

## I DREAM OF JEANNIE FIRST SEASON 1965



### SERIES ONE CREDITS

Directed by *Gene Nelson, Hal Cooper* and *Claudio Guzman*. Produced, created and frequently written by *Sidney Sheldon*. Original Music by *Richard Weiss*. Editing by *William Martin* Special Effects by *Richard Albain* Cinematography by *Lorthrop North* Animation by *Fritz Freleng*: Series One 30 episodes total length: 139 episodes of 25 minutes each. Distributed by: *Screen Gems*. Companies: *An NBC Production*. First shown on television on September 18<sup>th</sup> 1965. First DVD release 2007. Box Set Complete Series 2012. Rating 90%.

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Written Without Prejudice



## QUEEN JEANNIE

*Wikipedia*

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Barbara\\_Eden\\_Larry\\_Hagman\\_I\\_Dream\\_of\\_Jeannie\\_1969.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Barbara_Eden_Larry_Hagman_I_Dream_of_Jeannie_1969.jpg)

## CAST

- **Barbara Eden** as Jeannie
- **Larry Hagman** as Major Anthony "Tony" Nelson
- **Bill Daily** as Major Roger Healey
- **Hayden Rorke** as Colonel/ Doctor Alfred Bellows
- **Barton MacLane** as Major-General Martin Peterson
- **Richard Keil** as the Giant
- **Judy Carne** as Doctor Bellows's niece
- **Philip Ober** as Brig. Gen. Wingard Stone
- **Karen Sharpe** as Melissa Stone
- **Billy Mummy** as the boy next door
- **Henry Corden** as Jeannie's father
- **J. Carrol Naish** as Bilejik, Jeannie's grandfather
- **Lurene Tuttle** as Jeannie's mother

## THE BACKGROUND

In September 1964 the television situation comedy *Bewitched* premiered across America with much of the world soon following. It was a smash hit. The show became so popular that it has often been credited with reviving the popularity of the name of its main character, Samantha. Few American sit-coms have ever equalled it in popularity and smash hits have imitations, rivals and other subsequent productions following in the genre they started. *My Living Doll*, *Witches*, *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are just some leading examples.

The genre here was the comic fantasy of the woman with magic powers living in modern America. There had been a predecessor. Veronica Lake in the wonderfully whimsical comedy *I Married a Witch* (1942) was the example and that title describes the plot to that film and the first episode of *Bewitched*. On their wedding night while they still have their clothes on Samantha (Elizabeth Montgomery) proves to Darren (Dick York) that she is a witch with real supernatural powers. Let us leave the obvious Freudian interpretations alone. Being a married couple makes for one of

the differences between this couple and Jeannie and Major Tony, who only marry in the last season. *I Dream of Jeannie* did differ to *Bewitched* in two important aspects. It was not only in the magical woman genre, but seamlessly combined that with another genre, that of the American military comedy which *Sargeant Bilko* started. *Mc Hale's Navy*, *F Troop*, and *Gomer Pyle USMC* followed, but this genre was hit by the Vietnam War and as the casualty lists came in laughing at the military world became difficult. To some extent by focusing on NASA Sheldon's show did not suffer this fate. A second difference between the two shows was that *I Dream of Jeannie*, particularly Eden's performance caught the exuberance. Sensuality, desire for fun, rebelliousness and naiveté which characterised the swinging sixties.

Despite these important differences similarities between *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie* abound, often down to little details. Here is a list, almost all of them were in *Bewitched* first:

Jeannie and Samantha both have magic powers which they can use to do anything.

Samantha invokes her magic by tweaking her nose. This is accompanied by sound effects.

Jeannie folds her arms, tilts her head and adopts a commanding facial expression. This is accompanied by sound effects.

Samantha has a family of witches and warlocks who complicate her life with Darren.

Jeannie has a family in ancient Bagdad/ Babylon/ who complicate her life with Major Tony Nelson.

Darren's boss Larry Tate (David White) senses something odd and inexplicable is happening with Darren and while suspicious cannot prove anything: Samantha foils him.

Tony's senior officer Colonel Alfred Bellows (Hayden Rorke) senses something odd and inexplicable is happening with Darren and while suspicious cannot prove anything: Jeannie foils him.

