

COVER STORY





MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

**Angelina
Jolie takes on
a spy franchise
intended for Cruise -
can she play Bond and
Bourne at their own
game? Total Film
goes undercover
on Salt to
find out...**

WORDS MATT MUELLER

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Big guns: (clockwise, from right) Angelina Jolie as Evelyn Salt; Liev Schreiber as CIA honcho Ted Winter; Chiwetel Ejiofor as Agent Peabody.

M

ake piquant or more interesting...’ Just one of the many meanings of ‘salt’ listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, coming after ‘a white crystalline substance which gives seawater its characteristic taste’ but before ‘an experienced sailor’ (as in ‘old salt’). Handily, for the purposes of this cover feature, it’s also the one that most readily applies to the star of *Salt*, Angelina Jolie, who has been mainlining film fans a steady stream of interesting piquancy since the late ’90s, both on screen and off.

Now a gritty, seasoned vet, Jolie no longer needs to prove her worth as a fully-fledged member of Hollywood’s \$20m club. In the right vehicle, she can wipe the floor with most A-list big boys – and, if her foolproof-as-long-as-she’s-not-in-an-awards-seeker box-office armour holds firm, she’s about to rub *Salt* in their wounds. The final proof will lie in the figures, but the trailers and buzz on her summer actioner will certainly be giving its closest cousin/rival *Knight And Day* (starring the man she ostensibly replaced in *Salt*, Tom Cruise) something to think about.

And so to her sleek, spiffy spy-thriller, which will deliver summer-movie addicts a juicy fix of adrenalinised, ass-kicking Angie, even if it does look like a hodgepodge of elements ripped straight from movie spydom’s greatest hits (including her own): the bold, brash gloss of *Wanted*, the breathless, kinetic compulsion of the Bourne trilogy and the old-school paranoia of ’60s and ’70s Cold War classics. Director Phillip Noyce is more than happy to admit that *Salt* has a clasp, grab-bag quality to it. “It’s all of those things,” he chuckles to *Total Film* when we flag up the perceived influences, plus other touchstones like *Three Days Of The Condor*, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and even the 1987 Kevin Costner-starrer *No Way Out*. “But that’s part of what attracted me in the first place.”

If the Bourne comparisons are obvious, *Salt*’s shakers and bakers don’t want to dwell on them too much. “There’s a big difference,” says the

amiable Aussie filmmaker. “Bourne doesn’t know who he is. Salt knows exactly who she is, but she’s deliberately keeping information from us.”

In an industry that typically wants its heroes and heroines to exist in stark black-and-white terms, frowning upon any overdose of ambiguity, Jolie’s sultry, svelte secret agent is all the more

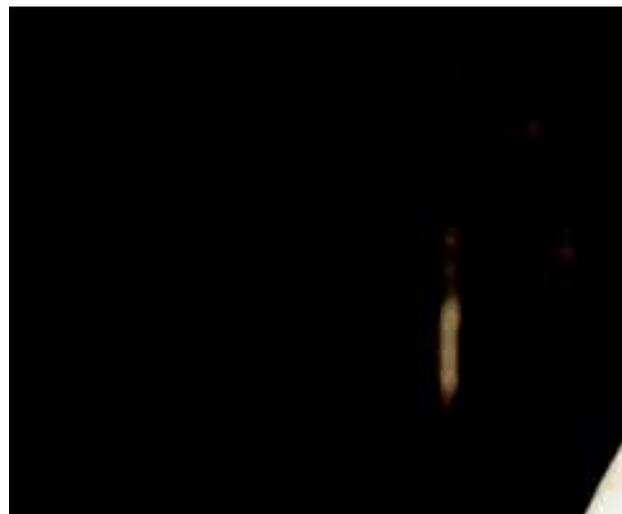
tantalising. Evelyn Salt sprints out of CIA doors and goes on the run after being fingered as a Russian sleeper spy – she’s a furtive, inscrutable creation who will send viewers’ sympathies flip-flopping as they question her true loyalties right up to the grand finale.

