titles in the 9-book series will quietly correct this with no mention of the discrepancy. Johnston was so prolific that it's entirely possible he forgot he made the geographical error in the first place.

sense of whimsy and a rare flair for delivering comedy—not just cleverness, but genuine "funny"—in prose. But you also have some experience writing mysteries (indeed, your 1960 *The Marriage Cage* was nominated for a Best First Novel Edgar [Mystery Writers of America] Award), and well-plotted, brilliantly dramatized paperback original novels in other genres as well, with compelling and distinct characters.

So it falls to you to write a novel based on the new Sheldon Leonard-produced series, *My Friend Tony.*

In many ways, it's right up your alley, because at the core it's light hearted. Its lead, and only continuing, characters are Professor John Woodruff (James Whitmore), who teaches criminology in a small college town; and his young companion, Tony Novello (Enzo Cerusico). They originally met during the last years of World War II, when Woodruff was stationed in Italy and Tony was an orphaned street-kid. The soldier took the kid under his wing…and now the Profes-
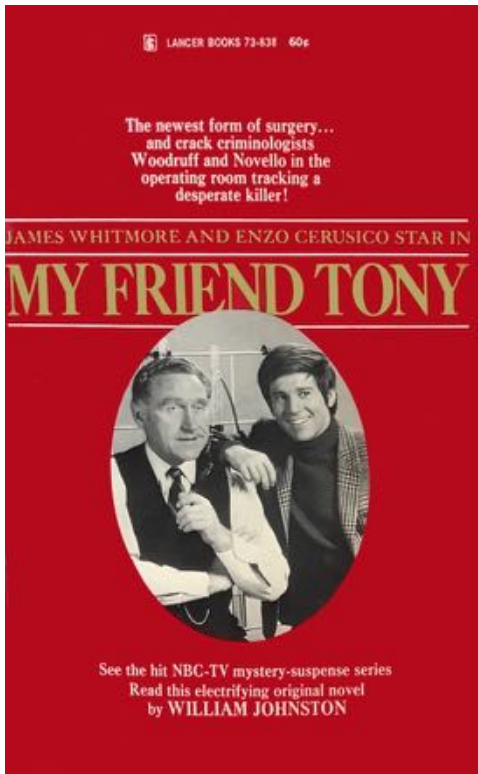

William Johnston

sor's a renowned crime-solver who favors the lab; and the young immigrant, having grown into a young man, is Woodruff's assistant out in the field.

For a novelist, Woodruff should be an easily drawn paternal figure, especially with the notion of actor James Whitmore's well-known and well-worn persona to fill him out. But the real charm of the series is provided by Tony, as played by Enzo Cerusico—impulsive, irrepressible and possessed of a delightful Italian accent. He's an impish heartthrob, and the *perfect* character for a book by William Johnston, because if anyone can riff on an accent—the wordplay, the confusion it might cause—the situations Tony can get into as a result—it's *you!*

One problem.

You haven't seen the show.

You don't know about the accent. You don't know where it sits in the actor's *tessitura,* you don't know its cadences. Nor would it necessarily be an ingredient of a sample script you might have been sent. The show's writers, knowing their lead actor, would simply let *him* take care of that, without needing to goose it.

LANCER BOOKS 73-838   60¢

The newest form of surgery…
and crack criminologists
Woodruff and Novello in the
operating room tracking a
desperate killer!

JAMES WHITMORE AND ENZO CERUSICO STAR IN

MY FRIEND TONY

See the hit NBC-TV mystery-suspense series
Read this electrifying original novel
by WILLIAM JOHNSTON

You don't even know about the soldier-orphan backstory. Subsequently, you're denied a key ingredient of the father-son subtext.

So interpreting what you have as best you can, which would seem to be little more than a thumbnail sketch, some photos (at least your physical descriptions of the characters resemble the actors), and *maybe* a teleplay or two that provide format without flourish, you write a perfectly nice mystery novel in which Woodruff isn't quite Woodruff, the fatherly lab genius who can puzzle things out abstractly…and Tony is a perfectly nice and *terribly* articulate young man who has nothing to do with the Tony of the series.