*I Dream of Jeannie* premiered on NBC television on September 18<sup>th</sup> 1965. It was not only inspired by *Bewitched*, but also by a 1964 feature film *The Brass Bottle* in which future Jeannie Barbara Eden was the love interest and Burl Ives was the troublesome if naïve genie, turning up in modern day California to cause mischievous havoc. Prolific Broadway playwright and best-selling future novelist Sidney Sheldon dreamed up the idea of *I Dream of Jeannie* and became the driving force behind the new series. It was only expected to run one season, but it gained a loyal following and ran for five, until May 1970 when Jeannie and Tony finally marry. In the first series ample evidence appears that it was not meant to last long. While almost all the others in television production were going to colour the first series was filmed in black and white to save \$400-\$500 an episode. Sidney Sheldon forked out that amount to film the second series in colour. Initially NBC executives complied with the puritanical census code rather than spend time and money defying it. As the show gained in popularity and the sexual revolution percolated into prime time television this policy faded. An amused Sheldon recalled how at the show's start he would get memos about Jeannie and Tony living together and about her navel being in sight. Barbara Eden recalled how she was expecting to be dismissed and therefore offered to her resignation for falling pregnant, but the filmmakers said no and merely shot from the midriff up. Despite the show's popularity, it never overtook it's rival.

So if *Bewitched* was the original and the more popular, why is *I Dream of Jeannie* the one being reviewed? Because this reviewer finds it to be the better show for reasons given at various points below.

Episode One begins at Cape Canaveral where astronaut Major Anthony Nelson is blasted off into space on a mission going wrong. He lands on a beach, flustered and worried. Looking around, he finds an exotic looking bottle and opens it. Out comes the smoke or mist which morphs into a beautiful blonde in an exotic Arabian nights dancers' costume. Seeing Major Tony her eyes light up in love at first sight as she bows, hands clasped in submission to a stunned into immobility Major Tony. When she speaks it is in mellifluous Arabic. After trying English he says " Oh

Genie I wish you could speak English” – so she does. At that point the global audience burst into laughter and were won over.

Major Tony is then told how, once human, she was punished by being made a genie. Her last master punished her by putting her back in her bottle and threw her into the sea. Whoever frees her and possesses the bottle becomes her master, therefore Tony is now her master and she can do whatever he wishes – make mansions, animals or piles of gold at a nod of her head, travel through time turn up anywhere, create imaginary people... Instead Tony wishes for and gets a rescue team in a helicopter.



*The body language says it all. On their first meeting, she is tender, he is wary assessing and resistant.*

Like his joyless realisation of what Jeannie is, this first duty first wish hints at a problem with Tony rather than Jeannie. It indicates that his nerdish, nearly humourless sense of duty will be as much of a source of hilarious trouble as her combination of naivete, love of mischief and ignorance of the modern world. He actually tries to leave her embottled

on the beach, but with her amorous intent and her magical ability, successfully gets her bottle in his luggage sent home to Cocoa Beach Florida.

Once there she starts saving him from his future (which he cannot foresee as being dismal) which seems wonderful to him and to others, notably his commanding officer and future father in law, Brigadier-General. Wingard Stone (Philip Ober) and his daughter Melissa (Karen Sharpe) These two are anal retentive humourless control freaks who sense that something has changed with Tony. Jeannie senses that something should to save him and as she says “Master she is not right for you.” Melissa comes to the same conclusion when she suddenly visits Tony’s home and Jeannie emerges from his bedroom wearing only his shirt, all of her shapely legs exposed on screen. This Lubitsch touch was about as suggestive as prime time American television could be in 1965 and this scene’s three performers wisely say nothing; their faces say it all.

Engagement broken, Tony has Jeannie stay in his home, but only after getting her to agree to a platonic relationship. When she tries to kiss him he reminds her of agreeing to this platonic relationship. Her response is that she only agreed because she didn’t know what platonic meant!

On their return, Tony’s friend Major Roger Healey (Bill Daily) and their superior Colonel Bellows (Hayden Rorke) also notice a difference in Tony and Bellows a psychiatrist, begins an investigation which is amiable and intending to be therapeutic - at first. As Tony repeatedly blocks him Bellows becomes more suspicious, more hostile, more of a thwarted nemesis. The wry comedy here develops because a psychiatrist is made to seem deluded, obsessive and strange by his attempts to make what can only be inexplicable (outside the world of magic) explicable.