“She’s one of the more interesting characters I’ve had the chance to play because she is more than one person,” muses Jolie with a mysterious half-smile. “It was a very emotional, challenging role in that way. It’s hard to figure out who she is.”

Long before Tom Cruise or Angelina Jolie flickered into view, *Edwin A. Salt* was a spec script by Kurt Wimmer (*The Thomas Crown Affair*). It went through various iterations as it reached for the vibe of early Bonds, *The Third Man* (“for its sense of betrayal,” says producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura) and even *The Matrix*, and all the time remained unloved and regularly rejected by studios. Di Bonaventura admits the detour into super-powered *Matrix* territory, giving *Salt* “a bravado that was outside the genre and pushed the extremities of physics and reality”, led to bewilderment (and was swiftly reined back in). But he’s also convinced that, in a new world order of apoliticised Bournes and Bonds, the script’s strong geopolitical context made it an anachronism.

“I went through this with *The Matrix* for five years where people kept saying, ‘What the hell are you doing?’ That was confusion,” notes di Bonaventura. “This? They just didn’t think it was cool.” It wasn’t until Sony, acutely aware that their own flirtation with Bond (the studio released *Casino Royale* and *Quantum Of Solace*) could end up a brief one thanks to MGM’s ongoing survival issues, plucked it from the abyss only after di Bonaventura had sent it over as a writing sample: “That’s how far it had fallen...”

The first time that Noyce read Wimmer’s “shape-shifting” script, he was on tenterhooks: “You couldn’t predict where things were going.” He landed the director’s gig not only because he has form with skilfully spun espionage tales (*Patriot Games*, *Clear And Present Danger*, *The Quiet*



American) but also because, in di Bonaventura’s eyes, “he’s always able to keep a character at the forefront of the story – he never lets the machinations overwhelm the character.” Cruise was the first star approached to play Edwin A. Salt and expressed immediate interest. After a reading with Cruise and Samuel L. Jackson, serious negotiations were launched. But in the end, Noyce says that Cruise was anxious the part skirted too closely to *Mission: Impossible*’s Ethan Hunt. That’s the official version, anyway. The unofficial version is that Sony brass were spooked by Cruise’s fading bankability, and the haste with which he leapt into another undercover caper, albeit of the comedic variety, with *Knight And Day*, gives some credence to the theory. “Whatever the reason,” says Noyce, “he wouldn’t commit.”

Enter Jolie, bosom buddies with Noyce (who helped propel her onto the A-list with 1999’s *The Bone Collector*) and Sony studio topper Amy



COVER STORY



‘She fights very dirty. The stuff that Angie can do, physically, is remarkable’

LIEV SCHREIBER

tenacious counter-intelligence officer Peabody (Chiwetel Ejiofor). The former is forced to question years of loyal friendship after Salt's accused, the latter simply assumes the worst and leads the hunt to recapture her.

"Ted's been her friend for 15 years and their relationship sometimes blurs the line," says Schreiber, a latecomer to the cast. "So what looks like her betrayal is particularly devastating for him." Does that mean Winter is in love with Salt? "I don't want to say too much but it's safe to say that they were very, very close and it went beyond a working relationship in his mind..."

For Jolie, she likes how the gender switch made the character "more emotionally complex and physically meaner". Simply put, Evelyn Salt is easily as badass as the field agents she works beside, enhancing her appeal to both sexes. "Females in those films rely on being

female but we wanted to ignore that - she's just Salt," muses Jolie. "She doesn't use her sexuality to get anything. In fact, in many ways it's the roughest I've looked because when you fight it gets ugly and if someone breaks your nose it's not pretty."

The actress imported her own long-serving stunt team onto *Salt*, lead by celebrated fight choreographer Simon Crane (the *Tomb Raider* films, *Mr & Mrs Smith*). "He knows her capabilities. He knows she's not afraid of heights for example, so she doesn't mind being suspended off a 10-storey building, she didn't mind jumping into the air from a freeway overpass to a moving vehicle down below," observes Noyce. "Unless you've been around these wire people for years, it's hard to believe that your \$20m actress is really safe.

I think she gets a real thrill out of it."

