

## **Ipcress File (1965) Sidney J Furie**

P Michell, 2018

1965 / color / 109 mins

*Starring* Michael Caine, Nigel Green, Guy Doleman, Sue Lloyd, Gordon Jackson

*Production Designer* Ken Adam

*Music* John Barry

*Editor* Peter Hunt

*Cinematographer* Otto Heller

*Screenplay* Brian Comport from the novel by Len Deighton

*Director* Sidney J. Furie

Style over Substance or ...

Star is born.

Significant British Film from mid 1960s.

Synopsis:

*Harry Palmer is pulled from dull surveillance duty under the contemptuous Ross (Guy Doleman) and begins a new assignment helping a small group led by the bullying martinet Dalby (Nigel Green). In a ramshackle building posing as an employment agency, they're trying to recover a kidnapped scientist and find out why hundreds of 'brains' like him are suddenly disappearing or unaccountably becoming unable to function. Harry risks life and limb to solve the case and please his superiors. His biggest problem is trusting his shifty co-workers, especially agent Jean Courtney, who shows up at his flat for a lot more than just the gourmet meals. Why are American C.I.A. agents threatening to kill Harry? And just what is that piece of recording tape with weird noises, and the word IPCRESS printed on it?*

Harry Palmer represents the new kind of British hero, just as Michael Caine represents the new kind of British film actor. Whereas in British action films hitherto, the elite were shown as efficient and brave with their "OK, chaps, in you go. I'll be right behind you;" here they are displayed as duplicitous, inept, and resistant to change. (Listen to the comments made about supermarkets by Col. Ross.) The new order of things is being swept away, as evinced by Major Dalby swinging away to the military band in the park, in a sparsely filled auditorium.

Michael Caine became an overnight star because of the film's success. [Second major role after Zulu (1964). Alfie was made in 1966.] The film also screened in competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Made two years after the British film *The Mind Benders* (1963) by Basil Dearden. Using similar subject matter – brain washing.

*The Ipcress File* was an ironic and downbeat alternative to the portrayal of espionage in Ian Fleming's novels about the spy James Bond and the film series which followed from them.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Harry Saltzman, who produced this film, was one of the producers of the

early Bond films. Among other crew members who worked on *The Ipcress File* and had also worked on the Bond films up to this point were the production designer [Ken Adam](#), the film editor [Peter Hunt](#) and the film score composer [John Barry](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

*The Ipcress File* became the first of the nominally rival Harry Palmer film series and some aspects are reminiscent of [film noir](#). In contrast to Bond's [public school](#) background and playboy lifestyle, Palmer is a [working class](#) Londoner who lives in a [Notting Hill bedsit](#) and has to put up with [red tape](#) and inter-departmental rivalries. The action is set entirely in "a gritty, gloomy, decidedly [non-swinging](#)" London with humdrum locations.<sup>[5]</sup>

The film has come to be recognized as a classic. *The Ipcress File* is included on the [British Film Institute's BFI 100](#), a list of 100 of the best British films of the 20th century, at No. 59, and currently holds [an approval rating of 100%](#) at [Rotten Tomatoes](#).

The film won the [BAFTA Award for Best British Film](#), and [Ken Adam](#) won the award for 'Best British Art Direction, Colour'.

Screenwriters Bill Canaway and James Doran received a 1966 [Edgar Award](#) from the [Mystery Writers of America](#) for Best Foreign Film Screenplay.

Many ongoing Influences:

TV Series – inc Mission Impossible

Spaghetti Western Maker – Sergio Leone credits Furie's style of filmmaking quintessential to developing his own.

### **Sidney J Furie – Director (1933 -)**

56 films inc *The Naked Runner*, *Little Fauss and Big Halsy*, *Boys in Company C* (1978), *Entity* (1982), *Purple Hearts* (1984) [one of the best exposes of Vietnam War].

Wide variety of genres inc Suspense, Vietnam, Espionage, Musical – *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) nominated for five academy awards and was Paramount Pictures second biggest money maker behind *The Godfather* of that year.