When Tony says that Jeannie is definitely not air force, she offers to fly by magic. This shows that a battle is on, between Jeannie’s whimsical ways and the dreary rule bound world of NASA and the Air force. Behind those obvious forces a bigger conflict continues, between Jeannie as a force for 1960s style merry anarchy and American society, not just NASA, as a force for repressive order. The battle is not so much for



*Flying Jeannie style*



*Major Roger Healey*



*Colonel Bellows*

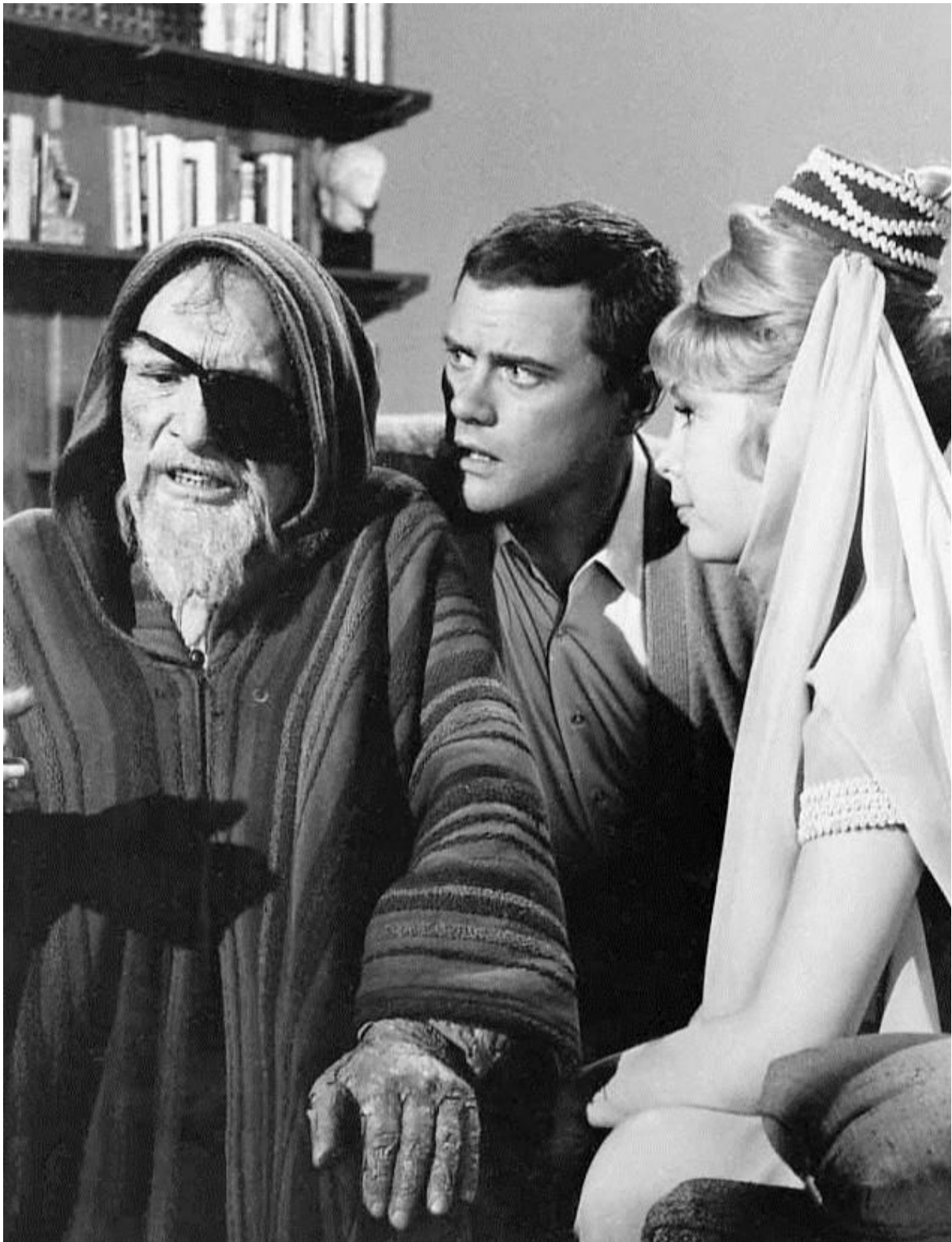




*In time warped Bagdad Tony finds muggings can be even worse than in New York. Richard Keil is the tall one.*

winning a victory for either of these forces, but for the soul of Major Tony Nelson. In some situations it seems Tony's frazzled near panic for a return to order is a victory for repression, especially as Jeannie restores Tony's desired order, but increasingly his half suppressed laughter, gleaming eyes and way of quickly inventing absurd solutions to Jeannie's disorder suggest that she is beguiling him - and she is.