Jolie and her fight club pored over the fighting styles of Bourne and Bond before coming up with Salt's own version. What they settled on, according to the

actress, is "not flashy, not gymnastic, not inventive - she's just mean when it comes down to it. Fights I've had in the past have been more elegant, but this was like street fighting. It was bent over and hunched and swinging." Without revealing whether they come to feel the "panicked, aggressive" fury of her curvaceous fugitive, Jolie's co-stars concur. "She fights with commitment," laughs Ejiofor. "The fight stuff is brilliant. You feel like you're right in the middle of it."

"She fights very dirty," echoes Schreiber. "I love spy stories, especially when they're done



Spies like us: (left) Schreiber, Ejiófor and Jolie on the case; (right) Angie goes rogue and dons a new 'do.



Chick flip

The five guy movies we want to see gender reassigned...

FIGHT CLUB

Girl power Bored corporate high-flyer invents an alter-ego, Dorothy Durden, to cope with the emptiness of capitalist ideals. Dorothy starts a gang who give abusive husbands a taste of their own medicine. Stars Kate Winslet as the Narrator and Angelina Jolie as Dorothy Durden.

Tagline Manbeating. Menstruation. Soap.



DIE HARD

Girl power Beleaguered stay-at-home mum Jane McClane (Marisa Tomei) attends her spouse's Christmas party at the Gherkin, and when all hell breaks loose she goes commando in more ways than one. McClane frets over dirty vest. It'll need Vanish.

Tagline Twelve terrorists, one mom... and the babysitter's only paid til midnight.



EASY RIDER

Girl power Biker chicks Winnie and Billie burn rubber and bras on a free-lovin', hard drinkin' trip of self-discovery, with a middle finger pointed at the sexist establishment and a copy of *The Bell Jar*. Stars Greta Gerwig and Kristen Stewart.

Tagline They went looking for equality, and couldn't find it anywhere.



DINER

Girl power Four college-age girlfriends struggle with adulthood as they meet at the local diner to discuss boys, careers and how many calories are in the Caesar salad. Stars Evan Rachel Wood, Jena Malone, Kat Dennings and Lindsay Lohan (Sheriff's office permitting).

Tagline Gossip is on the menu.



ANIMAL HOUSE

Girl power A group of sorority gals (Dakota Fanning, Hilary Duff and Miley Cyrus) about to lose their house turn it into a de facto zoo in order to pay the bills. Everything is neat, tidy and well kept, and the animals are treated humanely.

Tagline College may be full of animals, but Animal House is full of love. **DG**

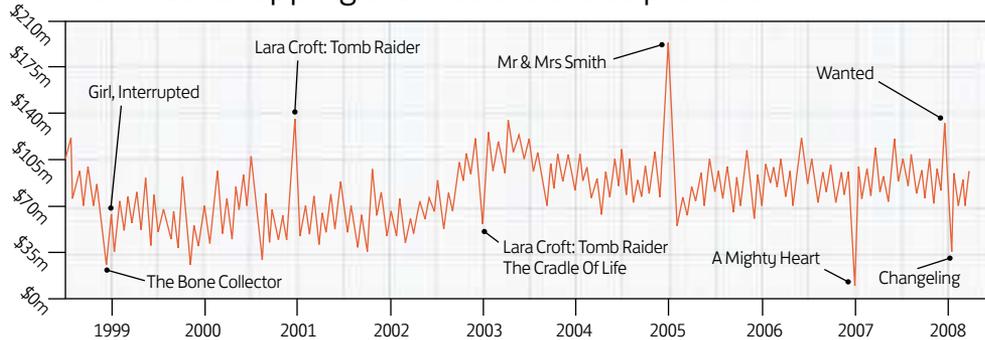


as intelligently as Phillip does them, and the action stuff is... Well, I think it's one of the guilty pleasures of being a guy - watching beautiful women pull off these action things. The stuff that Angie can do, physically, is remarkable..."

