

THE 007TH MINUTE

A BRIEF AND
VIOLENT SERIES
OF REVIEWS
PETTY ABUSE AND
JUVENILE SEXUAL IDIOM

BY JACQUES I.M. STEWART

WITH 24 ILLUSTRATIONS BY HEIKO BAUMANN

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a brief and violent series of reviews /
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A Commanderbond.net ebook

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Cover design, illustrations, layout and typesetting by Heiko Baumann

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A green broccoli is the central focus of the image. It has a large, textured head and a thick stalk. A bright red lightning bolt strikes diagonally from the top right towards the bottom left, passing behind the broccoli. The background is white.

Unburdened with any
desire to rewatch all of the Bond
films in the run up to the 50th anniversary,
Jacques Stewart genuinely couldn't be bothered
with all that effort, he thought it would be churlish not to
at least recognise it all in some way so plumped on just
watching a minute of each one, the OO-seventh minute of each.

He steeled himself to his brave endeavour (watching 24 minutes
of film – he deserves a medal) and what you get is this brief and
violent series of reviews / petty abuse and juvenile sexual idiom.

Some of what is to come may be outrageous
lies but following the lead of the
great green vegetable
himself, he can
cover that up
by asserting
that this
isn't science
fiction, it's

**SCIENCE
FACT!**

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What happens next sometimes happens in the summer, sometimes in winter. About three years since the last one. I think. After so many, it's hard to keep count.

The theatre is quiet; expectant. Doubtless an infant will start shrieking very shortly. That'll just ruin everything.

I'm not entirely sure why I'm here. Why I need to be. There are more pleasant things to watch. It's probably out of duty. I've been here before; far too often for it to be a novelty.

Roar!

Ru-ROOOOAAAAARrrRRRrrRR

Dots ping their way across the screen.

Bur-Bh-BM! Bur-Bh-BM!

Here we go again, then. It's likely to end up annoyingly disappointing and initial joy will wither to contempt.

...

But then I'm not the one actually giving birth, am I?



DR NO

SCIENCE FACT! #1

If you were to lay end-to-end every
VHS copy of Dr No ever sold in the
United States, you'd be a idiot.

Something puzzles me.

Let's say that the latest James Bond film is coldheartedly lumbering into view, ready to empty our minds and wallets, a childhood-catcher, pretending it offers sweet novelty. Helping it along, outlets accountable to common shareholders, the press and television emit cast interviews that brilliantly eke out whatever it is the publicists have cattleprodded this one's bolus of overpaid puppets into bleating.

THE 007TH MINUTE

Amidst the usual feculence about “We wanted to explore Bond’s inner life” – regardless of whether anyone asked them to – or “This Bond girl’s a really different Bond girl: she’s half carrot”, a common question seems to be “Have you actually seen *all of them?*”, with an affirmative answer being *newsworthy*. “N has *even* seen all the Bond films”.

Is gawping at readily available mass-market mild-to-mildewed thrills really any sort of challenge?

Yes.

To the patience.

Unburdened with desire to rewatch all of the Bond films to mark their 50th anniversary, genuinely could not be bothered with the *effort*, having been a “Bond fan” for eons – yeah, *pun* – I thought it would be churlish not to at least have recognised it in *some* way. Me done plumped on just watching a minute of each, the 007th minute to be precise (do you see what I did there? You must have. You read it. Poor you).

Fearing that observing the clock on the DVDmophone tick over between 0.06.00 to 0.07.00 would prove more engaging than the onscreen content, I steeled myself to my brave endeavour (watching 24 minutes of film – medal, now) and what you get in this petty abuse and juvenile sexual idiom is what I done thought of what I done saw.

Some of the below is outrageous lies – and equally outrageous to suggest it’s only “some” of the below – but following the lead of the great green vegetable himself, I can cover that up by asserting that this isn’t science fiction, it’s *science fact*. Additionally, I have a very old DVD player and doubtless the timings might be different on far

more sophisticated technology than mine but now you're reading the typing of someone who really does not care.

Prior to the 007th minute of Dr No, a moment to reflect on what's happened.

There's been a lot of highly colourful balls flung onto the screen, with another 90 minutes of the same to follow. Jamaica looks hot and glistening and sweaty and lovely and sleek and the natives are in their drink-serving and murdering place, so that's all good, hurrah, isn't the Empire super? What's left of it, anyway. A young lady with those great fifties tits like traffic cones has been paint-gunned with scarlet emulsion. Metaphorically significant; she was a woman with a *job* (the slattern), alone in a house, couldn't shoulder the responsibility, head full of knitting and bridge with the gels, patently had to die for such transgressions and, when she does, all laid out on the floor like the crimson-breasted floozy she is, she's like a relief-map of Nepal.

Cor!

All very shocking – actually really quite brutal. What could the unknowing-of-Bond audience seeking a quantum of solace in a flea-pit upon a winter 1962 evening have made of all of this? It's exotic and foreign and delicious and violent and Cor! More of these "thoughts" to follow. Anyway, we join the action at...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 DR NO

And here's Buddy Holly and Ross from Friends getting in a lather because W6N has gone off (I wouldn't say that; she's only been dead a few seconds. I'd still have a pop). Buddy Holly is sporting the most magnificent quiff, the tending of which punchblasted an unhealable chasm right through the ozone layer but that's OK because

it didn't exist in 1962. He's also wearing a pair of specs I recognise from photos of my paternal grandmother. As a plus, he's sporting a very natty, and foxy, navy cardigan which was subsequently homaged by Daniel Craig in *Quantum of Solace* when he visits that nice old codger in Italy and abducts him onto a 'plane to somewhere-or-other (science fact!).

It's a nice open plan office but it's not surprising they can't hear poor old W6N (and we know something they don't know, the clowns) because, temerity hopefully forgiven, it can't be easy to hear *secret* signals in *open plan*, above hearing about Maud's lady-operation, whether Richard Dimbleby is a hottie or a nottie and whether licking one's new asbestos pillows is a good idea or not. There might be a design flaw here but, granted it's a more muted set from Herr Adam than the sheer foaming lunacy that turns up later on, it's still a corker. I'd like an office like this. Especially if Buddy, Ross and their eyewear were hanging around; they would be fine pets and they could feed me muffins and tease their hair all they liked, the little rascallions.

Anyway, W6N's still not responding – why? Useless cow – and Buddy and Ross are being all very booted and suited / cardiganed and besporting upper lips not so much stiff as proudly boasting Roger Mortis. What a to-do! Hoots, crivens and jings ma boab! Apparently, Ross has tried both emergency frequencies (is two *really* enough? Smacks of unnecessary cost-cutting) and “received no joy there”, presumably because they picked up The Goons and The Clitheroe Kid, so *sympathies with* on that one.

Buddy Holly's solemn “Well, keep trying” – how vair British – is not a practical solution, is it? Look, honeysuckles, once you've unleashed the Scottish murderer and his pet hairpiece, you're better off trolling along to the woodbine-stenched espresso bar for a steaming

hot mug of chicory essence than “keeping trying” because, sorry to break it to you boys, she dead. Ooh, she dead big time. Lick my nips, she dead. There was red paint ’n’ everyfink.

Buddy, bless his little Dame Edna frames, has to persist, doesn’t he? Useless persistence – End of Empire in a nutshell. Perhaps he was set this as a target in his last Career Development Review – “We’ll tolerate the cardigan and the disturbing smell of singed aviation fuel as long as you just, y’know, persist fruitlessly and Britishly”. Notably this series is *not* about Head of Signals and his “persistence” but Alcoholic Ken-Doll and his proclivities for “murdering”, “insulting the natives” and “being rapey”. That, sorry to say Buddy, is now entertainment. Your time has passed. The Fifties are over. You were better off blissfully face deep in that fuselage, matey.

“Let me know as soon as they come up again,” he bothers us with. Fifty years on, and he’s still waiting. Science fact! Buddy Holly didn’t die; he’s just a *very* old man in the corner of a Pinewood soundstage waiting for the signal from W6N that still hasn’t come; bit like those weird islanders who haven’t yet heard that World War II has ended (a.k.a. the British).

Hmm, lovely old telephones and teacups and wire baskets, and look, there’s Daniel Craig in a smashing pullover doing some filing. Perhaps he’s “resting between jobs”. The set dressing is profound; quite what that self-same audience of a few paragraphs ago, those no-marks huddling in the cold and watching this nonsense for the first time, quite what they would come to make of sloping rooms with waffle-irons in the ceiling, underwater rocket-base things and nuclear reactors is anyone’s guess. It must have slutblown their tiny minds, minds full of rickets and Tommy Steele and rationing and black-market nylons and the Austin 7 and other tatty old slop.

Right, Buddy, it's an emergency so you need to speak into a Ministry of Works green telephone, the cord of which is leaving a jazzy pattern down his terracotta tie; it's just reefer madness, another psychedelic rush after those flashing coloured lights of five minutes ago. Behind him there's a map of somewhere unrecognisable but could be the western suburbs of London (i.e. everywhere else on Earth) and a blokey standing next to it is having the same problem as I am (one of them, anyway) and all the reading of the little names upon it is no help. And now he's drawing on the map, probably crayoning a spurting phallus over Staines or a pair of wazzo jubbies on Windsor Castle. His mind's been blown, man; those coloured balls, that's what did it. That Maurice Binder and his green dancing hot birds. I'm gone; solid gone. He might be Banksy. I do like his pullover; it looks warm.

There's a big knitwear thing going on, isn't there? All that rushing around in overtight suits and earpieces and flashy computers one sees these days and here they were, calmly getting on with the completely futile tasks of fighting the loss of power and, communing with a dead woman, with a nice cable-knit and horn-rimmed heads. That's style, gang. We may be useless but we have splendid garb.

OK, so we're an exhausting 25 seconds into this and we're now off to Le Cercle, bathed in an inappropriate red light. What could they be suggesting? A wobble on the camera there – OH MY GOD IT'S SHAKY CAM, THEY'VE RUINED THE BOND SERIES AFTER ALL OF THESE MINUTES, HOW DARE THEY POOH ON THEIR OWN LEGACY AND DO SHAKY CAMERAWORK. THAT CONFUSES MY BRAIN. *et cetera*. I am assuming it's because the camera operator is holding it one-handed and I'm not prepared to contemplate what he's doing with his other hand.

Becoming amused that it will be with 0.07 on the clock that they introduce James Bond to us... hmmm... deliberate?

What's this? Some bouncer trying to crash in without being a member. A disgrace. Hooray, he's been stopped by the bouncer. The world's smallest bouncer, admittedly, bit of a pørn dwarf to be honest, fits the brothel ambience, but a bouncer nonetheless (with a smashing waistcoat, I want I want I want). That's it son, beat him up, g'an glass the little [censored], bet he's wearing trainers as well.

Just look at the detail on this set. That painting behind the bouncer (let's call him Digby, I like that name, once had a terrapin called Digby) and this utter scoundrel (in what looks like a Harrow tie; I could have guessed. Tossers), that painting is a stolen Goya masterpiece called "Simon Le Bon" (science fact).

He's. Not. A. Member. Kill him! At the very least, Digby, you shouldn't have to lower yourself (not that you could, Shorty) to talk to this vile social-climber. He's obviously one of the lower orders trying to pass himself off as a gentleman. Seriously, Diggers – *look at him*.

A bottle green overcoat and a brown hat? What sort of absolute bumming ratbag is this? You'd expect better of the milkman or the sweep or the man who walks in front of one's car with a red flag. This is NOT a gentleman, Digby. He's parted his hair in a sinister way. He's probably left-handed and a homosexualist, although I accept those terms are interchangeable. Stab him. Do it. Listen to the way he's shouted out that he's looking for "Mr" James Bond. How uncouth. How Non-U. I suspect he lives in a semi-detached house and only has one maid. I suspect he plays Whist rather than Bridge. I suspect he's never bagged a German, nor been debugged by one. I suspect he thinks Darkies are good. Kill him. He buggers subalterns *more than* once a week, which is moral degeneracy. And now he's raising his eyebrow at you. He thinks he's Roger Moore. That might be enough to rescue him, admittedly. I still want him beat up real bad, though.

A three piece suit after 7 pm? *You've got to be joking*. He probably (this is horrific) drove himself there. And now he won't even give you his name; well, that must be a state secret, mustn't it, even though he's shouted "JAMES BOND" all over everywhere, the clot. Look, matey, the series isn't about *you* either; it's Secret Agent James Bond's series, not Wilfully Inappropriately Dressed Loser's series. Hie thee off back to whatever suburban grothole you were defecated out of and let's meet the hero, it's hero time, especially as there's only a thimbleful of seconds left to go.

That's right, hand Digby your card. I wonder what it says? Is it the sort you spend your lonely evenings putting in GPO telephone booths in the hope of attracting passing stevadores? "*A Very Secret (And Still Illegal) Service: I Roger More. More and More. Have A Funny Itch That Won't Go Away, To Be Truthful. Anyway, Call Me: Lewisham 555*". I'm not convinced that'll work with MR JAMES BOND but it's now plain that your shouting out his name wasn't stupidity, more a cri de couer. Bless. Only five more years to Wolfenden, and then it's boyganza. You can wait. And in fact, that's what you're going to have to do, as Digby says you can leave your coat "over there". He's pointing at the *bin*.