This is made clear in the introductory voice over when her bottle is spun and we are told that she is playing "spin the astronaut." Indeed. At the end of one episode she faces the screen and gleefully says "Oh master! Master you have so much to learn!" Here we have a delicious irony. Because he has the bottle Tony possesses Jeannie, who habitually calls him Master and obeys his every wish. By doing so and by trying to please him she continually leaves him frazzled,



*Jeannie has brought grandfather from Bagdad to Florida so Tony can learn the intricacies of a mysterious magical process called desalinisation.*

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/J.\\_Carroll\\_Naish\\_Larry\\_Hagman\\_Barbara\\_Eden\\_I\\_Dream\\_of\\_Jeannie\\_1965.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/J._Carroll_Naish_Larry_Hagman_Barbara_Eden_I_Dream_of_Jeannie_1965.jpg)

bewildered and befuddled and usually she ends up in control, obeying his plea, saving him or restoring disrupted military protocols which threaten him. He is also becoming habituated to her world of magic, thinking it nothing unusual that at breakfast meals and coffee literally fly to his table, or that a large swimming pool appears in his yard for a morning dip and vanishes when unneeded. Both are fish out of water in their different worlds. The producers wisely decided to make Jeannie an ancient princess located in 1965 Florida and Tony ignorant of ancient Bagdad's ways when they time travel. The show's gaudy fantasy of Bagdad is delightfully preposterous, even by 1960s Hollywood standards.

All this adds up to being more fun than we find in *Bewitched*. Yet the main difference that puts *I Dream of Jeannie* ahead is in the performances of the leads. Elizabeth Montgomery would grow tired of her role in *Bewitched* and go on to work mainly and memorably in television films. This was wise. While she was more than adequate as Samantha, her forte was in dramatic roles, as she would prove through her later work in that field. In the 1970s she started giving some of the best performances seen in television films. In *Bewitched* she played an astute down to earth (pun intended) American housewife who happens to have magic powers. She amuses: Jeannie entrances.

To some extent *Bewitched* was more sedate and more sedentary because Dick York's injury meant it had to be. His severe back injury usually precluded rushing around or fast movement. Film set walls were made to support him and scenes and episodes were written to accommodate his injury or necessary absences. By 1969 his worsening health led him to being replaced at his own suggestion.

In contrast energetic Hagman and Eden are frequently kinetic, at times almost frenetic in their performances. Both give fast cracking one liners and bubbly personas. Jeannie is zany, sweetly naïve, vivacious with a sometimes mellifluous, sometimes vivacious voice full of her optimism and goodness. Decades after the show ended Sidney Sheldon enthusiastically described her as a dream girl and she is. She is also whimsicality incarnate.

The show has not dated as much as being over fifty would indicate. Since Saddam Hussein nobody can equate Bagdad with Arabian Nights scenarios anymore. After the Canadian Prime minister felt he had to publicly atone for being politically incorrect by wearing black makeup at a university students' Arabian Nights costume party, no depiction of ancient Arabia can be anything like Jeannie's fantasy world. If it did feminists would picket the studio and cause a furore. The episode where Jeannie's grandfather tries to enrich Tony through magic making a mysterious process called desalinisation work is very dated. Mobile phones would make many scenarios – and Jeannie's magic appearances obsolete. Cars the length of yachts went out of style by the 1980s. A television show where a woman calls a male master would cause nationwide feminist protests and a grown man and woman sharing a house without sexual involvement would seem stagey.

Even so, the zest, humour, whimsicality, energy and fun do not date, enjoy.

## **INTERESTING BITS AND PIECES**

Even just the 1965 series was noted for how many future film celebrities and stars appeared. These included Judy Carne, Jamie Farr, Dabney Coleman, Richard Keil, Billy Mumy and Maureen McGovern. Later performers would include some of the best known names on American television. Farrah Fawcett Majors. Paul Lynde (a *Bewitched* regular) Milton Berle, Bob Denver, Jim Backus, Arte Johnson, Mike Farrell, Don Rickles, Jackie Coogan, Sammy Davis Junior and Michael Ansara, Barbara Eden's husband at the time.

Mountains in Florida? In several shots supposedly set at the Nasa Base in Florida we can see mountains in the background. The NASA scenes were filmed at their base, but the one in California, where most of the series was filmed.

The 1972 song “Jean Genie” was not about Jeannie, but about the acclaimed French writer Jean Genet. So said David Bowie, the song’s composer.

Jeannie’s original bottle, which looks so exotic and Arabic, was actually a Jim Beam whiskey decanter. Due to breakages several others followed.



*Jeannie's bottle Courtesy Clip Art*

Decades after the series ended Eden and Hagman would show how the magic was worked in. They froze in position while the special effects team quickly moved in with their wires, machines and props.

Each 25 minute episode took a week to do. Mondays and Tuesdays were for writing, the middle days for acting and the reminder for putting in the special effects.

Jeannie dolls became popular.

Image Courtesy of clip art.



Several decades later Barbara Eden described these early days of the show as the happiest in her life. She certainly brought happiness into the lives of many.



*Finally Tony proposes and the story ends. Wikipedia*



**SIDNEY SHELDON**

**1917-2007**