Trademark Style:

\* An imagistic visual style, often with a patented use of multiple cameras.

Shoots through and around foregrounded objects to offer a "refracted" view of the action. The style is overt and especially prevalent in *The Ipcress File* (1965), *The Appaloosa* (1966) and *The Naked Runner* (1967).

\* Long takes that play out in intricately composed master shots (some clock in at over five minutes in length)

\* Dynamic camera movement that captures the action of a scene, in lieu of cutting to coverage

Trivia

Cites seeing *Captains Courageous* (1937) as a young boy as having been the formative movie-going experience growing up in Canada. He told his mother about wanting to make movies after seeing it.

In 2009 [Martin Scorsese](#) placed Furie's [The Entity](#) (1982) on his list of the 11 Scariest Horror Films of All Time. It placed #4 on the list, above [Stanley Kubrick's The Shining](#)(1980) and [Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho](#) (1960).

In the years following the film's release, [Harry Saltzman](#) (producer) claimed that he had fired [Sidney J. Furie](#) relatively early in shooting, and that [Peter R. Hunt](#) (editor) had really directed most of the film, with Furie only being credited as director for contractual reasons. Hunt denied this, however, and revealed that he had in fact tried to preserve Furie's original vision to the best of his abilities, despite Saltzman's attempts to do otherwise.

[Harry Saltzman](#) hated [Sidney J. Furie](#) and his oddball style, and went so far as to bar him from the editing room. According to Furie, Saltzman also excluded him from the film's party at Cannes, and even stole his best picture British Academy Award.

Quote:

The truth is, whether your film is about the great mythological character you have to do right, or it's a little movie that nobody ever heard of, you still approach it like it's the most important thing in the world. But failing goes with the territory. Filmmakers are like gunslingers, and you don't win every duel.

### **Otto Heller – Cinematographer. Czech. (1896-1970)**

237 films inc [The Naked Runner](#) (1967), [Funeral in Berlin](#) (1966), [Alfie](#) [lighting cameraman], (1966) [Woman of Straw](#) (1964), [Peeping Tom](#) (1960).

Heller was much admired for his versatility and imaginative camera work on many diverse subjects (both in B&W and in colour), ranging from the 'noirish' [They Made Me a Fugitive](#) (1947) to the gothically-lit Pushkin adaptation [The Queen of Spades](#) (1949); from colourful adventure subjects like [The Crimson Pirate](#) (1952) and [His Majesty O'Keefe](#)(1954), to the stylised austerity of [Richard III](#) (1955); from Ealing's classic [The Ladykillers](#) (1955) with its Hitchcockian camera tilts and angles, to the stark realism and drab exteriors of the Cold War in [The Ipcress File](#) (1965).

Involved with filming the funeral of Emperor Franz Josef. From the 1930s worked on many German films. Settled in UK in 1940.

### **Trivia:**

On the first day of shooting, Director [Sidney J. Furie](#) gathered the cast and said, "This is what I think of the script". He then set it on fire

In the [Len Deighton](#) novels the name of the lead character is never revealed. So [Michael Caine](#) and producer [Harry Saltzman](#) tried to think of a boring name for the hero. Caine suggested "Harry" which Saltzman found rather amusing. Caine then remembered a boring classmate named Tommy Palmer. So "Palmer" became the surname.

Harry Palmer is depicted as an accomplished cook, but when you see Palmer skillfully break a couple of eggs, the hands in the close-up belong to [Len Deighton](#), author of the book, on which the movie is based. Deighton himself was an accomplished cook, and also wrote a comic strip about cooking for *The Observer*. The walls of Palmer's kitchen are full of these strips.

Palmer is the first action hero to wear glasses ([Michael Caine](#) is myopic in real life). Caine chose to wear glasses, because he expected the film to be the first of a series, similar to the Bond movies. He feared being over-identified with the character of Harry Palmer, and so he wore the glasses, so that he could remove them for other roles.

Note: Error - Superman's alter-ego Clark Kent wore glasses of course.