Nice drifty tracking shot following Digby down the stairs, past two old duffers and their crones who have the most amazing wigs, they look like something Louis XIV dragged in, along with most of this furniture. Look, a woman in a high-visibility orange tabard; must be the Chief Whore. I think that's how it works in such places. I. Would. Not. Know.

It's all clubby and lovely and smoky and a really very nice set, isn't it; ooh, plush. That Ken Adam wasn't all rocket silos and lairrrrrrs; sometimes he did nice things like this. Didn't he win an Oscar for Mad George King? Similar stuff, although I thought the scene with

the giant titanium airship raining down fire and blue wee on the Boston Tea Party was excessive. Still, an artist. The wallpaper is mahvellous. Can't see the carpet but I bet it's great.

You can tell it's gambling because they're talking French. It makes "turning over cards and seeing your score" much more dynamic and exotic to do it in French. A parallel is true of many pastimes. Water Polo is best commentated upon in Dutch, driving is more vibrant when the passenger is shouting in violently earthy Italian patois (hello Mrs Jim, what on Earth are you doing reading this, get back to work. Fetch my shoes) and Beach Volleyball is only acceptable in the language of love.

Them were Bond's hands, them were. We just seen his hands. Within the 007th minute 'n' all. Yay.

Hello you. Dunno your name (yet) but you're a lickle bit of a honey, aren't you? Nice scarlet dress. Single woman. Scarlet dress. Red light district. Scarlet dress. Speaks "French". Bet she does a lot of things French, yeah? *Fnarr*. What on Earth are they suggesting about this evident jezebel? Ooh, she's got plastic on the table in front of her. I think that's good, in "cards". I think the more plastic you get, the better you are. At "cards". Isn't it a thrilling thing, this "cards"? No, really.

OH MY SAINTED AUNT, YOU CAN SEE HER SHOULDERS. BOTH SHOULDERS. NAKED SHOULDERS. THIS IS TOTALLY INAPPROPRIATE AND I MUST WATCH IT SOME MORE TO MAKE SURE. IMAGINE IF THAT NICE BROOCH LET THE CRIMSON JEZEBEL'S DRESS SLIP FROM HER SHOULDERS. SHE WOULD BE NAKED. NAKED. VERY NAKED. HORRENDOUSLY NAKED. THE [CENSORED]. LOOK AT HER. LOOK AT HER. *LOOK AT HER*. THE DAUGHTER OF SODOM, SHE

MUST BURN. AFTER I'VE HAD A LOOK AT HER. IMAGINE HER. THE NAKEDNESS. OH, THE HUMANITY. THIS IS VILE AND CORRUPTING AND TOTALLY BRILLIANT.

That's a slightly stilted approach to her dialogue but, fair enough, she is acting in a foreign language and that can be tricky. Look at The Actor Pierce Brosnan and English, for example. Just look; don't, under any circumstances, listen. Having given that warning I will not be held responsible for your self-harming.

Damnation and filth, there's only two seconds to go, but at least we have a nice wide shot here and around the table we have:-

- a) an inanimate gilded object (played by The Actor Pearce Bronsnon in a mercifully non-speaking role). Probably an ashtray. This film is a disgrace! They show people smoking! They have Bond ordering someone of a different colour to lick his shoes! They have a man with metal hands! How does he dress himself? How does he wipe himself? How does he observe International Wank Day (November 1st), except in exquisite pain?
- b) hands, played by Hans (science fact!) who is holding a cigarette (for shame! He may as well be holding a burning cross; bastard). He has lots of plastic. He must be "good at cards". Such a talent.
- c) Roger Moore, who is holding his right hand in the air in what can only be described as a flagrantly camp manner.
- d) Croupier with his pizza flapper thing, because "cards" are hot and covered in melted cheese and you mustn't touch them. What, you play cards with your hands? You ratbuggering pleb. Do you eat with your hands too? Jesus.
- e) As we'll find out in a minute, Sylvia "the" Trench; hobbies include sluttiness, "cards", "golf" (whatever that is, sounds dirrrty) and

being spanked by the croupier with his pizza paddle. Scarlet woman surrounded by elderly men all sucking on hot phallic things. Subtle it ain't. Saucy, though, it is. Phwooarr.

- f) and, for that matter, g) a conjoined gestalt where a standing man has an older man growing out of his tummy, bit like Total Recall (the original; haven't seen the reheating and wisdom suggests avoiding it; it appears to be made of Ebola). A foretaste of the physical deformities beloved of the Bond films – Dr No's tinmitts, Blofeld's scar / lack of earlobes / withering scorn, Jaws' teeth and Ol' Jodrell-Ears Craig, etc.
- g) as above, still there, smoking away like a burnt baby cut out tumwards. An odd image. Can't imagine why they thought we wouldn't notice.
- h) Ian Fleming (science fact!)
- i) someone's grandfather; how'd he get in? Is it half price for seniors, this brothel? How'd he get past Digby given that he's not wearing black tie? Albeit stumpy of stature, Digby could slice this nork. Seems to be sitting on a lower chair than the others; perhaps it's a commode. Bless.
- j) a man wearing a red bow tie who is therefore a) foreign or b) a boybummer or c) both (habitually one and the same).
- k) this is tricky. Either this James Bond is incredibly long of neck or the hands we see, fondling that shoe (don't ask) belong to a different cove to the head popping up behind "person" l), more of whom in a moment. Having studied this for years (science fact!) I'm going with it being the same person. Whyever not? All the Bonds had distinct physical attributes. Sean Connery, as seen here and on the poster for Diamonds are Forever, has a *very* long neck. George Lazenby was

pieced together from fishfingers. Roger Moore had great tits. Timothy Dalton insisted on his lines being spoken by a barely-housetrained wolf. The Actor Pearce Brosman could talk underwater, making more sense when he did, and Daniel Craig's eyes spout cress. On balance, I suppose (grudgingly) that we have to accept that only the hands at k) are this James Bond – introduced right on the cusp of the end of the 007th minute, how neat. A problem lies with...

- l) THIS HAG'S HEAD IS IN THE WAY. Look at her, dully sitting there, in her provincially tedious "top", is it Marks and Spencer, perhaps it's BHS, dear oh dear, domesticity exuding from her like bad gas from a swampcorpse. Look at her pathetic pile of plastic. She must be *bad* at carrrrds; take the hint sister, get out of the way so we can see James Bond. What a [censored]ing idiot. Look at her, look at the way the red light of whoredom bounces off her unfashionable hair, the utter crapwit, she hasn't even got arms, look at her, blocking our view of James Bond, it's like one's thumb all over the holiday snaps. I want her dead, the dismal slagbag.

At which point, we reach

0.07.00.

Conclusions: Amused at the thought that the ostensibly iconic "Bond, James Bond" guff hurls itself into view when the little clocky on the DVDuliser has 0.07 (thereabouts) on it, it's dawned on me that this is a terribly important minute in the series. We have plot, we have hero, we have lifestyle, we have attitude to women encapsulated (dead meat, easy and up for it or GETTING IN THE WAY; later entries combining the three into one hateful mix / brief marriage) and we have wacky sets. Frankly, it's all there, save for the villain (although laddo in the green coat is a wrong 'un and no mistake). It's only a minute and yet it's stuffed until it bursts with

Bond nourishment and is The Most Significant Standalone Minute of World Cinema, other than that bit in Carry On Girls, obviously. Seriously, though, it does set off a number of ideas and themes and Bondiness. Lovely.

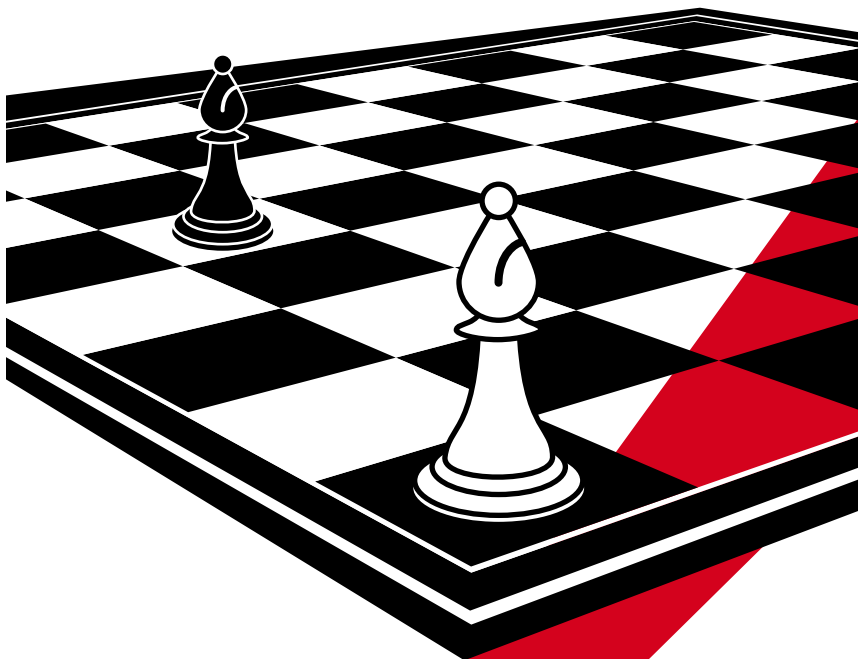
One idea especially.

Let's just imagine ourselves in that audience on that winter evening, sitting through this lunatic film, and let's say we'd never heard of James Bond, this was just some respite from harsh austerity Britain and the wolves running amok – my God, one's mind would *erupt*. The gloriously wet, silky look of it, the blasts of colour and unknown things, a man with tin hands and nuclear reactors and Ursula Andress in a moist bra and... It's insane. In contemporary context, perhaps it looks restrained and stilted but this must have been *wild*, back in the day. Given that it's toned down from the book, one does wonder whether Ian Fleming spent a lot of time in Jamaica because Customs & Excise were keen to have a chat about his aromatic tobaccos.

How representative is this 007th minute? To a placatable invading alien demanding one minute of huge entertainment lest it obliterate the planet, you could use this to demonstrate “this is a Bond film” and get away with it; a number of key pieces are there. It's not really representative of where the film's headed but I'm not joking when I'm proposing that just 007 minutes in, this one seems significant.

Bloody hell, these films are good. Sometimes. Show that alien Die Another Day and we're screwed.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE. JACQUES STEWART IS FILMED
IN FRONT OF AN INDIFFERENT STUDIO AUDIENCE.



FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

SCIENCE FACT! #2

Prior to his role Doing James Bond Acting, Sean Connery's previous jobs included milkman, coffin-licker, road sign, the Isle of Wight and Mrs Lucy Johnson of Tamworth.

Hello.

Unburdened blahdy blah – read the Dr. No one for an explanation of what’s going on. I suspect it may get bloated and ill-disciplined in time. How uncanny. How “Bond”.

Previously on 007. James Bond, languid Scot who does murdering for a transient political elite but doesn’t let that bother him because **LOOK AT THE TAILORING AND THE MUSCLES**, went to Jamaica and ate a tarantula and beat up a reclusive man with no hands – fringe of cruel, that – and hung around with a Swedish Honey who was dubbed but it wasn’t as if he was listening when he stared, agape. Did some singing, unwisely, had his shoes fetched in an act of oppression and deliberately vile racism but also did a lot of killing so that’s all OK and the one balances the other. Was cured of radiation sickness with a hot shower, put the Americans in their *arriviste* place, blew stuff up, played carrrrds, parked the squirty chipolata three times and was rude to his dinner host.

He's great. If fictional.

The following events happen in real time. Within the seventh minute of *From Russia with Love*, anyway.

So far as this one's gone, ~~Daniel Craig~~ Robert Shaw has throttled a red-lipped Sean Connery in the Pinewood Garden (sadly *not* a euphemism; a missed opportunity, frankly). Only it wasn't Sean Connery, it was Clement Attlee, so that's cool.

We've had thumping music including "some" James Bond theme, just in case we were uncertain what we were witnessing, some splendid belly dancing and the notorious mis-spelling that reads "Martin Beswick" when it should read "Martin Balsam". Oh admit it, Martin Balsam jigglin' away and having a ritual cat-fight whilst resplendently underdressed is the motherlode of entertainment, and you know it. Certainly better than that other film he was in, that sinister one with the psychopathic man dressing up as a woman, committing very bad deeds and also starring a piece of vacuous driftwood that later got itself cast as James Bond. Mrs Doubtfire, that's it.

All that happens up to the start of the seventh minute is marvelous and lovely and the titles are great, shouty and proud and loud and exciting and totally Bernard. That lot coming at you from a big wide screen; we *are* spoilt, y'know. A stunning six minutes of "encapsulation". Grind it up, pop it in a pill, instant Bond. Fab.

Then the 007th minute hoves into view and, as the timer ticks onto 0.06.00...

Chess happens.

Oh good. I was wondering when they would get to the chess. What this burgeoning film series needs, I was thinking to myself whilst witnessing starlets cavorting in Jamaican waterfalls, is frickin' chess. I.