Indeed, everyone involved heaps praise on Jolie's commitment, passion, onscreen ferocity... and mothering skills. "My kids actually liked coming to the set on that movie because there were huge squirt-gun fights and lots of toys. It was really fun because Angie keeps it fun for her kids," says Schreiber. According to Noyce, Jolie circa 2010 is a very different woman from the young actress he first met in 1998. "Before, she was looking to others to guide her. Now she knows the business back to front and really had a handle on what she wanted to do with this character," he says. "It was interesting and satisfying to see how much she had matured. She became in the interim a bona fide superstar and pop culture >>

Angie-o-gram

How heartstopping are Ms Jolie's receipts so far?



icon and paparazzi victim but she hadn't closed down as often happens. She's still open and embracing of those around her. And she hadn't closed down in another way – she's just as fearless as she was on *The Bone Collector*.”

As you'd expect from a costly summer flick, *Salt* is packed with supersize set-pieces. Noyce is wary about revealing too much, but two scenes involving escape and clandestine infiltration are “edge-of-your-seat fantastic”, while a face-off in the White House, says his producer, is “flat-out phenomenal... You've never seen anybody treat the White House the way we treat it. Roland Emmerich blew it up, but we beat it up.”

Befitting the film's entrapment storyline, Ejiofor says the vibe on set was intense. “Everyone was very *on it*, people were into getting it right,” he says. “With a script like this where much of it is claustrophobic and contained, it set the mood.” Schreiber's take is that he was sometimes in the eye of a storm. “A lot of it for me was trying to keep up with Phillip because the script was changing and he was on the move all the time, which is how he works,” he says. “But as crazy as it got, it felt like it was going to be OK because the right people were on the job. There were moments when I thought, ‘We're going to hell in a handbasket.’ But filmmakers like Phillip need that kind of freedom to make the films that they make.”

Salt shot predominantly in the spring of 2009, with Noyce then reconvening cast and crew for reshoots in December – partially to fill a few plot holes but also to reinsert a chunky set-piece set on a barge that had been axed at budgeting stage. “We were hoping we could do without it but when you saw the movie you realised we couldn't,” says di Bonaventura. “We also needed to make the death of one of the bad guys more... delicious. Both things are very good for the movie.”

If you think the whole concept of moles is just a relic of Cold War hysteria, think again. “If you ask all the current CIA people, they still believe there's a high-ranking Russian mole in the CIA,” insists di Bonaventura. “It's been a legend there for a long time and they've

never been able to figure it out. That's what drives the reality of our film.”

Noyce's research threw up evidence that not only did the Soviet Union run a sleeper-spy programme, but that Day X – another concept the film plays with, the date when sleeper agents in the West would be called to action – really did (does?) exist. Schreiber, who's of Eastern European extraction and has spent time in Russia, thinks the collapse of the Soviet Union is the gift that will keep on giving when it comes to compulsive storytelling. “What happened to that incredible infrastructure of the KGB as it dissolved and, quote-unquote, democracy took over?” he asks. “There are a lot of questions about what happened to that very dense and effective spy intelligence structure, and this is one outrageous hypothetical that's fun to play out.”

As for ‘reality’, it's being pushed to outlandish Hollywood proportions here... “The challenge of trying to combine reality with extreme popcorn seemed worth taking on,” laughs Noyce. “How to walk the tightrope of maintaining an even tone while you're dealing with a story where your allegiance to the central character keeps shifting. You love her, you hate her, she's good, she's bad. Who is she, *what* is she?”

And Noyce is still on that tightrope. Working alongside his Oscar-winning DoP Robert Elswit (*There Will Be Blood*), he was still tinkering with *Salt*'s colour-grading when *Total Film* spoke to him, trying to find the right balance between supreme escapism and gritty realism. “With bright contrast, it becomes a popcorn, cartoony scene; but colour it like a PT Anderson movie and you get deeper, arresting imagery.” Which approach is Noyce favouring? “Well, it's both...”

‘Roland Emmerich blew up the White House, but we beat it up’

LORENZO DI BONAVENTURA



Whether this eclectic approach ends up paying dividends is the great unknown, but if *Salt* hits its target, then di Bonaventura predicts the birth of a new spy franchise.

