



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Good morning. Your mission, should you choose to accept it: Enjoy this Further Review page about the original “Mission Impossible” television series that debuted on CBS on Sept. 17, 1966 — 60 years ago.

It ran for seven seasons, won 10 Emmy Awards and spawned a revival TV series and then a very successful series of eight movies starring Tom Cruise.

This page will *not* self-destruct in five seconds. Good luck!

DREAMING UP THE ULTIMATE SECRET AGENT THRILLER

A 1964 criminal heist comedy film, “Topkapi,” featured a complex scheme to steal an artifact from an art museum in Istanbul and the group of highly-skilled experts hired to pull off the caper.

Bruce Geller wrote episodes for “Have Gun – Will Travel” and “The Rifleman” and, in 1964 and 1965, served as co-executive producer for “Rawhide.” He used “Topkapi” to leap from the Western genre into the spy genre, developing a series about a special forces unit composed of a group of criminals who are having difficulty readjusting to civilian life. Geller called his show “Briggs’ Squad” after the leader of the team.

Geller later dropped the criminal element and focused on the work needed to pull off the impossible missions to which they were assigned. He deliberately kept character development to a minimum, wanting to focus less on who the team members were and more on what they did — and the clockwork precision with which they pulled off their missions.

At that point, the real “Mission: Impossible” became finding a studio that would finance Geller’s concept. The one executive who believed in

the show was the owner of Desilu Studios: Lucille Ball, who also got behind another pricey TV series pitch: “Star Trek.”

“Star Trek” debuted on NBC on Sept.

8, 1966. “Mission: Impossible” debuted nine days later, on Sept. 17, 1966. Within two years, the expense of the two series forced Ball to sell her studio. It would become part of

Paramount Pictures.

“Star Trek” lasted only three seasons before it was canceled. “Mission Impossible,” struggled through the same budgetary issues: Each episode took seven 12-to-13-hour days to film. Still, it managed to last seven seasons.

Sure enough, Paramount canceled the show in 1973, figuring it could maximize its profits by instead syndicating existing episodes. In 1983, producers planned a reunion series but found it difficult to come up with quality scripts. The series morphed into a movie in 1984, which was then sunk by its projected budget.

In 1988, with a writer’s strike causing pandemonium throughout Hollywood, Paramount finally began shooting new “Mission: Impossible” episodes, using slightly modified scripts from the 1960s series and filming in Australia to save costs. The remake was panned by critics but lasted two years on the air.

In 1996, actor and producer Tom Cruise — who grew up as a fan of the original TV series — launched a series of “Mission: Impossible” movies. His eight films brought in \$4.74 billion over 29 years.

SEVEN SEASONS OF “MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE”								
		SEASON						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Steven Hill: Dan Briggs		MAIN						
Peter Graves: Jim Phelps		MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN
Barbara Bain: Cinnamon Carter		MAIN	MAIN	MAIN				
Greg Morris: Barney Collier		MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN
Peter Lupus: Willy Armitage			MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN	MAIN
Martin Landau: Rollin Hand		RECURRING	MAIN	MAIN				
Leonard Nimoy: Paris					MAIN	MAIN		
Leslie Ann Warren: Dana Lambert						MAIN		
Sam Elliott : Dr. Doug Robert						MAIN		
Linda Day George: Lisa Casey							MAIN	MAIN
Barbara Anderson: Mimi Davis								RECURRING
EMMY AWARDS	Nominations	5	10	8	6	2	2	2
	Wins	4	2	2	1	1		
GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS	Nominations		3	1	1	2	1	
	Wins		2			1		

IMPOSSIBLE MISSIONS BY THE IMPOSSIBLE TEAM

“Mission: Impossible” featured one of TV’s most memorable theme songs. The tones: “Dunn, dunn, da da...” spelled out “MI” in morse code: Dash dash, dot dot. Composer Lalo Schiffrin’s original theme was rejected, so he was pressed for time. “The whole thing — including the chorus, the bongos, everything you hear — took me maybe three minutes,” he told Emmy magazine.



Barbara Bain played the female agent whose assignment was often to serve as a diversion while secret work took place. She won three Emmy Awards in three seasons for her work. Her husband, Martin Landau, played the team’s master of disguise. They both quit in a salary dispute after the show’s budget was cut after Season 3.

Steven Hill had it written into his contract that he’d be released from the set by sundown every Friday and wouldn’t have to work until Saturday night. This and his personality conflicts with others led to his replacement after the first season. He later redeemed himself by playing District Attorney Adam Schiff on “Law & Order.”



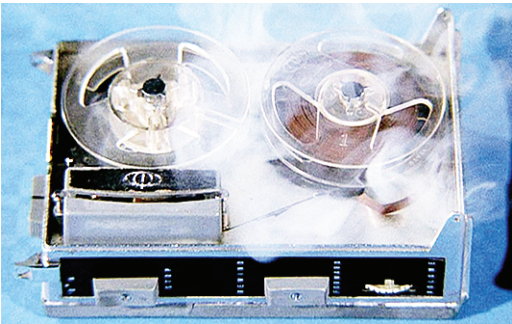
Landau’s place was taken by “Star Trek” co-star Leonard Nimoy, who played Paris, an actor who also excelled in disguises and rubber masks. Nimoy accepted a deal to appear in only eight episodes but then ended up in all Season 4’s 26 episodes. “It was a chance to show that I could act,” Nimoy said. “Without ears.”

Hill’s replacement was Peter Graves, the brother of James Arness, who played Marshal Matt Dillon on “Gunsmoke.” For years after the show left the air, Paramount wouldn’t syndicate Season 1 episodes because viewers were puzzled by the absence of the familiar leader of the Impossible Missions team, Jim Phelps.



Two cast members stayed with the series for all seven seasons: Greg Morris, who played electronics expert Barney Collier and Peter Lupus, who played the team’s muscle, Willie Armitage. The producer of Season 5 tried to deemphasize Lupus’ role but angry letters from fans changed those plans. Lupus was given more to do in Seasons 6 and 7.

The famous self-destructing reel-to-reel tape sequences at the start of each episode were all filmed at once, at the start of each season. The tape appeared to be moving too slowly, so it was filmed in rewind mode. The tape didn’t actually self-destruct. A special effects guy used a tube to blow smoke into the back of the tape recorder.



When Tom Cruise revived the series in 1996, he asked the surviving original cast to appear in the movie. He wanted to kill them off, one by one. They all refused. Cruise then had Jon Voight play Peter Graves’ character — but turning Phelps into a traitor. Graves expressed disappointment and Greg Morris angrily walked out of the movie premiere.

Sources: Entertainment Weekly’s “The 100 Greatest TV Shows of All Time” edited by Alison Gwinn, “Retro TV: Classic Shows We Used to Love” by Ian Collis, Internet Movie Database, TV Insider, Click Americana, Neatorama, MSB.com, RogerEbert.com

PHOTOS BY DESILU PRODUCTIONS, PARAMOUNT TELEVISION AND PARAMOUNT PICTURES