Did. Not. Come. Here. For. Chess. I came here for ~~Daniel Craig~~ Robert Shaw and family-friendly titillation and killings and ladies' bazongas and guns. Chap with the metal fists in the last one, he was good, even if he ran in a manner suggesting that he would be just that moment too late for the loo. Can't we have him back? I'm not watching this crap. The last one had explosions and spiders and lickable nymphettes and a dragon and a nuclear reactor and carrrrds (digressing into sanity for a moment, just writing that makes one goggle at what an *extraordinary* film Dr No is). At least carrrrds has people speaking French and waving a spankpaddle about and appearing in off-the-shoulder-nothingnesses.

I. Do. Not. Wish. To. See. Either. Of. These. Two. Men. In. An. Off-. The-. Shoulder-. Nothingness. Hmm, maybe the Canadian guy, if the lighting's right and I've been blinded with a rake.

THEY HAVE GOT BOND SO WRONG! THEY HAVE RUINED THEIR LEGACY OF ONE FILM! Everyone I know thinks this is rubbish.

I know nine people.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

So as we join the “action” (Lordy, that sticks in my craw and triggers my gag reflex, like that time I [deleted, for a family audience] with [very deleted, highly defamatory] and his drooling spaniel)...

...so, as we are hurtled into this autoevisceratingly exciting scene of “doing glaring”, badhat's reaching towards us and poking his cigarillo right in our faces (this might look good in 3D; anything to liven it up, frankly. One second in and I'm chewing my left arm. Tastes of scampi (a mystery)). Right, so he's looking to take a black knobbly bit. But, hang on a mo, he's already got five of those to his right. The glutton. I think he's cheating.

I really don't know.

Let's try to follow this. He's picked up his ivory horsey-shape and he's tugged at the other chap's bishop. I'm only trying to derive some entertainment. Who the hell watches chess? You'd be better off watching cress. Much more danger.

He says "Check". But is he saying "Czech"? It says he's from Czechoslovakia (Christ, I miss the Cold War) on the electronic laser display board. Is this how characters have to introduce themselves, by reference to their homeland? Is that how lazy it's getting? Are we to expect Scaramanga's first utterance to be "Cuba"? Blofeld's "Probably Poland but sometimes Surrey. Or Queens. Or old Queens". Halle Berry's definitive reading for this generation of the complex character of Jinx to introduce herself with "Hell"? That would be better than what she *did* utter which, painfully recalled, seemed to be "Hello. You have a big willy. [censored] me," although I may have remembered it as possessing more charm than it has. If you think I'm watching that nonsense to check, not a chance, m'darling. I'd rather "do" chess.

Which brings us back to this. Well, the set looks very nice but I'm not convinced that the people sitting behind this eeevil looking man can see anything, despite craning forwards. Perhaps they're nodding off; good idea.

Dear oh dear, he's going to burn his fingers holding his very sickly-looking cigarillo like that and, if he does, he won't be able to do chess no more. G'an, y'bastard, burn yerself. Hm. Does one "do" chess? I suppose the correct terminology is "play", but that bestows upon it the heady whiff of "sport". I suppose it's a like darts in that respect, but at least one can "fling" darts, and one usually does, at passing funerals, especially those of scutters. Anyway, chess, at best

it's a board game, non? They should be playing Pictionary; at least that's challenging. Especially with burnt fingers.

Bloke in the background is turning to his companions, including a biddy in a dangerously low-cut purple number (Eva Green's Casino Royale nightgown is a homage to this – science fact!) and is observing “We come to Venice – that's Venice, mind, not Mansfield or Birmingham or somewhere equally ghastly – Venice, the most beautiful thing ever, apart from bananas in custard, and we're sitting *inside* watching *chess*? Are you out of your bumming mind? Yes I know it's Pinewood really, ssh, I'm Doing Acting”.

Hang on a minute (not the whole minute or this would stop, that's how this nonsense “works”), has he just put the smoking end of the cigarettey thing into his mouth? It does look like it. Cockanory, chess players are hard. Or stupid.

Perhaps he feels no pain. That peculiar Scottish Bosnian in one of those The Actor Piers Brosnam telemovies is a homage to this (science fact!). I've just rewound that and either a) he is holding the lit end in his palm, which brings me back to the fervent desire that he does himself damage, cremates his claw and has to find a more meaningful pastime, like lying face down in a puddle or removing gloves from railings and licking them, weeping, or b) he is indeed sucking on fag's red hot tip. Yes, it's that kind of comment. Because it's that kind of film. I appreciate that chess is duller than Derby but livening it up in either of manners a) or b) seems extreme.

He does have the sunken, haunted eyes of a practised masturbator, does he not?

Anyway, here's the opponent, a Canadian chessist. Hm. That whole phrase is an utter party, but not one I shall be attending. Con-

templating the diary, I find myself that evening, oh I dunno, let's say I'll be deworming a child.

I do like the table upon which they're playing their little board game. Very shapely legs. It's chess and I have to get my jollies somehow.

The crowd behind one's colonial brother are sitting behind rope. What do "they" seriously think is going to happen, a wild riot, everyone goes a-lootin' for trainers and a really good telly? One of the roped-off throng (four) might get overexcited and burst out and make for the (nice, shapely) table and wipe the pieces from the board in anger (which I confess to doing the only time I ever tried chess), scream "Let's [censored]" (another confession) and then insert a rook in a rude place (no confession, in the event I might incriminate myself) where the sun don't shine (Swansea).

Am liking the blue and gold thing they have going on here; homaged by the relentless blue and orange motif that's running through *Quantum of Solace*. Not "science fact!" – fact. Watch the film again (oh, *do* get over yourselves on the "editing") and for everything that happens in "Bolivia" onwards, it's basically blue and orange in practically every frame – be it landscapes, set decoration or Young Mr Craig's overmade-up face contrasting with his luscious cornflower blue eyes. Seriously, it's all there. It's...weird.

Looks like the Canadian's nicked Buddy Holly's glasses from the last one. Is also wearing an adventurous tie. Sat there, he is, trying vainly to remember whether the big black spiky one the eeeevil man has just taken is worth ten points or twelve. Oh, how he'd have liked to go outside and kick a ball; but no, his "mom" said he had to learn chess rather than play rough games because the big boys would pick on him and hit him, to which he remarked that he was of above

average height for his age and they might not target him had his mother not called him Jennifer. And then she'd club him around the ear with an Arthur Hailey novel and... oh [censored], it's my go and that clocky thing's doing ticks, that's not good. Better do something, but I've gotta face it, this guy's gonna beat me real bad, whoop my [donkey], because basically he's a) patently well-practised in the art of eeevil chess and b) he has just eaten a lit cigarette.

Right, so there's a big chessboard and a man in a suit is whispering something saucy about bishops. A lackey grabs his pole and has a sudden, upsetting flashback about the years he spent in the altar-boy pit in The Vatican when it was all bishops and poles, day in, day out, and then there was that Argentine bishop who [read any further and you will burn, forever. Still, free fuel].

Sitting in front of them, at another slutty table, there's an old chap writing something. Ostensibly keeping score, he's actually penning lewd clerihews about Olivia DeHavilland. He is played by Simon Le Bon.

The altar-boy does his thing with his stiff pole and knight takes bishop. This is a) how the Establishment works, it's basically rutting, and they're all seven-foot lizards or b) the original draft of the "Do you have a match / I prefer a lighter..." exchange later on – science fact!

Nice wide shot, and the ceiling was cleverly matte-painted in. I'd love a ceiling like that, but Mrs Jim will insist on her stirrups. Not totally convinced by this scene that a) chess and b) chess in Venice would draw *such* a crowd though. It might have been raining. Bet they haven't got a clue what's going on; they all look old and have probably come inside for a bit of warm and a choccy biccy. They're murmuring "knowledgably"; ostensibly "knight takes bishop" must

be “good”. I thought it was illegal, and I’ll carry on thinking that, thank you very much.

Right, so here comes a waiter and he’s probably eeeevil too. 25 seconds into the seventh minute of Dr No and we’d had Buddy Holly resurrected from the dead, large chunks of plot explained / exposed to scrutiny and splendid if chemically enhanced bequiffery. Do excuse me if this is struggling to keep up, what with all this chessy piffle.

Exciting delivery of the glasses of water there, using up the seconds. I wanna explosion. Frankly, I wouldn’t mind if they *did* sweep the pieces from the board and decide to [censored] as that, in my experience, is how chess ends. Perhaps with these two... no. It would be gruesome. Although it would appear that the eeevil man can put anything in his mouth without serious consequence, so one can’t rule it out entirely.

So the waiter has lingered a bit *too* long now. One does hate it when they do that, when these below-stairs persons call attention to themselves. I do so tire of waiters wishing to be recognised as humans, which is nonsense – they exist to feed me hot swan. Acknowledgment indulges their self-esteem. Can’t have that. OK, so eeevil chesser has noticed the waiter. This is a bad move. Next he will be forced to listen to today’s special – it’s cottage pie – and become aware of the exciting range of ice creams (banana, coffee, smear). He’d much rather eat his cigarette and taunt Jennifer some more.

Who the frick drinks water like that? Anyway, just noticed that Jennifer doesn’t appear to have won any ivory pieces which suggests he must be crap. Take up Hungry Hippos instead, love. It’s more entertaining and gratifyingly violent if played to win. Might have given us an early “action scene”, well within budget.

Now he's found an octopus in his drink. That's impressive; it's a small glass. Yes, that's a bit more Bondy. Most people would find a fly, or one of their fleas, or dandruff or some of the waiter's manfat but no, this Bond film has an octopus in a tumbler. Cool. And it's an evil looking octopus, all scowly like octopi do (probably; I don't know and I'm confident you don't either). This suggests that this eeevil looking man who can swallow fire is associated with an eeevil person or group of persons demanding his presence. Well, that's a [censored]ing turn-up for the blindingly obvious.

Look at that, Jennifer just moved. It was a frown. God, it's tense.

Four seconds to go and suddenly the cigarette's back in the eeevil lizard-face's mouth again; very sure it wasn't there a moment ago. Perhaps he regurgitated it. He has dark powers. And as he prepares to very, *very* deliberately and very, *very* slowly and very, *very* offputtingly tear up the little paper doily in much the same way as that total scumbag was unwrapping individual boiled sweets in the cinema the other day which put me right off my hating of the woeful Batfilm, we come to...

0.07.00

Conclusions: Hard to say. It's beautifully staged and because sod all happens, there's plenty of time to look at the scenery and consider how well presented, how well *done* it is. Concentrating on just a minute of these things does make one look at the detail and the attention to it. These are premium goods, these films. It's beautiful in its design and its luxury, even though I'm well aware that the furniture is polystyrene, as is most of the acting.

What follows this seventh minute is, of course, sublime and it's dawned on me that even though the most famous bits are on the train, an awful lot of From Russia with Love happens on boats. SPECTRE's

THE 007TH MINUTE

resplendently groovy yacht, Bond punting Sylv, lots of pretty blowage uppage towards the end, and copping off with Tatters in a gondola. Don't remember many boats in the book. Odd that. So far as this seventh minute goes, the beautiful design of it being noted, the rest of the film is a testament to the fact that being cool, doing killing and knobbing and wearing tremendous suits beats them-what-do-chess any day of the week. James Bond doesn't play chess, and that appears to be the moral of the story and an important one for one's children to learn.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH
MINUTE OF GOLDFINGER. JACQUES STEWART
IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY SOME CHEAP WINE.



GOLDFINGER

SCIENCE FACT! #3

Goldfinger is number six on the British Film Institute's Top Ten Films That Might Be Made of Jam. Others include *Dangerous Liaisons*, *A Beautiful Mind* and *Con Air*. Number one is *An American Tail 2: Fievel Goes West*.

Unburdened by reality, the Dr No one explains the idea and the From Russia with Love one tries its desperate best to stick to it, like a disc jockey to an alibi. It's on the From Russia with Love one that I realise that I have been misguided. There I was thinking its seventh minute was the vital, diverting tale of two middle-aged men playing chess, with the action high-spot being one of them drinking a glass of water in an odd way, largely to douse the cigarillo he's just swallowed.

Well, that's just what "they" wanted us to think it was, isn't it?

I've had another ponder about it and – Clement Freud, analyse this – it's not about that at all, is it?

Dr No's seventh minute was, and I stand by this, as definitive a statement of what was going to happen for the next fifty years. Bad pooh administered by "the foreign" happens to the British in a bit of the world they used to own, or at least once put a test-the-water offer in on. The immediate reaction is "oh well, let's keep trying" followed by a dawning realisation that this is nowhere near good enough, so better call M, because he or she is full of ideas and expendable faceless alcoholic psychopaths who do things we're better off not thinking about when mowing the lawn. This is followed by the introduction of the hero, and subverting the early-sixties audience's hero-perceptions, it's not the nicely side-parted ramrod-backed all very monochrome Michael Redgraveish Peregrine Caruthers with the unfortunate green coat, the old "school" tie and an accent so razorsharp the dockworkers he entertains of an evening would do well not to stick anything in his mouth, no, it's someone altogether more cool and slick and sleazy and outside the perceived heroic idiom of the time who picks up scarlet half-naked women what do carrrrds.