“I think we're giving the audience something new,” he says, “and as such I think they'll want to see more of her.”

“Make piquant or more interesting...” We're not the first to say it, nor will we be the last, but should Daniel Craig ever get fed up with shaken Martinis, gorgeous girls and the licence to kill, Bond's franchise-makers could do far worse than consider giving 007 his own gender reassignment. The name's Jolie, Angelina Jolie... **TF**

Salt opens on 20 August and will be reviewed in a future issue of Total Film.



Spies like us

The changing face of cinema's secret agents...

OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR...

Once upon a time, in Nazi-occupied France or otherwise, the rules of the spy game were clear. The Germans were the baddies (as 1914's *The German Spy Peril* announced), and espionage meant military infiltration by men, usually with dodgy accents. War infected everything: author John Buchan (*The 39 Steps*) worked in propaganda; Peter Lorre fled Germany (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*); even Fritz Lang's *Spies* (1928) was an attempt to sooth the national psyche with escapism. Instead of gadgets,

Hitch's *39 Steps* adap relied on human database Mr Memory, a timely macguffin/reminder that the Nazi threat was, first and foremost, an ideological one.

IN COLD BLOOD

A paranoid period stained by the shadow of insidious nuclear stalemate, the Cold War sent the spy film off in two directions, like a double agent. Appropriately for a victor-less conflict, *The Ipcress File* and *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* showed espionage as a dirty, deadly serious job for "seedy squalid bastards". Bond had other ideas, particularly as regards anonymity. Although reacting to real situations (Russian spies, the Chinese nuclear threat, the space race etc), he was more Hugh Hefner than Mata Hari, relying on unlikely gadgets and unfeasibly named ladies to keep the British end, irrefutably, up.

HAPPY CAMPERS

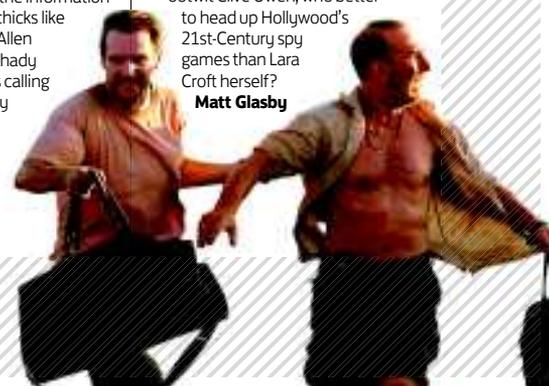
Mercilessly spoofed in Woody Allen's *What's Up Tiger Lily*, the original *Casino Royale* and, er, *Dr Goldfoot And The Bikini Machine*, the spy became a laughing stock under the stewardship of Roger Moore's Bond (from 1973's *Live And Let Die* to 1985's *A View To A Kill*). Increasingly apolitical, the series reflected the relative safety of the times by retreating into self-reflexivity, taking its cues from blaxploitation, kung fu and sci-fi rather than the real world. The likes of Mary Goodnight and Holly Goodhead were good-time girls helping Bond forget his brutal past as quickly as the baby-boomers had. It worked.

A STAR IS BOURNE

When the illusion of national security toppled along with the Twin Towers, a brutal new breed of spy emerged from the rubble. Matt Damon's Jason Bourne and Daniel Craig's retooled Bond weren't fighting for king or country; they were killers, destabilising governments and taking down errant moneymen. They didn't need guns or gadgets – their bodies were weapons enough and gadgets aren't to be trusted in the information age. Though kick-ass chicks like Judi Dench and Joan Allen barked orders, it was shady government agencies calling the shots, quite literally in the case of Bourne, an assassin so covert that even he wasn't sure which side he was on.

GREED IS GOOD

With today's world divided into economic interests, corporate spies exploit ethical grey areas to help their companies stay firmly in the black. Everything – from *Duplicity's* Julia Roberts can outwit Clive Owen, who better to head up Hollywood's 21st-Century spy games than Lara Croft herself? **Matt Glasby**



COVER STORY

TOTAL FILM'S TOP 10 FEMALE SPIES

Espionage never looked so good...

