Spies in movies are suave, drink martinis and they are martial arts experts if they are men; and they are mysterious, speak many languages, are gorgeous and glamorous if they are women. Movies are movies, of course. Reality is much more mundane. A spy could be anyone from a scientist to a teacher; and it could be argued that most embassy employees everywhere are - to some degree - spies, due to the very nature of their job, although their salaries certainly can’t buy an Aston Martin. When caught, spies can be sometimes swapped for other spies, as if they were merchandise. Real spies are also not necessarily very good agents.

The Russian group arrested in the US last year was apparently made up of not very successful sleeper agents. In a highly-publicized swap, however, they were exchanged for accused American spies held in Russia, who were probably not very good spies either. The Russians were flown together, rather unglamorously, to Vienna, before being sent from there to Mother Russia.

Times have changed, and failed secret agents are not necessarily sent to Siberia anymore. After the 10 men and women returned to Russia, it was President Dmitri Medvedev himself who gave them top state honours, and they even sang patriotic songs with Prime Minister Putin, once an intelligence agent himself. Not exactly old school.

The network, called the Illegals Program by the US Justice Department, is said to have used very amateurish tradecraft, in some cases downright embarrassing. And in fact they were uncovered before they even started doing any serious spying. That didn’t stop the Russian government from receiving them as heroes.

At least one of those spies has become an instant celebrity. Anna Chapman was clearly different from the rest. She actually looked like one of those secret agents we love to see in films. Not incredibly successful as a spy -despite being the daughter of a once high-ranking KGB officer- Anna Vasil’evna Kushchyenko (the name on her Russian passport) has proven to be more than successful with the media. Not only has she posed as a Bond girl for the Russian edition of Maxim magazine, she was also hired as an advisor to a Russian bank, she has been appointed a leader of the Molodaya Gvardia, the youth branch of Vladimir Putin’s political party, and her name is being used to advertise anything from watches to clothing, beer or vodka. She is writing a book, she has just launched a poker game and an iPhone app. She has even registered her name as a trademark in Russia.

International media also seems to love Anna Chapman. Agent 90-60-90, as the Russian press already calls her, for example, has returned to the US, in the form of nude photos, in the January issue of Playboy. These photographs were made public by her British ex-husband Alex Chapman.

Also in the US, herobuilders.com has created action figure Anna Chapman Spy Girl “The Predator” and “The Spy I could love”, which are sold online for $29.95. She has reportedly received an offer to pose for Playboy as well.

Is Hollywood next? Wouldn’t it be deliciously ironic to see femme fatale Anna Chapman incarnating a Russian secret agent in the next James Bond film, using all her charm to try to extract secrets from Daniel Craig. Bet Daniel won’t mind.