#### Rejected Roles:

[Christopher Plummer](#) was originally considered for the lead role, but dropped out to star in [The Sound of Music](#) (1965). The role was then offered to [Richard Harris](#), who also refused it. Harris later regretted his decision, commenting to [Sean Connery](#) that he "turned down *The Ipcress File*, but did [Caprice](#) (1967) with [Doris Day](#)".

#### Music:

The main melody in the movie's score was played on a cimbalom - a type of Hungarian dulcimer - that provided the forlorn mood that Composer [John Barry](#) was eager to create.

Note: Possibly referencing Carol Reed's *Third Man* where the dominant zither music.

#### Poor Pay:

Harry is offered an annual salary of 1,400 pounds for his new job. This was less than twice the average wage in 1965, so not a fantastic sum for the danger involved.

This film and its sequels were a deliberately downbeat alternative to the hugely successful [James Bond films](#), even though one of the Bond producers, [Harry Saltzman](#), was involved with the [Harry Palmer](#) series, along with other personnel who had been contracted to work on one or more of the 007 movies.

#### Links:

Interview with Sidney J Furie:

<http://www.money-into-light.com/2017/02/an-interview-with-sidney-j-furie-part-1.html>

#### Review:

In November 1962, shortly after the release of [James Bond] *Dr. No* (d. Terence Young, 1962), Len Deighton's spy novel *The Ipcress File* was published to enormous critical acclaim and brisk sales. Producers Harry Saltzman and Albert Broccoli approached Deighton to script the next Bond film *From Russia with Love* (d. Young, 1963). Although little of his work was used, Saltzman eventually decided to use Deighton's novel, and its sequels, as the basis for a new series of spy movies.

*The Ipcress File* was designed to be in direct contrast to the Bond adventures, although Saltzman ended up employing much of the same production staff, including production designer Ken Adam, editor Peter Hunt and composer John Barry. Superficially, there are many similarities, even to the extent of beginning the film with a dramatic pre-credit sequence. Like Bond, the hero is clearly his own man, has a taste for fine foods and is popular with women, and even carries a non-standard-issue weapon. But the similarities end there. The protagonist, named Harry Palmer in the film (the book's narrator is anonymous), wears spectacles, shops in a supermarket (still a novelty in 1965) and is a sergeant working off a two-year sentence for black market activities in Berlin.

Deighton took the Ian Fleming spy formula and grafted on the anti-authority attitude, first person narration and wisecracking dialogue of the 1930s and '40s hard-boiled detective novels of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Director Sidney J. Furie and cinematographer Otto Heller adopted an equivalent visual style, using distorting lenses, unusual angles and high contrast photography. Essentially they used the noir style of 1940s Hollywood thrillers to tell a story set in 1960s swinging London. In addition, Furie and Heller took their cue from Palmer's poor eyesight. The camera is often out of focus, or shoots through objects, such as a pair of cymbals, lampshades, a parking meter and even a keyhole, creating a visually abstract world that contrasts with the otherwise gritty and realistic look of the film.

Although he had already played a supporting role in *Zulu* (Cy Enfield, 1964) and had appeared in a few other films, Michael Caine's career really took off with his starring role in *Ipcress*. He would reprise the role of Harry Palmer in two interesting though inferior sequels, *Funeral in Berlin* (d. Guy Hamilton, 1966) and *Billion Dollar Brain* (d. Ken Russell, 1967). [Both these film inferior to *Ipcress*.]

Sergio Angelini – BFI Screenonline  
(Highlights by Paul)

Class ?

Although this film is obviously made on something of a shoestring, there is nothing "kitchen sink about it". The scenes are shot on location in London (I came out of my house one morning, and saw them shooting the film across the road. A friend told me that Michael Caine was in the film, and this turns out to be the film.) This film was made in the wake of the Philby, McLean et al scandal, and the film enters the British class warfare with all guns blazing. You see, these bunch of traitors were not the undependable working class, these were "decent Oxbridge chaps" who had had the finest education and privilege. And it was THEY who had sided with the commies. Similarly, the Profumo affair, where a minister of the Conservative government had been sharing a mistress with a Soviet diplomat, had been a nail in the coffin for the "old British order." If the chaps at the top couldn't be relied on to stay loyal. How about the rabble beneath?