In comparison, two blokes playing chess does look less thriller, more filler.

However, what's actually happened in the seventh minute of *From Russia with Love* is also series-defining. A dark-haired bow-tied man, measured in movement and fond of a cigarette, is playing a game watched by an audience amazed at his skill. He is then interrupted with a message and in due course will leave to meet his boss. Subverting its own subversion in *Dr No*, the series now starts introducing the villains *in the way they introduced Bond*.

Call it a happy accident, call it fate that it also falls within the seventh minute, call it a statement (one that will become less subtle as the series progresses) that Bond and the villain are (deep breath)

“NOT SO VERY DIFFERENT, YOU AND I”. That it’s the same broad idea as the introduction of Bond in the first film is, I put it to you, deliberate. OK, I know the Kronsteen chess match is in the novel and this follows it as faithfully as the changes in the screenplay allow, but still – I’m prepared to believe it. I like the idea. If it’s only serendipity, then fortune smiles on the Bond films, and upon us that they can be enjoyed, decades on.

It’s a deliciously brilliant coincidence and may well have been intended; but that it happens at practically the self-same point in the duration of the film? I think that’s smashing.

Taking that further and, albeit this may be stretching things it is capable of being gently caressed in such a way, the comparison of these (nearly) mirrored minutes demonstrates that one dark-haired bow-tied man likes games of risk and this other likes games of intellect. Only one of these will win the day, and there’s an argument in there about anti-intellectualism, brute force and ignorance overcoming, y’know, “brainy people”, again repeated throughout the series. There’s really no other sensible explanation for Octopussy.

The other parallel is that they are each plainly trying to seduce their opponent.

With that in mind, we come to Goldfinger.

Up to this 007th minute, we’ve had Bond with a duck on his head and Ken Adam seeking to convince us that poppies grow in one of his weirdo rooms and sprout from oil barrels. Not sure about that one Ken; what next, a Space Station no-one notices being built? Additionally, we have Bond doing a weird skipping run, as if trying to loosen a stool, then blowing everything up, the concept of heroin flavoured bananas (yes PLEASE) and a lot of cold extras trying to convince us that they’re in Mexico or somewhere other than a Fe-

brurried Pinewood. We also, of course, have the most magnificently funny costume change “in cinema history”, probably, a great fight exposing the dangers of bathing near electricity and a woman getting smacked around. Positively shocking. This is a weird one in its attitude to women, more of which in a moment.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 GOLDFINGER

And it’s the titles. I suppose launching into this meritless endeavour of picking apart the seventh minute of each Bond film was eventually likely to encounter this bijou problemette, but I’m sticking with it and hope that salvation duly comes in the form of *The World is Not Enough*, not a clause I would ever have believed myself typing, even at gunpoint or having my nethers smeared in Lurpak and dangled before an undernourished wolf.

Shirl’s giving it some right old welly. It is an extraordinary sound for a human being to make, and this is an odd and slightly troubling song. Last film around we had Matt Munro giving us *Three Coins in the Fountain*-style harmlessness (played over A LOT OF SHAKY CAM, I CANNOT SEE WHAT IS GOING ON, THAT’S IT, THEY JUST COPIED THAT OFF BOURNE SEVERAL DECADES EARLY, THE BASTARDS), not that it’s unpleasant but it’s a bit Fifties, y’know, tweedy and naice and warm and utterly Labradory.

This one, though, is an unleashed sweatdripping fangbearing Rottmonster of a song.

Consider what she’s singing about. A predatory man who murders women and who, in his spare time, paints them, in a manner best described as “not nice”. A still life, with once-live models. For it to have become a staple and perceived to be the benchmark for the series is disturbing. Admittedly, similar songs have entered the public consciousness as crowd pleasers – Young Mr Jones’ *Delilah*,

for example, a popular terrace tune amongst the swigblister-faced enthusiasts of Stoke City, despite it being about wife murder. I wrote “despite” there, didn’t I, when I shoulda done writted “because”. I have witnessed Stoke-on-Trent. Anything to liven it up.

Anyway, what’s also “interesting” is the perspective of the singer. Is this a woman who has escaped his clutches, or is she warning others off because she wants Goldfinger for herself, because he’s bad and dangerous and murderous, meaner than a junkyard dog etc? I suppose it’s meant to be the former but, given the film’s approach to women, it’s occupied me for a moment.

Right, let’s have Shirl bang on about what an utter bastard – but a fascinating bastard you’ll want to know more about – this Goldfinger is. *Oh, the shark has pretty teeth, dear.* Let’s sit in shock at how much of a step-change this piledriver of raucous sleaze must have seemed from nice, unthreatening ditties about mango trees.

First up at the start of minute seven we have Ted Moore B.S.C. (I assume this means British Society of Cinematographers or the like, not Bloody Sean Connery), and this is perhaps where this idea of the seventh minute may fall apart as many pieces from now on are going to be a slightly deathly list of names. I may accidentally on purpose defame most of them. Ted, Roger’s dad (science fact!), also “lensed” (a grubby quasi-verb, like “partied” or “medalled” or “leveraged”, ugh) Dr No and From Russia with Love.

A moment to reflect on the differing characteristics of those two films. Dr No is dark and sweaty and dripping with atmosphere; it’s a great watch in black-and-white (I recommend it; it’s a Bogart with a bomb up its botty-bot). From Russia with Love has breeze and openness and the spring chill of the waterside about it, as if the weather was permanently terribly fresh. Goldfinger strikes me as a

combination, perhaps having less immediately distinctive a look to it but there's snappy stuff in Miami and lowland Switzerland which makes those locations do their bit and look nice; visitable. I appreciate that most of the final hour is but they do their best to convince us it's Kentucky or whatever blandhole it's supposed to be. Then he went and made Thunderball look like nothing has ever looked before.

The point I'm circling is that what'll emerge through these title sequences is the loyalty placed by the Broccolis in their people; indeed, how those careers marched on, film by film. The right call; they had the talent to make moisture drip from a Kingston clipjoint just as much as we feel the seabreeze swirling through the Scottish Adriatic or the cool valley air of that Swiss service station. The Bonds may have been criticised as a factory or a cottage industry; that might be a viable point, but less sustainable is the perception that, as a result, they're all the same. These people had the nous to ensure that they were *not*. Embrace it. Would we have had fifty years of this with personnel overhaul every film? I doubt it. The confidence that they had their team must have been a hell of a solid start on every one of these ventures.

While all that's been going on, Margaret Nolan has an aeroplane taxi up her abdomen. She was the first human to be classed as an international airport (science fact!). Great windsocks.

Righty-ho, here come (in no particular order other than the order in which they come), Peter Hunt as Editor (bit of an idea what this one does) and Ben Rayner as Assembly Editor (not a Scooby). All Quantum of Solace gave us was Peter Hunt on quadruple-ristretti. The genesis of that style is here, in the Hunt films. It's not hard to see a change of pace after he'd gone. It became languid / lazy (Diamonds are Forever flablumps around, gasping for breath; bit like its lead)

and filmed from a month away (the later Moores, although one suspects that's deliberate for red-headed stuntman reasons) or sedately (the Sutton mansion goonbash in *A View to a Kill* has a tea interval and ends simply because bad fight stopped play). It's only because we've become so sedated to these things lasting for two hours, because that's apparently the *law*, that it was a jolting to have someone homage the man properly. Can't make out what happens to Mr Slate? You won't enjoy Draco's antechamber much, then.

Here come dubbing editors Norman Wanstall and Harry Miller. Their voices were themselves dubbed by Jimmy Armfield and Tom Finney (science fact!). Apparently Mr Wanstall won one of those Oscar baubles for this film and anyone who can consistently ensure that Connery spoke in a silkenhoneybutter Scottish accent, rather than his natural whining Scouse, deserved it.

Dudley Messenger and Gordon McCallum recorded the sound. Just as well, otherwise this would be a silent movie and it wouldn't be half as much fun, what with its songs about girl-murder, lines about expecting people to just shut up and die or whatever it was and throbbly laser sounds emanating from big phalluses. It'd be like *The Artist*, which would be completely terrible (and is. Fact). Useful for Gord 'n' Dud to be around when there were sounds to be recorded.

Talking of sounds, she is giving this *some* sound, isn't she? Thinking back to that cinema audience of Dr No, now witnessing this two years on, yes them again, they're back for more (sensible move), you have these glowing golden images massive against the black screen and the dark of the cinema, and you're listening to *that*. Magical. Transporting. Blimey, it puts All-Star Family Cribbage in its place, doesn't it? My goodness, revolving numberplates flipping over that dead girl's mouth. It's a saucebomb and no mistake.

Here's Oddjob and Deadmeatgoon growing out of her abdomen whilst we're told that Peter Murton was the art director (I suspect we joined the fray moments after Ken Adam was mentioned) and L. C. Rudkin was the production manager. The management of the production does indeed stand as a positively – and distinctly – Rudkinesque bit of old lovely. Bit of a mystery why L.C. doesn't merit a full name, unless (that suspect attitude to women again), L.C. was a lady wanting to be taken seriously in a world of Millers and Messengers and McCallums and it's therefore like J.K. Rowling or W.G. Grace or T.J. Hooker. Or maybe L.C. Rudkin didn't exist and for some credit-validation "making films" reason I'm too drunk to bore you with inventing, it's the name of someone's dog. Bit like that thing Robert Towne used to do, and he would have gotten away with it were it not evident that *Mission: Impossible 2* was patently the work of a Shi-itzu.

My God, she's got long legs. That Lincoln Continental's taking blimmin' ages to drive along them. Still, she's a cold corpse, so what can she do? It's not as if someone was going to shove her on a cinema screen in front of many millions whilst a song blasts out about how mischievous her murderer is. *Oh*. You don't get this in Dixon of Dock Green. You just don't. Ban this sick filth now.

Right, so the Assistant Director was Frank Ernst (...Stavro...no) and the camera operator was John Winbolt and I'm sorry to gloss over their contributions but on the basis their work isn't immediately noticeable I suppose that's the mark of their having done a good job. I mean, as far as Mr Winbolt goes, there are no thumbs on the frames nor people with their heads cut off. Statues, yes; people, no. However, the deeply fascinating thing series of names comes next.

"Continuity Girl" Constance Willis. Hmm. Peter Murton wasn't described as "Art Director Lad", was he, and unless Ted Moore's

B.S.C. stands for “Boy, Slightly Childish”, it’s a bit unemancipated, isn’t it? I can only assume that the job’s full title is “Continuity Girl with Flowers in Her Hair”. God alone knows what the office politics were. “Oh dear, Continuity Girl with Loveliness in Her Cheeks, Sean’s hair was on his head in that scene but now it’s sprouting from his mouth. How did that happen? Tsk! You know what that means, Continuity Girl with Cabbage in Her Teeth, it means *punishment*. That’s right, put that copy of Floyd Cramer’s *On The Rebound* onto the gramophone, that’s right, and do jigging, that’s it, jiggerboo those Bristols, lovely, smashing Bristols darlin’, Cor! and if Floyd Cramer’s *On The Rebound* was released after 1964, that’s just a continuity error which is your fault, Continuity Girl with Hatred in Her Eyes so once the record’s over you’re going to have to suffer this punishment All. Over. Again. It hurts me more than it hurts you, I promise”.

Dear God, the 1960s.

Of equal intrigue, albeit promising (hopefully) less by way of jiggerboo, is that Paul Rabiger and Basil Newall are billed above Bob Simmons and his By-Bob-Simmons-Action-Sequencesnessitude. That’s extraordinary, given the prominence that the stuntmen would eventually take in the series (to the extent that in *A View to a Kill* they spend more time being James Bond than Roger Moore does; he seems to spend most of the film prating about France as a “confirmed bachelor” Member of the Variety Club of Jersey, picking up studs). Not to say that Rabiger and Newall aren’t significant. After all, the singlemost indelible image of the film, possibly the series, is the Golden Girl, which I’m assuming was make-up and not, in a dark twist, that they took some tips from the song Shirley is currently regaling us with. I’m also assuming they did Margaret Nolan’s paintjob and that must have been a hell of a lengthy task as that car’s only just reached her knee.

Wardrobe Mistress, Eileen Sullivan, was damned lucky to be credited with that title. Given the precedent of Continuity Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, it could have been Wardrobe Honey. Still, there's a Wardrobe Master in John Hilling, and they did some very good wrangling of the wardrobes. No wardrobes were injured or killed in the making of this film. At least it wasn't Closet Master: that's the name of a club in Amsterdam. Assistant Art Directors Michael White, prior to his stint as the Political Editor of The Guardian, and Maurice Pelling are oddly not credited alongside Peter Murton. Perhaps they did a bad thing, although it's not easy to spot; everything looks lush and convincing and expensive even though it's all made of old beer mats and chives. Freda Pearson dressed the set, with a nice reduction of balsamic vinegar, mustard and red wine, albeit this did mean they had to stop Gert Fröbe from licking it. Science fact.

