

TOP FIFTY  
ACTION HEROES

11



TOM CRUISE IN *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE*

# ETHAN HUNT

"YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT ME—WHY?"

BY NATHAN LEE ADAMUS

PHOTO: ANDREW HAY / GLOBE PHOTOS / IMAGES

The iconic scene where Ethan Hunt steals the NOC list from the CIA headquarters in Langley.

**Luther Stickell:**

**“You really think we can do this.”**

**Ethan Hunt:**

**“We’re going to do it.”**

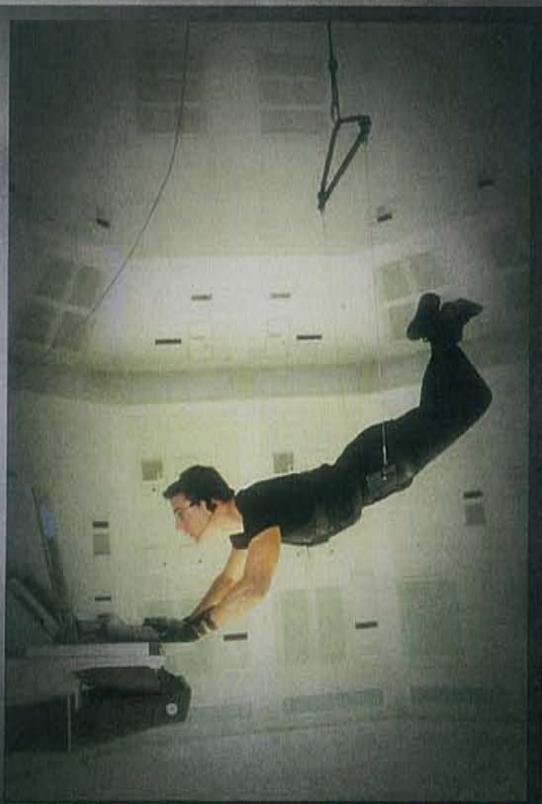
—*Mission: Impossible*

**F**or those “young” enough to remember both renditions of the *Mission: Impossible* television series, the core formula remains relatively unaltered in the films. A message is delivered via some form of digital media: A senior agent provides a brief synopsis of the impossible mission, and then the message self-destructs in 10 seconds. Poof! But, there is one major difference between the iconic TV series and the movies: Ethan Hunt.

Contrary to what many remember, Hunt was not a character on either TV series. He was never played by Preter Graves or Steven Hill. He wasn't the son of IMF (Impossible Mission Force) agent Jim Phelps. Hunt's character was designed specifically for Tom Cruise who, over the course of four motion pictures, has taken every opportunity to expand on the character's development. Hunt is now far more than a technological magician and martial artist, he's a family man wrought with emotion, thanks to Cruise.

## APPEARANCES

*Mission: Impossible* (1996)  
*Mission: Impossible 2* (2000)  
*Mission: Impossible 3* (2006)  
*Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* (2011)  
*Mission: Impossible 5* (2015)



## A MAN ON A MISSION

Ethan Matthew Hunt is a senior field agent for IMF, a heavily trained covert operations agency tasked with extremely dangerous missions. After flying solo for a good portion of the first movie, Hunt transitions into a dedicated leader capable of assembling the perfect unit of misfit soldiers. Using a mix of hand-to-hand combat, stealth tactics, top-secret gadgets and disguises, Hunt and his team attempt to infiltrate the enemy and thwart their plans.

**“Failure to a terrorist is just a rehearsal for success.”**

—Ethan Hunt (*Mission Impossible - Ghost Protocol*)

## WELL DISGUISED

One of the recurring props used throughout the television shows and the films are intricate masks. In *Mission: Impossible*, a high-tech 3D printing device is used to create a flawless facial reproduction that Hunt uses in conjunction with a vocal device to assume the persona of another character.