Harry Palmer represents the new kind of British hero, just as Michael Caine represents the new kind of British film actor. Whereas in British action films hitherto, the elite were

shown as efficient and brave with their "OK, chaps, in you go. I'll be right behind you;" here they are displayed as duplicitous, inept, and resistant to change. (Listen to the comments made about supermarkets by Col. Ross.) The new order of things is being swept away, as evinced by Major Dalby swinging away to the military band in the park, in a sparsely filled auditorium.

Again and again this theme of "it's the upper classes that are subversive comes up - from the very beginning, when Palmer leaves his lowly flat in Maida Vale's Formosa Street to head for a stakeout in Hamilton Terrace, one of the most exclusive streets in London. When the traitor is revealed at the end, it is a member of the establishment, who apparently believes in the system - not the insubordinate Palmer who continually cocks a snook at the system.

Plenty of interesting imagery here. Notice that it is the "working class" Palmer who is living the most sophisticated life, from the moment he first appears in the memorable scene. Yes, the working class with their regional accents, and studying the racing pages of the newspapers have now got electric kettles, electric coffee grinders, and make their coffee in cafetieres. Another harbinger of the social change to come is the CIA agent, portrayed by a well-dressed Negro who smokes a pipe.

Then there is the irony. The establishment, who hold the lower orders in utter contempt are the ones who embrace communism, a system that is supposed to be on the side of the worker, while it is lower orders, as represented by Palmer, who are trying to stop them.

The spy mystery is just the tip of this iceberg, the interesting things are the changes in society that are going on underneath.

### **Better than James Bond**

[foz-325](#) July 1999

This film is, in a word, fantastic. Caine plays a British secret service agent who is assigned to find out who is brainwashing the country's top scientists. This is an interesting slant on the usual cold war thriller plots and is much more believable than James Bond films, although it lacks the latter's explosive action. This is the antithesis of Bond as Caine lives on a meagre wage, has a bedsitting flat and does his own shopping! He also wears glasses and in one scene, chats up his female work colleague whilst cooking. The plot is also a lot more grown-up than its Bond counterpart - there are no cat stroking madmen intent on world domination. What makes the film is the idiosyncratic camera angles and the grainy film quality which adds to the oppressive cold war drama. The brainwashing scene is quite amusing and cliched by today's standards with psychedelic images, trippy music and "You-are-getting-sleepy..." type-quotes. Guy Doleman and Nigel Green head up a brilliant supporting cast which include a few familiar British faces. It is interesting to note that the film was produced by the same people who bring Bond to the screen and even the excellent soundtrack is courtesy of John Barry.

### **An original take on Len Deighton's novel.**

[jotix10023](#) November 2005

London, in the early 60s, was captured by Sidney Furie in all its splendor. One of the best things in the movie is the fantastic camera work by its cinematographer, Otto Heller. The director and his cameraman place the camera as a sort of "peeping Tom" device. Mr. Furie and Mr. Heller takes us along to spy on Harry Palmer in this satisfying adaptation of Len Deighton's novel. The musical score by John Barry is another element that works well with one is witnessing.

Harry Palmer came alive the way Michael Caine played him. Palmer is a man from humble origins, in sharp contrast with the rest of the people he works for, who are clearly highly educated and who look down on this man because he is different. Mr. Caine is versatile actor whose take on Harry was right on the money. We can't do anything but admire him for making this man so approachable and believable.

The film was blessed with an excellent cast. Nigel Green, who plays Major Dalby makes his character come true with little effort. So does Guy Doleman as Col. Ross. Sue Lloyd, Gordon Jackson, and the rest of the actors give amazing performances.

#### Reality: MKULTRA

MKULTRA is the closest known real project to IPCRESS. It was an illegal CIA programme to develop drugs and torture techniques for use in interrogation and mind control. Trials included forcing people to take LSD and other drugs and subjecting them to continuously looped audio messages, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, and other mental and physical abuses to 'brainwash' them in a similar manner to IPCRESS.