Here's Sean Connery in Q-Branch walking past a Post Office van in a scene that many people claim is not appearing in this film. That's a lie – here it is. This scene is projected onto Ms Nolan's back – will no-one give the girl a decent burial? – which, for the avoidance of doubt, *is* appearing in this film and is infinitely more interesting than a Post Office van. I suppose it's "nice" to see us standing on the precipice of the slope down to the John Cleese Storecupboard of Tat.

Special Effects Boy was John Stears and the Aston Martin's cool and the laser's cool and that they managed to fit Connery and Honor Blackman into that little model 'plane at the end is clever. Trouble is, this starts the cult of Q – Q's the biggest cult in the series – and I suspect this isn't a popular opinion. I'm not doing it to annoy; a little of Q went a *very* long way. I mean, what is he *really* doing turning up in Octopussy? Other than to give sane people a toilet break or wonder which club's tie he was wearing that time out (the Tufty Club, on that occasion). But, as stated, the Aston is jolly good; much worse

was to come. Stears. J. was assisted by Frank George who seems to have been the victim of parents unsure which first name to give him, although it was a lucky escape from being called Candy-Lou.

Eileen Warwick was the hairdresser and it's a little known fact that she was also permanently on hand with her syringe to ensure Sean Connery's hair remained sedated and didn't keep escaping. Such backstage fun there was, tracking it down every morning! Was it hiding in the fold of the seat of Ms Blackman's courtesy Ford Anglia, ready to spring her a cheeky surprise? Was it in Mr Sakata's Quaker Oats, tasting largely the same? Had it annexed the Sudetenland? Oh, more innocent times. Now it would be CGI'd in and it would be like having Jar Jar Binks on your head. Have just realised that Jar Jar Binks rhymes with Jinx. Everything's ultimately connected, except, getting back to the point, Mr Connery's scalp and this hairy... matter.

My Lordylumps, even mute and projected onto the pleasant (if becoming whiffy) undulations of a murdered girl's back so that he's all warpy, Sean Connery looks absolutely scrumblelicious. That's star power – few people could have their faces beamed onto gently putrifying flesh and look anything like they would normally do. Although you couldn't tell the difference with [insert name of someone about whom you crave to be rude... *here*].

Now, this is unusual. Here he comes, running along, escaping from the last film in a self-reverential way, an irritating habit the films have of winking (that's the correct first vowel) and repeating on themselves like bad broccoli (and that's the correct vegetable). A theorem would state that this decision not to take itself seriously has kept it going and for the sake of seeing more Bond coming along, I suppose I shall (generously) have to put up with it. But if they make me sit through anything like Die Another Day again, I shall not be responsible for my actions. I'll blame the wife.

What's even more of a to-do is that he appears to be running along a boy's bottom.

My mistake, they're a young lady's knees. Still, it was a homage to Ian Fleming and his insistence that most of his female characters have young male chutney barrels. That was a bit... odd, come to think of it. But I hope it goes some way to explaining my mistake. Young lady's knees, young boy's bottom, easy to confuse the two, officer. (You can use the excuse in other contexts; just replace the word "officer" with "Your Grace").

This is where we're told the titles are designed by Robert Brownjohn. I confess that I prefer Brownjohn (not a euphemism for... *urr*) to Binder. Belly dancers and cold hard gilded deado-girls by no means dismissed, the next bit comes as my explanation. What we're looking at is a golf ball putted along her arm and plopping down into her cleavage. That's hilarious, it's genius and so fantastically, wildly inappropriate that one can't believe they thought they could get away with it. This is, The Actor Pearce Bronston having his faced dunked at speed into iced water a very close second, the single most fantastic moment of the Bond titles. Look, she's even grown little hairs along her arm to replicate turf. It is art, it is cheeky, and it is fab. *They projected the putting of a ball along her arm and into her tits.* Go back and watch. You'll laugh, possibly horrified, at the sheer nerve of it. Robert Brownjohn, I salute you, as does my Mashie Niblick.

Enough of that. Richard Maibaum and Paul Dehn are up next and there is a school of thought (to which I subscribe) that it hasn't been the same since Mr Maibaum's days. It's probably nostalgia clouding things, but would he have been so crude as to have stuff about "cunning linguists" and "perfectly formed house" (I think that's what ol' panda-eyes says) and Christmas coming all over the sheets? I accept

I'm writing this watching a man putt a golf ball between a woman's mummylumps – a cuppy lie, that – but, still. I also accept that I'm writing this about a film with a character called Pussy Galore, but we can hardly blame him for that.

What I think we *can* blame him for is some challenging rearranging of the book. Goldfinger's reasons for keeping Bond alive are marginally better than the ones Fleming gave him, and it was right to get rid of Tilly "Soames" early on, she was boring and could neither shoot nor drive nor anything "straight" but I can't help feeling that neglecting the scene with Oddjob being fed a cat and beating up a mantelpiece was a missed opportunity. Also nagging is the uncomfortable suggestion that one can bring a woman over to see things your way – whether she's a lesbian up for being cured, or not – by doing a rape-wee inside her Galore. Not that the barn scene is in this particular minute but it clouds one's view of the overall spectacle from hereon in. One could take the view that it's evident that there's some amusing chemistry between Mr Connery and Ms Blackman and it's all a jolly romp on a Pinewood Friday but... Hmm.

Meanwhile, Margaret Nolan has a handgun pointing out of her eye. Can't identify the type as it's blurred and in any event I don't know about handguns, not being a bloodlusting delusional cretin.

And just in time, just on the cusp of the seventh minute coming to an end, we're told that the title song is sung by Shirley Bassey – I'm not sure we needed telling, there's nothing else on Earth that sounds like this – the music is composed and conducted by Barry John, having a day off the rugby presumably, and the title song was written by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley, who must have been off their noddles to think this tale of murder and mayhem would pass as family fun, the mucky little pups. Mr Newley was once married to Lewis Collins; something like that. I'll get back to John Barry,

another victim of *first name last name* syndrome, as he's bound to crop up in one of these seventh minutes for a later film. Or is he? At least that adds suspense to this nonsense and arguably more so than all of the rest of Goldfinger.

And, as Margaret stands stoically on, she's probably impaled on a girder, and has projected onto her face and upper torso some weird flashy lights that I don't recall occurring in the film, unless it's the heroin-flavoured banana finally kicking in, *thank you* Mr Ramirez, we come to

0.07.00

It's patently seminal, and they are using their seventh minutes well, so far. We've had the hero introduced (ish), we've had the use of the "villain and hero quite similar" trick that would only go too far when Toby Stephens announced that he'd built his new persona out of Mr Brosman's liposuction off-cuts, and here we have another staple – the abstract credits and the noisy song. It's shocking – and forgive me for labouring a point here, but it's only in concentrating on it for a minute that it's dawned on me what a nasty, sleazy old song Goldfinger is. In a good way. This wasn't so much pushing the envelope as dipping it in tabasco and ramming it up the cultural GrandSlam. The visuals have wit, the sound is immense and it's another perfect minute of instant Bond. Just add slaughter.

What follows is strange. Goldfinger is held up so frequently as the archetype that it's hard to watch it on its own merits as a film. Is it really the archetype? I'm not sure. Bond is languid in this, and spends the majority of the film a captive who sits around observing. He doesn't actually stop the bomb himself. He's not really a protagonist, nor an antagonist. Just an agonist. Once Bond and Pussy are safely entwined in the Pinewood Garden (still not a euphemism, and

it will tease me so by steadfastly refusing to become one, perhaps I need to take it into a barn before it sees things my way), I'm not sure we really have witnessed anything much more than an exercise in how much they could get away with. Man with duck on head. Shouty song about a serial killer. Ejector seat. Laser table. Pussy Galore. Gert Fröbe's plus-fours. Perhaps that exercise is all it really needed to be. Perhaps that's what Bond is, and it's futile to look for meaning and plots and continuity, especially if it means liberating Continuity Girl from Her Jigaboo Hell. On that basis, as an exercise of art rather than science, this 007th minute of Goldfinger, this is about as 007 as one can get and the people named in this seventh minute, and those other names in the titles, they did this. They made Bond.

For that I should be more grateful, I know.

I am really.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
THUNDERBALL. JACQUES STEWART BECKONS YOU TO
ENTER HIS WEB OF SIN. BUT DON'T GO IN. SERIOUSLY.



THUNDERBALL

SCIENCE FACT! #4

If you accidentally eject your DVD halfway through Thunderball, your home will flood. If you accidentally eject your DVD halfway through Never Say Never Again, lucky bloody you.

Some of us may lead awful lives. That's different to being an awful person.

Having the luxury of time to waste on needling light entertainment is cast-iron evidence that little is truly wrong in the life of the critic. How noteworthy are the views of someone for whom these films represent yet more goods vying for one's listless, capricious, whimsical attention, other than in the minds of those similarly advantageously afflicted? Can Bond films not simply be genuine escapism and a release from a grim old time for those who would consider it a fundamentally alien thing to do, to neglect *surviving* to instead savage someone's acting or catalogue the watches or mock some garb. Well-fed, First World fingers mashing the keyboard, the talent of complacent cynicism, a lack of understanding of the misery of others trying to stay alive exemplified by the cavalier dismissal and condescending ignorance in the phrase "grim old time".

Crisis of conscience: I could stop, and do something to *help*. Alternatively, being a Western liberal and a believer in redistribution – although, being a Western liberal, grateful if it's not my stuff that finds itself redistributed, get off moi land – I can see what I can do to spread a grim old time around a bit. That takes less effort, and it means I don't actually have to meet any of those unwashed little fly-blown sods. I may not have an awful life; might be an awful person, though. Decision made: this review is an act of charity that'll bring me attention and might let me guest-edit The Independent one day. There may even be a wristband. Read on, if you actually feel you must and don't have something more fulfilling and improving to do, like being nice to others or drinking the contents of a radiator, or molesting old ham.

So, Thunderball it is. Before I launch into petty abuse and ill-thought-through sexual metaphor that would do well to achieve the status of “gratuitous”, let me put on record one inalienable fact: I love Thunderball. I think it is the definitive James Bond film, exemplifying all the others' strengths (many) and weaknesses (many) in one 94-hour-long extravaganza of blueishness and harpoonydom and Conneryality and fish. I accept – I don't have to like, but I accept – that this is not the opinion of others and that their choices and opinions are valid, like the choice to use public transport, the choice to wear unpleasant hipsters and the choice to look in the mirror in the morning and yet still carry on. Brave. So *brave*.

We've gone all wide in this one, wide and (bm-bm) deep. The previous three had a lot of standing or sitting, interior-bound snarling or fighting or rudey bits. This one largely keeps its mouth shut to the bare minimum of plottidom, it's the most basic of the stories so far, and gets out into the open air, as if the Bond series has had a frowny conversation with its wee-scrutinising GP about unplugging itself from the sofa and going for a brisk walk.

Look at all the blue and sunshine and widescreen splendour; it gives us a *show*. They wanted us to see some extraordinary things with a bit of a plot stapled on. This would get way out of hand with the next one but here, Barryhorns blasting over clear blue water, the biggest film star in history gliding through it and the production's tangible air of total confidence in its task (never expressly tipping into the self-reverential smugness that would haunt the series later), this is the paradigm. Visually, it remains a big watery blur of old lovely and it's a great pastime after three pints of Rioja to just sit in front of it and let the general (and I maintain, deliberate) relaxedness wash one over as one slumbers into dreams of Claudine Auger licking plum jam from one's moobs.

And before we join the seventh minute, before 0.06.00 has even ticked over on the overticker, consider what we've been entertained with so far. James Bond viciously murders a trannie, jetpacks out – because he is James Bond and he can / must – and then hoses down a series of agitated gentlemen with fierce white spray; cue titles. Family entertainment. It's a bit, y'know, skewed and weird and possibly “unsuitable for minors”, this cross-dresser strangulation – *trangulation*? – followed by blast-off and moist spurts in climax. It all now seems to have jogged well beyond Goldfinger's at-the-boundary titillation into full-blown sexbombing, whilst still trying to disguise it as “adventure in the sunshine”. Dr No's cold brutality clothed in tropical exoticness and pleasant bikinis was an iron fist in a velvet glove. Here, the velvet glove's still there – more of a mink one, as we later see – but the fist has gone a bit *sticky*.

I may be reading too much into this. I have watched this film “a number” of times, a number close to “too many”, but I maintain that's it's capable of such interpretation, if only for a cheap laugh. There are cleaner readings of the pre-titles sequence. It's another

cracking example of creating the Bondmyth, showing us, the little people in the dark waiting for the advent of the internet so we can bitch about it all redundantly because *they made it anyway*, showing us lot an untouchably refined world of private chapels, chateaux, inconsistently-surnamed dastardly foreign types (Bouvard? Bouvier? Boitier? Bottyburp?) who know the value of quality underwiring and expensive lippy (it's the weekend, and it's a victimless crime). It's in Bond's world that a woman should have the door opened for her (and do note, rather splendidly, that even when being chased by goons wanting to administer unto him some death, Bond opens the Aston's door for his little chum – oh, *lovely*). Or at least it was, then. "These days" Bond would have had to have figured out Booooovarr's deception by other means. Perhaps when creeping in from the roof having stowed the jetpack safely (presumably he jetpacked up there – did no-one notice?), he discovered the bathroom and all its... things. Or maybe he'd just say "hang on, you're patently a stocky man in a shapely binbag despite being played by a woman all of two seconds ago", something like that, yes, something like "that" would have to happen "these days", what with this "having the vote" and "wanting to open car doors themselves" and "looking one's lord and master in the eye" nonsense. Hopefully, just a phase.

