

Spies Like Us

By Reg P. Wydeven
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One of my all-time favorite action movies is 'True Lies,' the 1994 flick starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as Harry Tasker, a mild-mannered computer salesman. In reality, Tasker is a secret agent working for The Omega Sector, which is the U.S. government's counter-terrorism task force.

Tasker is so convincing in his cover as a dull computer salesman that his wife, Helen, played by Jamie Lee Curtis, gets bored and begins secretly dating Simon, hilariously portrayed by Bill Paxton. Simon is a used car salesman who ironically pretends to be a secret agent in an effort to woo Helen.

When Harry overhears Helen talking to a coworker about a recent rendezvous with Simon, he panics about the state of their marriage. In an epic performance as Harry's partner, Gib, Tom Arnold is enlisted by Harry to use Omega Sector resources to spy on Helen, including a GPS tracker and wireless microphone in her purse.

Harry even goes so far as to have his agency kidnap Helen and put her in an interrogation room. Using a voice distorter, Harry convinces Helen she is in trouble for associating with the spy, Simon. He gives her an ultimatum: go to prison or carry out a mission by posing as a prostitute and planting a bug on an arms dealer. Choosing the mission, Helen goes to a hotel room where Harry is waiting for her, disguised as the arms dealer, in the hopes of spicing up their marriage.

Before he can reveal himself and come clean about his secret agent double life, terrorists break into the room to abduct the couple, thinking they are both spies. Hilarity ensues and after the action-packed climax, Helen actually goes to work for Omega Sector.

'True Lies' is considered one of Schwarzenegger's best action films, as it has the perfect blend of action, comedy and romance. Plus, like most of his movies, the hero wins in the end.

As it turns out, in real life, though, using government resources to spy on loved ones definitely does not have a happy ending.

In response to a recent request by Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley, Dr. George Ellard, the Inspector General for the National Security Agency, wrote a letter detailing a dozen instances in the past decade where NSA employees intentionally misused the agency's surveillance power to spy on their love interests. The letter did not identify the perpetrators.

In one instance, an NSA employee used agency resources to eavesdrop on nine foreign women's phone conversations. The employee also illegally collected the communications of a U.S. citizen by not having a warrant. Another case involved an employee who spied on a foreign phone number that she found in her husband's cell phone that she believe belonged to his mistress.

One employee hacked into six email addresses belonging to his ex-girlfriend on his first day on the job. Many of the employees in question have resigned, been demoted or otherwise sanctioned. At least half of these incidents were referred to the Justice Department for possible prosecution or additional action, however, none appear to have resulted in charges.

So the moral of this story is there are no rules in love or war, unless you work for the federal government in counter-terrorism.

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