In episode 160 of *MythBusters*, Adam and Jamie attempt to swap faces and fool some of their friends. A special-effects department designed life-like masks and both mythbusters received vocal and body-language training so they could mimic each other's tendencies. Most of the test subjects were visually fooled by the disguises from distances over five feet, but felt something was awry as soon Adam and Jamie spoke. *MythBusters* determined that the scene from *Mission: Impossible* wasn't entirely impossible to pull off under certain circumstances.

**Ethan Hunt:**  
“I’m part of an agency ... called the IMF.”

**Julia Mead:**  
“What’s that stand for?”

**Ethan Hunt:**  
“Impossible Mission Force.”

**Julia Mead:**  
[chuckles] “Shut up.”

—*Mission: Impossible 3*



## FORMER CAST RECEPTION



PHOTO BY MURRAY CLOSE/GETTY IMAGES

Some former cast members of the television series were reportedly disgusted by Jim Phelps' (Jon Voight) portrayal in *Mission: Impossible*.

Greg Morris, who portrayed Barney Collier in the original television series, was so appalled by Phelps' portrayal that he left before the film ended. Peter Graves reportedly turned down the role of Phelps when he caught wind of the script. Martin Landau, who played Rollin Hand in the '60s and '70s TV series, criticized the texture of the film stating, "It was basically an action-adventure movie and not [a] Mission."

## HUNT'S TRUSTY SIDEKICK

Although there are several IMF agents who make repeat performances in the film series, none are as memorable as Ving Rhame's Luther Stickell. Stickell is the only other character besides Hunt to appear in all four motion pictures. It's hard to imagine Hunt without Stickell, and the interaction between the two characters is a highlight of the series.

"Computers are a b\*tch," according to Luther Stickell in *Mission: Impossible*. Ving Rhames appears in all four movies.

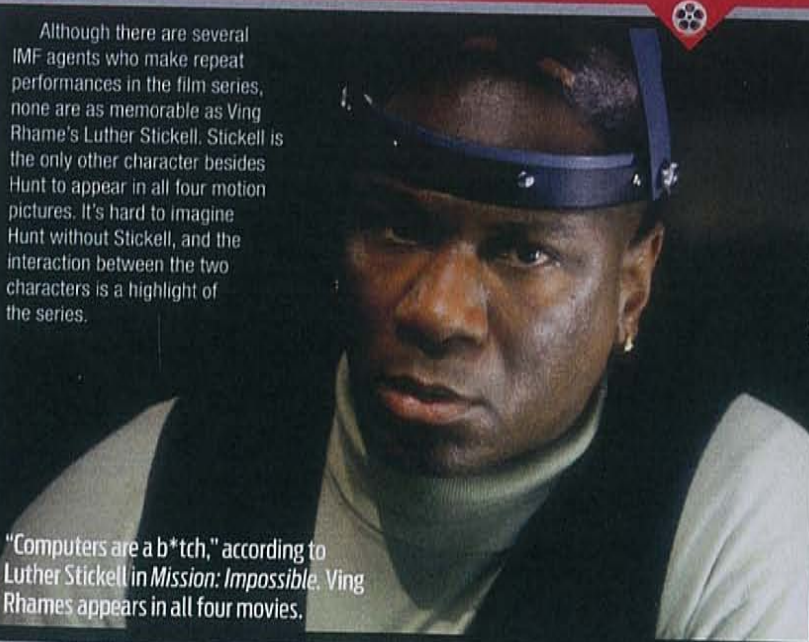


PHOTO BY MURRAY CLOSE/GETTY IMAGES

## RETURN TO FORM

After the mixed reviews of the first film and John Woo's forgettable *Mission: Impossible 2*, many assumed the series would be scrapped. After directors David Fincher and Joe Carnahan bailed on the third installment, the end of the series almost seemed inevitable. However, Cruise was such a fan of his character that he sought out *Alias* director J.J. Abrams to resurrect the franchise.

Abrams takes the series back to its roots with a daring mission to thwart international terrorist Owen Davian (played by the late Phillip Seymour Hoffman). Abrams later went on to reboot the *Star Trek* franchise and is currently in the process of filming *Star Wars: Episode VII*.