Anyway, Bond smacks him / her / don't know, all confused, in the mouth, interesting way to pass on one's regards after a funeral, must try it next time – perhaps he didn't like the ham sandwiches – then does a bad thing with a poker to a prone man and then tosses things over the corpse... um... JETPACK! The helmet does spoil it but I can reveal this wasn't for safety reasons, more to keep the hair in place and not have it fall off onto that stag statue, from which there would have been no chance of recovering it and we'd be watching Thunderbald instead.

Directly shooting the viewer in the face with ejaculate as Tom Jones hoves into view, Bond roars away – he doesn't write, the bastard, I feel so used. We join the action at...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 THUNDERBALL

And a bit like Goldfinger, and possibly (read: definitely) more to come, we're mid titles and it's rather nice to see that Peter Hunt is now Supervising Editor (not just any old editor). As previously noted, the progression of the trusted people through the early films is notable, and the lasting impression that these were not functionaries, these were the artists, this was craft, is tangible. This film must have been a hell of a job to cut into shape, particularly in maintaining the lovely drifty nature of the sunblasted latter half whilst having jolly good fights. Yes, I know it has ostensible pacing issues but I would steadfastly hold that these are deliberate. Bond does relax his way through this because he knows the villains know that he knows they're villains and that he'll stop them; why bother rushing? Enjoy the sunny day. There's no mystery in Thunderball and whilst that may have been a criticism of it (a criticism I have just made up to amplify a point I wish to make in contradicting it, this is how reviews work, gang), there doesn't need to be one. Just look at that scene with Largo and the clay-pigeons; the villain's knowledge that he cannot cope with Bond being so magnificent seems to wash over him like a relief, a liberation to carry on being beastly because there won't be any consequence to it and Miami won't get blown up after all, which he doesn't really want as he knows a good eyepatch felter there.

Accept this proposition and the editing is spot on. Except of course for THE RACK SCENE IT HAS SHAKYCAM AND I SPURN THESE FILMS LIKE I WOULD SPURN A DISAPPOINTING CHILD, or something. There are glitches – Bond's mask

changing from blue to black to blue again – but we’re not in a world of anyone slicing off bits onto YouTube and creating their own (sometimes tremendous) fan trailers and thing. This unwieldy old bugger was steamhammered into shape over a mangle and by whacking it around the floor with a five-iron. They didn’t have YouTube, they didn’t even have ThouValve, so it’s not that surprising that there’s the odd charming blip to notice. Anyway, that’s Continuity Girl’s fault, and there will have to be “punishment”. I do hope so, anyway.

Any woman he wants, he gets. This is what comes of opening car doors, so don’t forget your manners, gentlemen, and if you want to have playtime, open the door for a lady, always address her to her face rather than gawping at her dirty dumplings and ensure that you have a good handful of hair when dragging her back to your cave. Clean sheets help.

There are schools of thought (not sure where they are; most schools teach happyslapping and listless chewing rather than “thought”) that debate, with “thought”, whether the song is about Largo or Bond. There are lines that could sit with either and I suppose the “thought” here is that this is another example of the “Bond and villain all being samey, y’know, it’s only because he’s a public sector taxpayer-funded entity and the villain is evil private capitalist free enterprise, that Bond is better” stuff. Certainly, it’s more ambiguous than the abandoned Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (just too knowing, although the instrumental of it is shiveringly, luxuriatingly, lie-on-the-beach wonderful). I tend to favour it being about Bond, especially the earlier reference to running, not walking. Although he’s not as much of a chubber as Goldfinger, the last time Largo ran was, presumably accidentally, into that eye-level spike. I bet that hurt. Good; he’s a *rotter*.

Peter Murton and David Middlemas are back, to direct the art around a bit and supervise the production so that it doesn't talk to strange men. Again, we see the loyalty on show and again, they repay it. Cannot have been easy, both the expectation created by the success of Goldfinger and then producing this *monster* within the following year. You need people you know can do the job, to do a job like that.

We are so spoilt by the easy access to (and inability to hide from) information pebbledashing at us, such that many demand a new Bond film every second and become enraged when it emerges not. When will they release the trailer or name of the singer? Why have they not done what I demanded? Why? I get everything I want, I am special (no kidding) and I am a beautiful and unique snowflake, they are my slaves, they owe me (for some mysterious reason) and I require them to produce Bond now. I don't think any or many of us have any real concept of how hard it must be to come up with these things then haul them into and through and post production. If we were to be involved, I doubt we would have the time to whine, anonymously and with a menu of grammar choices. It seems difficult enough now, with one Bond every few years. Turning out this behemoth of trickiness – it's not people sat contemplating the wallpaper, it's a film where several months happen *underwater* – within a year must have been gulpingly daunting. That they produced art and one of the most successful films of all time emphasises the importance of having the right people. And those right people aren't us. We don't know better. I suspect we don't know at all.

OK, interesting lime green thing going on now. Takes my interest in the way that roadkill or the singing of The Actor Purse Brosnon do. It's more like "abduct" my interest as it's there far from willingly. They Fritzl my interest. I can understand why young Mr Binder

has decided to do one of his patented white frothy releases to distract our attention. However, it does make the next set of credits difficult to read, especially on a DVD player and television that are getting on a bit, so here goes with the best I can do / can be bothered with. John Stears' special effects, as we know, won an Academy Award and it's not surprising that noted academic institution of "watching films and liking them", liked what he had done. The effects are undeniably special – start with a jetpack, pass by merrily with a rocket-firing motorcycle, Claudine Auger's bikini and ending up with that huge explosion of the Disco Volante that sent the boat straight into orbit, where it's still going. When it ploughs into Uranus, we've had it.

The 2nd Unit cameraman might go by the name of Egil Wokholt but I'm old and my eyesight is going for reasons too grimy to go into (but you can guess) and that's the best I can make of it. The white on toxic-waste green is, I feel, an error and can't be representative of the sea, unless you're from Sunderland. Assistant Director Gus Agosti I may be insulting by glossing over in my rush on to the next lot of names, I apologise for that, but this colour is giving me bad head. Frank Ernst managed some beautiful locations and, albeit it was a loony what said it, why bother going into space when the seaside remains unexplored? The desire to show, projected into a 1965 winter lashed by Brown Windsor soup and corned beef, demonstrating that a beach holiday didn't have to mean Great Yarmouth but could be... this. With John Winbolt's holiday snaps showing it off at its best, this is headily aspirational. Recent efforts in their attempts to be edgy haven't appealed to the same desires: we travel. The opportunity having arisen to visit, the Bahamas do look like that but Miami already looks nuked so it was pointless threatening it: with guns and gangs and pastel leisurewear and bling, it's just a Big Gay Warrington.

Hey there, Continuity Girl, swingin' down the street so cont-nu-i-t-ee, nobody you meet could ever see, the loneliness there, inside you; hey there, Continuity Girl, why do all the boys just pass you by, could it be that you just don't try, or is it the fact that Sean's scuba mask's gone wrong again, his wig's trying to mate with a clump of seaweed and in two adjacent scenes in Moneypenny's office the map on her wall changes to show completely different things? I wouldn't open the car door for you, darling; you can walk. Do a little jigger-boo whilst you do, though. That's it Joan, lovely. Maybe run your fingers through your hair and wiggle a bit. Cor, smashin'. I may yet forgive you. Don't look at me like that. C'mon over here (pats knee).

In an act of continuity unlikely to be the work of Continuity Girl, because she's a girl and her head's full of knitting and daisies and getting my tea ready, Paul Rabiger and Basil Newall once more are billed for make-up above Mr Simmons and his sequences of action. Bet it was their idea to put him in a dress, to rub it in. This is, though, the best looking principal cast of the Bonds thus far. I can understand Bond's dilemma in choosing between the psychopathic Italian redhead and the increasingly mute sad-eyed bikini-botherer because both women are immensely attractive. Bond himself's a bit of all right. Largo spoils it by donning a wetsuit, looking like a well-lagged hot-water tank but, earlier in the film, strutting around the SPECTRE meeting room of death in a *magnificent* suit, he does look crisp. His eye wasn't poked out, it fell out when open-wide, staring disbeliev-ingly, the first time he saw Fiona in her leathers. One sympathises.

Ah, Ivan Tors Underwater Studios. If this were a Moore film, you know that Flipper would have turned up. Equally so, MooreBond might have fancied his chances with it, given that it's a higher form of intelligent life than Stacey Sutton. Browning, Boren and Jordan

Keith (a victim not of first name last name syndrome, but reversey-name palsy) were director, cameraman and engineer, all underwater. They did a grand, damp job and, even though this is splashy and colourful and wondrous, it's another film I recommend considering in black-and-white. Some of the underwater scenes are pretty creepy in crisp monochrome. Probably not what they were wanting; an accidental magnificence.

Here come frogman pointing their spears through a fierce burst of Maurice Binder's little white tadpoles. What can it mean? I've seen some rough pornography in my time – I have "internet", this is what it's for – but this is taking the soggy biscuit. Bet Tom Jones is singing this with big curly pørn hair as well. It's all so much filth. Lovely.

Assembly Editor Ben Rayner's back, along with Ernest Hosler who is presumably supervised by Peter Hunt, a consultant-imposed line-management structure, as if they didn't have enough to cope with. I wish my childhood assemblies had been edited, rather than having to pretend to like Dr Jesus and his entourage and learning who had upheld the house's honour by beating another gaggle of hoodlums in rough games whilst parents had shouted vicarious obscenities. Dubmasters Wanstall and Miller are back in the game, as are those recordists of sound and bearers of superb British names, Bert Ross and Maurice Askew. They appear to have recorded a lot of sounds underwater, including a full orchestra, which is novel and slightly unlikely, but skilled. Whenever I try a length of the pool underwater all I hear is my heart beating the seconds of my life away, the ruthless little bastard.

Master and Mistress of the Wardrobe John Brady and Eileen Sullivan have returned, from Narnia. This time they've allowed their wardrobes to be manhandled roughly, all sorts of bad stuff going on, especially in the pre-titles. Unfortunately this meant that three

display cabinets and a grandfather clock had to be destroyed, humanely. PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, have always had a thing about Thunderball, although they reserve most ire for The Man with the Golden Gun: in that one, for our giggling, immoral and slack-jawed homined entertainment, an innocent and lovely pedigree closet was repeatedly force-fed Britt Ekland.

Alongside Masser Brady and The Mistress Sullivan, we have a Wardrobe Designer in Antony Mendleson and that sounds an easy job: they're cupboardy, with rails. I'm not sure the concept withstands much redesign. If this is really about the clothes and not the receptacle a) why hasn't anyone *told me* and b) they had a job on their hands, and blessed us with good work; Largo's *exquisite* tailoring, Bond's swim shorts that are wet one second and dry the next, because he's so hot, Fiona's explosion of coral-island blue, Patricia Fearing's birthday suit and Domino in a swimsuit best described as almost appearing in the film. Everyone looks spectacular; even the goons are stylish and it was probably a hoot shaving Bob Simmons into something slinky from Dorothy Perkins. The blue / orange thing's in abundance – Fiona's hair vs. most of what she wears or drives, the wetsuits vs the sea – and it's a popular visual contrast of the Bond films, albeit it becomes relentless later.

Hairs were dressed by Eileen Warwick – each individual hair of Connery's scalp was sent off in the morning in red wellies and warm coats with mittens on strings, and a packed lunch – and Michael White and Freda Pearson are back, to assist with the art direction and to dress the set, this time in a lime and honey jus with just a piquant dab of ginger. Delicious, and makes having to eat it once filming's done much less of a chore.

All characters and events in the film are fictional. [Censored] me, there I was thinking it was a documentary. I'll go on thinking that,

because I want it to be true. Something else I want to be true is those two ladies swimming towards each other might be about to kiss; no, they just *delightfully* bounce off each other. Maurice, you little tease. Still, we couldn't cope with that sort of thing: smashing up a trannie, various gassings and suicides and a harpoon through the eye are fine but ladylove? Mucky.

Giving this piece a quick edit for e-bookery, I note that in this one I've Freudian slipped "titles" as "tittles". The power of suggestive entertainment on a weak, childish mind, eh?

It's filmed, gloriously, in Panavision and the colour (not identifying which one, but I bet it was blue) was by Technicolor, who cannot spell but can do colouring in; bit like the average British graduate.

His film goes on and on and on. Oh Tom, how could you?