Interlude #1: Creative Liberties

All this leads to one big, glaring question: How was it possible for *authorized,* and *officially licensed* tie-in novels to be published, featuring such likewise glaring discrepancies?

Because during this period, Hollywood studio supervision, which included story and editorial approvals, was as far in the future as the household VCR. By and large, nobody at the studios cared to police the books; they weren't considered "canon" (meaning, part of the official mythos) and were frequently dismissed, ignored or at times even unknown to some of a given show's creators, stars and staff, who were generally divorced from the tie-in creative process. All that mattered was the merchandising deal: There was a book on the racks with the show's brand and a picture of the star(s), it meant more exposure for the show, money for the underlying rights license and a royalty—and that was the extent of studio authorization.[xxi] Content was *entirely* dependent upon the diligence, professionalism and talent of the assigned writer and his editor. Exceptions were rare and *very* idiosyncratic. [xxii]

Profound changes to the system didn't take hold on an industry-wide basis until well into the 80s. It seems likely that two factors working in tandem were responsible.

The first was simple business. As Kurt Peer reports in his bibliographic reference book *TV Tie-Ins:*

> [A 1970s] trend toward novelizations [of teleplays, as opposed to original novels using the concepts and characters] was facilitated by the collective bargaining agreement reached by the Hollywood Writer's Guild in 1966. Prior to it, the writers of teleplays retained all rights to the stories, meaning that a publisher had to negotiate with the writer directly for the novelization rights. The 1966 agreement allowed the writer to sell the rights to the studios, making it possible for the publisher to negotiate with the studios for the novelization rights, a much simpler process.

The trend itself would seem to have been motivated by the success of Bantam Books' *Star Trek* series, a run of 13 books debuting in that very year, 1966—titled simply for the show, with the book sequence number following—turning the entire complement of scripts from what's now commonly referred to as *TOS* (The Original Series) into short stories. All but a very few of the scripts were adapted at first by award-winning science fiction writer James Blish—and increasingly, starting with *Star Trek 6,* by his wife, J.A. Lawrence, and his mother-in-law Muriel, who was his assistant—though still under Blish's name. His by-lined "five-year mission" with the franchise was curtailed by his untimely death at age 54. (After his passing, Blish's widow, J.A. Lawrence, who had taken over completely with *Star Trek 10,* was co-bylined on *Star Trek 12,* to acknowledge its posthumous completion, as well as an unnumbered 13th book, *Mudd's Angels* [later reissued as

Mudd's Enterprise], containing adaptations of the two Stephen Kandel teleplays featuring comic villain Harry Mudd, and one original Mudd story by Lawrence.)

The books (and the first *Trek* original, *Spock Must Die!,* also by Blish) sold like the proverbial hotcakes, well beyond the life of the TV show itself (staying in print, in various editions, almost until 1990). And though Blish had been well established as a science fiction icon, the *Trek* books put him on the map of general readership.

While these were not the only books adapted from episodes to appear in the 60s, they were among a very small number.[xxiii] But because they were so staggeringly popular, they encouraged publishers to think that episode adaptations were what the readers wanted.

They couldn't have been more wrong. Due to the glut of low-selling novelizations, the bottom dropped out of the TV tie-in market for a decade, until originals took hold again near the end of the 70s—ironically when Pocket Books introduced an all-new *Star Trek* line (in the wake of the first feature film and Pocket's successful novelization by series creator Gene Roddenberry), which initiated a dedicated *Star Trek* department that continues producing regular titles to this day. Pocket's revival of the *Star Trek* line, though, also mainstreamed the likewise still-current era of studio approvals. Where once TV tie-in books were dismissed as

Top Row: **Bruce Cassiday, Ben Haas ("Richard Meade"), Frank C. Robertson**
Middle Row: **Don Tracy ("Roger Fuller"), Jim Thompson, Harry Whittington**
Bottom Row: **Beverly Cleary, J. Hunter Holly, Philip Wylie**

"mere" trademark merchandising, now story proposals through finished manuscripts often go through rigorous inspection by non-book people, ranging from studio marketing appointees to the creators and showrunners of the series themselves. (And that too is fodder for another discussion.)