EMMA PEEL

DIANA RIGG/
UMA THURMAN

THE AVENGERS

(1966-1968 & 1998)

A brainbox, master in martial arts and expert fencer, Mrs Peel drove a racy Lotus Elan at breakneck speeds and paraded dangerous curves in her signature black leather catsuit. As physically and mentally capable as her toff partner John Steed (Patrick Macnee) and as sharp with her tongue as she was with her foil, Emma Peel was a man's fantasy – and a woman's heroine. Independent, stiff upper-lipped (her pilot hubby was MIA), Rigg played her with sass and a twinkle in her kohl-rimmed eye. A shame then that Thurman's more leaden version won points only for services to Lycra.



TATIANA ROMANOVA

DANIELA BIANCHI

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

(1963)

Italian actress Bianchi certainly looked the part of a beautiful Russian spy deployed by SPECTRE's Rosa Klebb to seduce Connerly's 007, but she didn't sound it. Her accent was so thick she was dubbed by RSC thesp Barbara Jefford as she pouted prettily round Cold War Istanbul, but her contribution to movie spy history is considerable. The saucy scene where she and Bond first meet in a hotel room (him: towel, her: velvet choker) has been used as an audition test for every actor who subsequently tried out for the role of 007. "I think my mouth is too big," she purrs like a true Mata Hari. "No, it's just the right size," says Bond leaning in. Suckered!



JANE SMITH

ANGELINA JOLIE

MR & MRS SMITH

(2005)

As far as John Smith knew, his chic wife was an office drone who made elegant dinners for him in their elegant house. Turns out The Missus is a trained killer with an armoury of weapons in her closet and his demise on her to-do list. OK, so Jane is more hitwoman than spook, but her globetrotting antics, hi-tech arsenal and fierce combat skills would give Mr Bond a run for his money any day, while Jolie plays her with tongue jammed firmly in cheek and a balletic physicality honed from previous *Tomb Raider* missions. This vampy, ruthless assassin who wrestles through broken glass with the same passion she deploys for sex is one we'd like on house protection duties.



BRIDGET VON HAMMERSMARK

DIANE KRUGER

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS

(2009)

WW2 German actress turned double agent Bridget von Hammersmark is bright, beautiful and brave. Not content with emoting daring on the silver screen, Hammersmark facilitates an Allies gang (select Basterds and a posh Brit) dropping in on a Nazi film night in gay Paris for an explosive comeuppance. But not before she's used her wiles and seduction on a rural French inn full of German officers to try and stop bloody hell kicking off. Despite not succeeding she sucks up getting shot, tears her wound with an evening gown and literally limps on – ultimately playing the price for her guts. Exemplary conduct.



SAMANTHA CAINE/CHARLY BALTIMORE

GEENA DAVIS

THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT

(1996)

Long before Jason Bourne had his first bump to the head, there was another amnesiac spy roaming undercover. Davis was icily fantastic as the Amazonian über-spy, Sam Caine (anagram of 'amnesiac', see?) who's been absent-mindedly living as a soccer mom for nearly a decade. That killer past comes back to her when dispatching an attacker with lethal skills she never knew she had. A switch up from sweaters and muffins to peroxide bob and uzi and Charly the spy is back. The perfect combo then, a MILF who bakes up a storm and cooks the goose of bad guys. Brings new meaning to the phrase 'My mum is going to kill me...'



SYDNEY BRISTOW JENNIFER GARNER

ALIAS
(2001-2006)
Forget *Daredevil* and *Elektra*. To us, Mrs Affleck will always be never-knowingly overdressed super agent Sydney Bristow in superior TV show *Alias*. Flip-flopping between ditzy college girl and globetrotting killer for the CIA, Bristow certainly had skills. She spoke upwards of 30 different languages during her five-year stint, excelled at Krav Maga and rocked a variety of male-fantasy wigs and costumes. Not a gal to get close to, mind – Sydney's fiancé was offed by her employers in season one and her subsequent dates, roommates and chums generally turn out to be dodgy. Even her parents weren't what they seem. Bet her shrink bill is massive.