Now it's gone a lovely blood-orange shade, the colour of the inside of one's eyelids when dozing half-drunk in broad sunlight, and a confession that the main title was designed by Maurice Binder. I suspect it's not a popular opinion but it's teetered into trying too hard. Brownjohn's displays had wit. This is spurty and lewd, really, colourful and exciting on various levels no doubt but a bit obvious, with all that stiff harpoon wobblingness. Exemplifying the point, as his name disappears, Maurice lets fly with a milky shower of spume. Ha ha ha.

Here's John Barry, and here he is about to outdo himself. The Thunderball score is immense, from doomy to exultant to fundamental for steering oneself through watching the underwater chunks. The excessively shrieky bits bolted onto the 007 theme as everything gets fighty and Bond turns up with one of Eileen Sullivan's wardrobes strapped to him, are a textbook example of pushing and then

pushing *some more*. Sums up the ambition of the film, and also what Maurice must be doing to produce all that sticky white love piss.

Sung in a manner that's best described as "at us" by Tom Jones, Thunderball's a nonsense ditty, although it's positive whereas the last one was about murdering girls, so things have taken a turn for the sunshiney (and a girl-killing song played over Binder's foamy squirts would be A Very Bad Thing), but surely, Black Donald, it's "a thunderball, not just "Thunderball"? Thunderball's not a proper noun is it? Not like "Geoff" or "Lulu", although I suppose "strikes like Lulu" is what you had her do to us nine years later with that other "song" of yours. Young Mr Jones has a distinct and powerful voice, albeit these days he only seems to use it to tell us his mother told him not to come, good advice as it's the most stubborn of stains. Old Ma Binder would have done well to pass on the same advice.

A rubbered-up man aims a trident between the legs of a fleeing girl. This defies comment.

The screenplay was by Richard Maibaum and John Hopkins, before he turned himself into a university in Baltimore. This was based on an original screenplay by Jack Whittingham which, we are told as a man with a particularly phallic probe swims into view, was *itself* based on an original story by Kevin McClory, Jack Whittingham and Ian Fleming and if you think I'm touching that one, save to observe that it all sounds complicated, you've another thing coming, despite "coming" being the point of this seventh minute.

And as Tom holds the note and prepares to faint, we have to leave him, forever, going slightly blue-orange in the face, for we've reached

0.07.00

In direct comparison to the Goldfinger titles, it's more colourful but significantly blunter in intent. The more money they could spend, the more they knew that this would find an audience, the cruder they became? Doing similar things – sexualised imagery and exultant powerballadry – whilst turning it up to 11 with both? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Instead douse it with pheromones and let it tart itself out. It's a possible conclusion, albeit one based on one minute of film alone. Certainly, what follows is a more rawly sexualised bucket of Bond than the previous three – the Bond / Fiona sex scene is grubby fun, for example – and any real attempt at troubling us with understanding Bond or giving us “character” is jettisoned in favour of dropping this unrestrained, irresistible and unstoppable weapon of mass destruction into two hours of widescreen gorgeousness and letting us *revel*. It will tip into invulnerability from hereon in, relieving many future instalments of burdening themselves with tension about the hero's fate, but here's it's not yet a tired inevitability that Bond will win; it's a celebration.

I want to be this man.

I want to be the man who taps open the bathroom door not to find one of the offspring's failed to flush but to discover all moistened-up a woman he knows is his bitter enemy (er...Mrs Jim?), to offer her “sumsing to pudd on”, offering shoes (the finest joke of the series), to sit back and watch and *then* pretend it's her seducing him. I don't recall which minute that is it's the definitive Bond minute of the film. For all its bombast and scale that leaves one emerging thinking one's just been headsmacked with it, Thunderball can be more subtle than it's given credit for, or that this seventh minute represents.

The previous seventh minutes were, for their own parts, of significance in demonstrating key elements of Bond films. This one tends to represent the series teetering on the lip of the pit of doom that is

to repeat the successful items from last time but exaggerating them until they risk bursting. Whilst that wasn't yet to happen, we know it did. So far as this seventh minute represents anything, it's foreshadowing of debateable creative decisions to come. Which makes it sound more meaningful than its other deserving description, which is "shouty jizzwhack".

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN YOU ONLY
LIVE TWICE. JACQUES STEWART ALWAYS RUNS,
WHILE OTHERS WALK. BLADDER PROBLEM.



YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE

SCIENCE FACT! #5

Donald Pleasance's facial scar was achieved every morning by tapping him hard on the top of his head with the big spoon otherwise used by Sean Connery to ladle tepid lard down himself.

Prompted mostly into doing this at the expense of more meaningful pursuits and good works, herewith the fifth of this thunderously self-indulgent series of ludicrous moments and the same old jokes. The others you'll find on your DVD shelf.

No, that isn't really *quite* fair.

Still, the fifth one of any sort of ongoing fictional enterprise must present a challenge to those who will administer it unto us. By this stage, the stock characters are established and may have developed into "favourites", for good or ill. The general beats of the entertainment have emerged, and these must be worth maintaining to ensure people keep coming back to enjoy yet more of it. However, there's a risk that you bask in the transient popularity, go over the same stuff

again and instead of bothering to test the expectations you yourself have created, you just reproduce your previous claptrap, to diminishing returns. The particular danger is that the audience, that audience that you thought you would be pleasing by capitulating to *their* lack of creativity, will turn on you for *yours*, making them pay (in money and time and fleeting relationships) to sit through the same old guff again. Too *much* change, however, and you will have raped their childhood, or something. The ungrateful swine. Too many film series and television programmes to mention have been incapable of walking this tightrope. None of which, I hasten to add, have lasted fifty years.

“Give the people what they want” is only viable by interpreting “what they want” as being “they want the same, but different”. Which, obviously, makes it really, *really* easy for you to meet that childish demand.

You Only Live Twice is a from-many-counties-visible hilltop memorial to this sameness, but differentitude lark. It’s recognisably mashing us through the by-now anticipated and expected sieve of Bondyness but is a textbook example of balancing that against doing so in a challenging, unsettling flavour. Like ordering a Martini and instead of finding an olive in it, there’s a parsnip, or visiting an aged aunt for a slow-tick of an afternoon of cake and half-remembered anecdotes about family feuds, and then noticing she’s tattooed her face with the words “I Love Rimming”.

That the film has become a series’ whipping boy for lampoon – more of a spanking boy, then – an ostensible archetype of the daftness of the entire 50-odd hours of 007, is an unacknowledged *celebration* of how successful the series (generally...) is at stretching itself, not beyond recognition, but into unexpected variations. Bit like what happened to Roger Moore’s face in his last two films. You

know it's the same, but it's gone a bit "new". That the excess of *You Only Live Twice* – a subtle film it is not – is hardly a challenging target for parody doesn't undermine the film nor the series, but hopelessly holes the thing mocking it, because it doesn't grasp that the film *isn't* representative of the Bond series, either before or after. The variety of the Bond series only exposes the creative limitations of taking the mick out of its most cheese-dreamy moment. There isn't a fifth Austin Powers film, notably. Bond hurtles on. The latest Bourne is a half-arsed midquel of events happening during the previous one which itself happened during the one prior to that which leads one to believe that the fifth one will be based on a deleted scene from *The Bourne Identity* in which Matt Damon done a guff. Bond hurtles on. Harry Palmer's been, gone, never coming back, was there a fifth; who cares? Bond hurtles on. Let's see what *Mission:Impossible* chapter V comes up with. Let's see if, for our fifth tenner, they dare do something like...

...this.

I doubt it. It'll be precision-tool designed by corporate paranoia (not gleefully sledgehammer-crafted in total confidence) to demographically meet test-screening percentage approvals of the "best bits" of the previous ones and have something about those exciting things called "computers" in it and will try to have a "story arc" in it. Nadgers to story arcs. If, on the other hand, you had just witnessed *Thunderball* and were told that the next one would involve a short screechy bald pantomime villain going bonkers *in a volcano*, space rockets eaten whole, Sean Connery with a camera on his head, *Fifty Shades of Charles Gray* and possibly the worst impersonation of a Japanese man since *Breakfast at Tiffany's* or that time you looked in the mirror and pulled your eyes to the sides and sang "I am Japanese, if you please", you'd be thrilled (and if not, mentally ill) that

they *hadn't* listened to your yet-to-be-invented internet whining that the gunbarrel must be at the start or that we must have closure on the story of the scientist who drops off the Disco Volante at the end of Thunderball or DINK HAS TO RETURN, and just got on with providing you with novel entertainment in the vain hope that you might accept it for what it is and dare to, y'know, *enjoy it*.

Some hope.

This film wouldn't be made now. Not only because it would cost about \$500million but there would be fear of failing to satisfy unaccountable and unimaginative website typing. The supposed democracy of the internet is a tyranny over creativity. It's in doing everything "wrong" that this comes out so well. Breaking the rules you created must be a thrill. Sticking to the rules because someone you don't know and could afford to have killed, apparently much better versed in how to do your job than you are, types up that you *must*, can only be hugely frustrating and uncomfortably limiting. If, of course, you paid heed. After all, you don't go round to their workplace and show them how to mop down the peep-show booth.

You Only Live Twice is the epitome of not paying heed.

As we reach the 007th minute, how has this manifested itself? Perhaps it's in the "outer space" and gobbly projectiles and weird peace conferences and James Bond catching his death of bullets and not having, as he was looking forward to, the very best "duck". Fatty meat, duck. Looks like he's had his fill. That sort of not paying "heed", that sort of giving us James Bond, giving us thrills and epic music and threats at the level of "completely impossible for anyone else to resolve" and international widescreenery, the stuff we come to expect, and throwing it at us in an new, mixed-up way. James Bond is dead; long live James Bond. Many more times.

And as The Master tells us that they're too late, not even a renegade Time Lord can help with this one, and Sean Connery oozes into the sheets (hmm), we come to...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE

The strangeness continues. We've come to expect roaring Welshness by now, and instead we have muted strings and Nancy Sinatra's soft, sleepy, soothing tones. Stop getting Bond wrong! You're not playing by the rules, it's not right and it's not fair and my dullard's pea-brain, one that demands that you are trapped by the limits of my underpowered imagination, simply cannot cope.

Neon fan things sweep across a young lady's face, it's all rather drifty, slipping into unconsciousness. I suspect that's the idea. There is a theory that *You Only Live Twice*, largely because it's ludicrous, portrays the dreams of a dying Bond, that everything that happens from hereon in is the heightened unreality of a mind adrift. There's something in it, and it does go to explain some creative choices taken. It's undermined by the fact that it was Space Marchy bonkers *before* Bond got himself teabagged (I mean perforated, not something else (honest)). Countering *that* is the deleted final scene when Bond does indeed wake up screaming, after the ending that we do see, the one with his being prodded from underneath by a long hard powerful tube full of seamen.

Just when we thought this wasn't Bond, here comes a red-hot spurt and we're in safe hands / sticky fingers with Maurice Binder "on the job" as t'were. Look, they've told us it's SEAN CONNERY in letters that must be, on a cinema screen, a mile high. The red spurty things are going insane. Of note is that it's SEAN CONNERY in Ian's Fleming's *You Only Live Twice*. It's not Sean Connery as James Bond in, etc. It's SEAN CONNERY we have come to see,

SEAN CONNERY who has overtaken the character in prominence and SEAN CONNERY who will quite understandably go off in a bit of a miff pretty soon, grumbling about not actually being James Bond, *look no hair*, and leaving the producers with a problem in replacing SEAN CONNERY as thingywhassname, you know, *that bloke*. The same credit appeared for Thunderball, although the letters were smaller and probably done because there would have been McCloriesque squabbling over whose James Bond he was. Obviously, all the posters for this one did scream that Sean Connery IS James Bond; it's plain by now that it's James Bond who has to be identified with Sean Connery rather than the other way around. James Bond IS Sean Connery would have been nearer the truth. They would have to replace him with someone completely brilliant. Um.

It's stuff like this credit that makes these damn difficult shoes to fill. It's remarkable that they continue to, largely with success. Whilst Roger Moore may have had a *ROGER MOORE in...* a couple of times (will check, if bothered (not bothered)), and so he should because he defined other aspects of the past 50 years, the others lag behind. They are (a couple of them, anyway) actors playing a part. This, this is *iconography*. Self-perpetuated and, hindsight wisdom spurting up like one of these lava flows, probably not the wisest move on the part of producers wanting to establish that the character is bigger than the performer. It also plays into the hands of those disconcerted that this is not a James Bond film. It's not, it's a SEAN CONNERY film. A documentary crew followed him on a promotional tour of Japan and waited to see what happened. Sister, were *they* in for paydirt! He has a great time, all spacesuity and mini-helicoptery and having cosmetic surgery-y and stopping World War Three-y. James Bond hadn't done that before, so that means SEAN CONNERY is better. SEAN CONNERY's life is weird, man. Those

who say he looked disengaged fail to appreciate the documentary; he was trying to relax but even when having a few days off touring Japan, things *just keep happening* to SEAN CONNERY to the point it becomes comically wearying for him. Wanders through local places of interest: ends up *married*. Takes a rowing boat out; nearly gets gassed to death. Rambles through the hills: falls into a Death Crater of Evil. Books into his hotel: is plied with bad booze by a raddled old queen. A tale of mishaps and misadventure. His complaints about being followed into the loo or being photographed eating lunch were the least of it.

