

P. CANBY, Vincent
SO 04.01.4 The Spook
who SAT by the
Door

NEW YORK TIMES
22 SEP 1973

Screen: Using the C.I.A.

Ex-Agent in 'Spook Who Sat by the Door'

By VINCENT CANBY

In "The Spook Who Sat by the Door," Dan Freeman (Lawrence Cook), a mildmannered, bespectacled, black social worker who seems to know his place, allows himself to become the token by which the Central Intelligence Agency becomes integrated.

There is, of course, no thought of ever sending Dan into the field. Black men, otherwise invisible, have a tendency to be conspicuous as spies. They stand out. Dan is kept around the home office where he says "yes, sir" and "no, sir," and escorts sightseeing parties through the nonclassified sections. That, however, is just one side of Dan.

The other side is Dan Freeman as the superblack nationalist. After Dan has learned everything that the C.I.A. has to teach him about guerilla warfare and weaponry, he returns to Chicago to organize a black revolution that, at the end of the film, is about to bring white America to its knees.

Like Dan Greenlee's novel, on which it is based, "The Spook Who Sat by the Door" is a difficult work to judge coherently. It is such a mixture of passion, humor, hindsight, prophecy, prejudice and reaction that the fact that it's not a very well-made movie, and is seldom convincing as melodrama, is almost beside the point.

The Cast

THE SPOOK WHO SAT BY THE DOOR, directed by Ivan Dixon; screenplay by Sam Greenlee and Melvin Clay, based on novel by Mr. Greenlee; produced by Mr. Dixon and Mr. Greenlee; music: Herbie Hancock; director of photography, Michael Hugg; editor, Michael Kahn; a Bonart, Ltd. film, distributed by United Artists. Running time: 102 minutes. At the De Moya Theater, South Avenue at 47th Street, and Juler 2 Theater, Third Avenue at 83rd Street. This film has been classified PG.

Dan Freeman..... Lawrence Cook
Dunomey Queen..... Paula Lawrence
Joy..... Janet League
Dakson..... U. A. Preston
Do-Daddy Doan..... Paul Butler
Sted Davis..... Dan Blackely
Proty Willie..... David Lemieux
General..... Byron Morrow
Carstairs..... Jack Aaron

The rage it projects is real, even though the means by which that rage is projected are stereotypes. Black as well as white.

Mr. Greenlee, who adapted his novel for the screen with Melvin Clay, and co-produced the film with Ivan Dixon, the director, couldn't care less about convincing white audiences of anything except black anger. The white characters are even more idiotic than can easily be explained by their roles as C.I.A. officials and United States Senators. The blacks are either poetic proles or members of the corrupted black middle class.

"This is not about hating white folks," Freeman says as the black revolution is about to begin. "This is about loving freedom enough to fight and die for it."

In spite of what Dan Freeman says, the film equates the two. "The Spook Who Sat by the Door" stacks its cards, and in doing so, it raises black consciousness by trivializing several hundred years of black neglect.