ALICIA HUBERMAN INGRID BERGMAN

NOTORIOUS
(1946)
The Yank daughter of an SS spy, Huberman is coaxed into marrying a Nazi living in Brazil by US agent Devlin (Cary Grant) in order to scupper plans to construct a nuclear bomb (with some uranium hidden in a wine bottle). Apparently producer David O Selznick originally wanted Vivien Leigh to play the role, but director Alfred Hitchcock stood firm and demanded Bergman for the part. It's a coup: Bergman plays a woman with a wild past and determination to serve her country with staggering class and steely vulnerability. She risks a slow and painful death in the name of espionage and looks fabulous doing it in Edith Head costumes. Bravo.



JINX HALLE BERRY

DIE ANOTHER DAY
(2002)
The traditional female role in James Bond films involves screaming, being taken hostage and hopping into bed, but Jinx was a new breed of sidekick. She's an all-action NSA operative who can keep up with Her Maj's secret agent in the field, bedroom and bar. This gal can knife fight her way out of a nose-diving airplane and slo-mo slink out of the ocean in an orange bikini like a good 'un. And she matches Mr B for innuendos ('Now there's a mouthful'). Berry described her as "the next evolution of Bond girl" and certainly without her snarky backchat we wouldn't have had Eva Green's *Vesper Lynd*, or without her gung-ho action, Olga Kurylenko's gutsy *Camille Montes*.



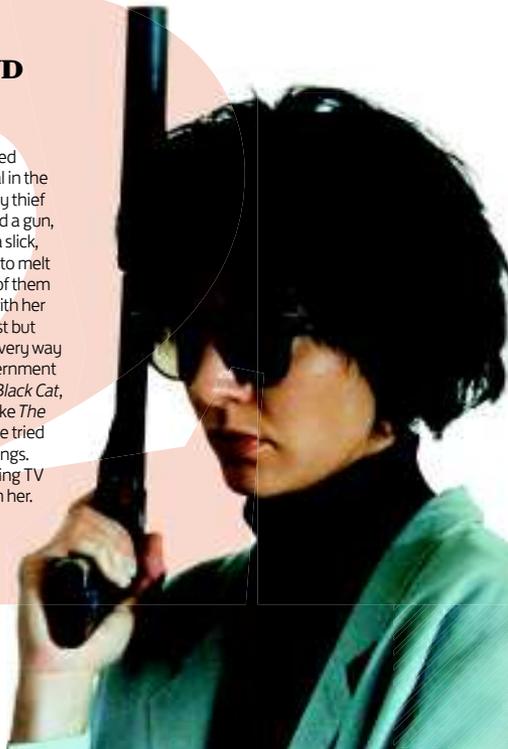
EVELYN SALT ANGELINA JOLIE

SALT
(2010)
If you're looking for a hard-as-nails superspy without a Y chromosome cluttering up her DNA then look no further. Trained in everything from explosives to unarmed combat, infiltration to marksmanship, computer hacking to topiary (alright, we may have made that last one up...), she's the pride of the CIA. And there's a lot of the Bourne about Salt, from her lethal hand-to-hand expertise to her fast thinking and parkour-style building jumping. This chick is smart, fit, cunning, dangerous – everything any self-respecting 00 agent is these days. More intriguing, though – whose side is she on? We love a mystery...



NIKITA ANNE PARILLAUD

NIKITA
(1990)
The French teen delinquent turned government liquidator is a natural in the spy business. A drugged-out petty thief snatched from prison and handed a gun, slip of a girl Nikita blossoms into a slick, fast and ruthless hitwoman, able to melt into crowds, vamp with the best of them and also maintain a 'civilian' life with her ordinary Joe. Shame it doesn't last but while it does Nikita is kick-ass in every way and the blueprint for female government emissaries. Hong Kong actioner *Black Cat*, Bridget Fonda's Hollywood remake *The Assassin* and TV series *Nikita* have tried to offshoot from her cool beginnings. Maybe Maggie Q's new take, hitting TV screens in the autumn, will match her.



ALLSTAR, LFI, PA, KOBAL, REX