“in Ian Fleming’s... You Only Live Twice” That’s moot, innit? Retaining little of Fleming’s splendid – but deathdripped – novel save for character names and the sporadic nod, the pirhanas for example, its claims to association with the book seem thin. To now, the films had done their best to “adapt”; this is more about “survive”. Adaptation would have meant a pre-credits of the events of OHMSS condensed into five minutes (“difficult”, especially as one must retain the scene about hypnotic chicken-sexing) and then, after a doom-laden song by a popular singer of the day, let’s say Tiny Tim, Bond is depicted swigging spirits in the park, is banished to Japan, has to eat live fish and is berated every thirty seconds by a grumpy old man, wanders about a bit (a lot), and then it goes insane and he “dies”, after he’s made a Mini-Me with an island girl of questionable intelligence. “Quite dark”.

There’s actually more of the book here than popular wisdom suggests. Bond does “die” although this time it fools his enemies rather than his chums; he still gets an obituary, though. The dark beats of doom are there, Tanaka’s still a patronising twerp, we get a decent amount of travelogue and a desire to show us Japan as being a strange place, and the island girl (who doesn’t merit a name) is

still tempted by the Dim Side of The Force. The ultimate mythical concept that that Bond must enter a dragon's lair to slay it, a dragon who never leaves that lair mark you, is there, even if the book version had a crone and hostile shrubbery and the film one has a monorail and cosmonauts. I know which lair I prefer. On balance, there's enough Fleming in there, amidst the mad spacerockets and helicopters and Siamese vodka, and I'd aver that the death of Aki is a Flemingsque addition of utter, *utter* cruelty. Great.

Here comes something else to disconcert us: a long list of names of people I have never heard of and (and I accept this is both ignorant and probably racist, sorry) they all seem massively exotic and it's discomfiting. I'd heard of Cathy Gale. These people, this Wakabayashi and Tamba, Hama, Shimada and Karin Dor, who the hell *are* they? There's not much here to cling onto, my being indolent and Western and ignorant of their contributions to the cultures of their nations, and this is a good example of the use of "a top international cast", to not allow us to come to this with our previous experiences of their other performances. Anyway, no-one's allowed to overshadow SEAN CONNERY are they? This may be why I cannot appreciate GoldenEye (one of the reasons anyway). In casting both Sharpe and Cracker, and familiar faces like Dench, Bond S. and Michael Kitchen, it comes across as one of those ITV Drama specials that run over several nights (feels like it) and often imports a minor American TV performer to help overseas sales. Is it William Katt? No? Jan-Michael Vincent then? No? Jeff Colby off of Dysentery? No? Go on then, who? The Actor Perce Brosnon? Hmm. *Remind me*. Oh yes, Scarecrow & Mrs King. Yes, yes, I think I know him. Isn't he about eighty, though?

There's a woman lying down as scorching liquid pours towards her. Move, lovey, or that's going to sting quite badly.

Something reassuring now, the usual gang. Because this is *You Only Live Twice*, they're not going to turn up in London but will be on the seabed in M's "private submarine", dear God, or in a pair of shorts in which you could stage a circus. Interesting that Lois Maxwell is billed first, although she deserves it for two splendid moments. The first is in sharing a lovely exchange with First Sea Lord Bond along the lines of how he "found" the girl, to which his uncontrollably Bond and all-you-need-to-know-about-the-Bond-and-Moneypenny-"relationship"-response is "Which girl?". Splendid. The second is being invited, with pleasure, at the end to shove that periscope right up [nameless girl] and boot her off the submarine and have Bond all to herself hahahahaha what the *hell's* he done to his eyelids, has he had a stroke? Urr don't fancy him no more.

The early Moneypenny exchange includes one of the more outrageous character points in the series, Bond's claim that he went to Cambridge. Writing as an Oxford man, I agree that he's certainly stupid enough. I suspect the deft hand of Dahl, bearing in mind that all the Burgess, Maclean, Philby stuff that exposed the nasty, grubby, hollow nature of espionage was contemporaneous to these Bond films educating us that, *au contraire*, being a spy is great fun with wetsuits and dolly birds and it never rains and you get great cars, "bejongers, is Karin Dor smuggling two stolen nukes under her blouse?", etc. Still on the lookout at the time for the fourth man, here we have *another* Cambridge spy. It's a joke, quite a good one, albeit the further the series goes the more one observes that Bond does do a *lot* of protecting of the interests of the Soviet Union. One wonders whether he was joking at all.

Desmond Llewelyn. Lord have mercy, it's Q, here it comes, a bit of Q, got to have a bit of Q *apparently*. Nothing against the man personally, but even now it's getting tired. Rescued by the fact that

the scene gives us a practical gadget in Little Nellie and this leads to magnificent photography as she zips about. There are beautiful moments of Bond in her take-off, her sweeping over the bay and – especially – seen from above, chased by gooncopters. The fight is perhaps too easily won, on reflection, and it was stupid of SPECTRE to call attention to themselves – but intelligence isn't in their arsenal. Counterintelligence is, and their actions here are indeed counter to intelligence. SPECTRE appears to have developed into a nation state. What it lacks is a queen; that came along a couple of films later. Or, perhaps, right now...

Charles Gray. Oh dear God, Charles Gray's Henderson, a one-man leer machine, one part Noel Coward, several parts Uncle Monty and the most hilarious performance in the film (in a good way – in a bad way, the most hilarious performance is from The Nameless One proclaiming that "There. Must. Be. A. Hidden. Tunnel", just as Bond's trying to investigate her hidden tunnel. Naomie Harris' nameless character in *Skyfall* is a homage to this style of delivery). Gray's little skit (not a euphemism) is splendid and, as it's *You Only Live Twice*, subversive. Why have the British entrusted secrets to this lascivious bekimonoed flopsie? Why does he give Bond the wrong drink and why does Bond agree to it, other than out of fear that otherwise the man might unleash his own Predator Rocket? Why isn't the film actually about the adventures of "Dick" Henderson and his chum, the doorman at the Russian Embassy who procures "other things" for him (he means rent boys, y'know), instead of which we sit through a load of daft nunchukas? Why does Bond insist on whacking him about (unless he likes it)? How is he such good friends with Tanaka; did they share a bath too? Why this five minutes was sufficient casting call for playing international gangster and murderer/liser of women Ernst Stavro Blofeld later in the series is a mystery, but by

the big hairy monkey himself, I am glad it was. Fleming's Henderson was an escapee from HM Prison Ship Australia and kept going on about Pommie Poofers. I'd call Mr Gray's performance "absence of denial". It's not as if he appears to be Australian, is it?

"and Bernard Lee as M" Whilst an Admiral is as likely as anyone to have access to a submarine, it does seem excessive, as does the deadline for Bond to sort it out of "about three weeks", which is leisurely and gives him time to go touring around and get married etc. Preposterous though it may be for M to have a sub, at least he's where M should be when dealing with minions, in an office, the same but different, not rolling around in bed or preparing to get into the bath or pretending he's Macaulay Culkin. That wouldn't be different; it would be sickening. There's not much one can observe about Bernard Lee's M, because words would be futile to describe how indelible the performance was, right from the start. M stands for Missed.

A particularly erupty bit o' Binder gives us Donald Pleasance, Worksop's finest, providing a performance that's most kindly labelled as "broad", as if playing to the back row of the largest theatre on Earth or, for that matter, the inside of a hollowed-out hill. In providing us with Blofeld, a character from before – the same. In providing this Blofeld – different. Very. The Blofeld we have encountered up to now, played by "?", actually The Artist Formerly Known as "?", is a hard bureaucratic facilitator of villainy, not fond of the procedures for Wrongful Dismissal (try taking *that* to a tribunal, number 9), but pragmatic and resourceful, despite developing a voice of doom in Thunderball (it's a reaction to the cat). Here, however, he's a total loon, possibly driven mad by "being thwarted" but also perhaps because he's a very lickle and very ugly, a scar running down his face like a dorsal vein (look it up and, if at work, do so on someone else's computer).

Alternatively, the money he must have had to invest to get this one underway would make anyone lose sleep and get stressy, especially since Thunderball starts with a remuneration committee at which it seems SPECTRE's on its uppers. Seems he's abandoned cabinet government now; he liquidated them when they found out that Project Astonishingly Expensive Volcano wasn't just a cool name for reviewing the catering budget. The one consistent feature is his style of exit interview for redundant staff, although that's pretty whacked-out too. Seemingly uninterested in his clients' desires, whatever the hell they are, halfway through the film he ignores them and pursues his own agenda, whatever the hell that is. It's pantomime, delivered in a gloriously sinister squeakbark and beamed in from somewhere quite mad. He also has a lovely bemuscle blond buff bodybuilder for a chum and the thought of what goes on in the apartment late at night is upsetting me. Fortunately, he's so off his tennis-ball head that he announces, in earshot of Bond, how one blows up the rocket. You clot. Throw *yourself* to the fish. It's a distinctive leadership style and when one scours the shelves of WH Smith at Euston, you'll find his three volume management guide on a 3 for 2 deal: Volume 1 – Scream, Scheme and Killer Bream – Persuasive Management Techniques for the Modern Maniac; Volume 2 – Lose Those Earlobes In Ten Days (Or None Of Your Money Back If You're Foolish Enough To Ask) (comes with free hypnosis CD, about chickens); Volume 3 – MBWA – Management By Walking Around vs. MBSAMAP – Management By Sashaying And Mincing About Pointlessly.

Let's not forget that Fleming's Blofeld is clownbrained by the time of *his* You Only Live Twice, so I suppose, generously, that this is a "homage" to that. I *suppose*.

Peter Hunt is now edging ever closer to power and is not only Supervising Editor but is Second Unit Director too. It's a shame he

only had the chance to direct one Bond; he appears pivotal to the early success. Another one much missed.

David Middlemas is back supervising the production, making sure it doesn't stay out late at night and get itself up the duff, a production which by all accounts was "tricky" and the art director was Harry Pottle which is a) a magnificent name and b) patently reminiscent of a young man who would wave his wand about and lots of stuff would shoot out of the end. Maurice Binder.

Don't get so close to the lava, dear! Not with all that lacquer on yer head. These titles, a dangerous attitude to health and safety aside, are more restrained than the last lot, as is the song. "Restraint" and You Only Live Twice are not mutual concepts, but these are calming moments before the eruption of absurdity to come. Talking of eruptions, John Stears finally gets a prominent credit and it's well deserved because he made an hollow volcano spew lava, which is good work. There's loads of good stuff – rocket guns, deadly helicopters, sucker suits that one can wear under one's other clothing without anyone noticing, outer space stuff that looks wobbly now but was probably spiffing back in the day and big explosions going off in the biggest set you've seen in your life whilst a billion ninjas plummet to the floor. The winner of the Special Visual Effects "academy" award for 1967 was Dr Doolittle; well, that can just knob right off. Where were its explosions and billion ninjas, then? It's a disgrace.

Bob Simmons manages to break free of the hold the make-up boys had over him, and celebrates by running over dock rooftops and beating people up. It's interesting to note that Special Effects and Action Sequences get a joint credit together, on their own. That seems to be laying down a marker for where everything's going from this point on.

Coming towards the end of this 007th minute now and we're told things about the cameramen. Lamar Boren's still underwater – I do hope he's not still there, he'd be very wrinkly by now; Second Unit by Bob Huke (B.S.C. – which probably does now stand for Bastard Sean Connery) but most notably, John Jordan for the aerial unit. We sit and we sneer, we criticise, we inflict our empty uncreative thoughts and some people were really, painfully hurt making it, and all they wanted to do was entertain us. Shame on us all.

And love is a stranger, who'll beckon you on, and as the stranger, George Lazenby, does his beckoning on, we reach...

0.07.00

It's a confounding minute, but thereby justly inhabits the world of *You Only Live Twice* with its twisting of our expectations. The title sequences prior to this have been shouting and sleaze; we expect it. This 007th minute, however, is mellow, slightly threatening but generally docile. The film will confound us further by being anything but that and imploding with excess, as it proceeds to demonstrate that Ken Adam is a genius, SEAN CONNERY, despite looking ridiculous in most of the costumes, is entirely at ease with what's going on and John Barry, well, John Barry is peerless.

As far as the film tells us anything about the series, it demonstrates the willingness to change things even in the teeth of previous success, yet still keeping hold of recognisable elements, just giving them a before-their-time-was-up scrub; later explicitly demonstrated with *Die Another Day* to *Casino Royale*. They could have gone along the same lines as *Thunderball* – which seems grounded and gritty in comparison – but instead twisted everything into loony mock-horror, wild designs and global-scale threat. Perhaps it's that last element that provides the reason why, although I admire its *colossal* testicles,

I find it alienating – there’s an awful lot going on in the film that isn’t focused on SEAN CONNERY any more. It is opened out into command centres and The Pentagon and you know you’re in trouble when Shame Rimmer hoves into view. There are loads of speaking parts in the second half of the film and it risks becoming incapable of tying all the elements together. Unlike Thunderball, which copes with its own ambitions, this one bursts out, unrestrained, flinging stuff in the hope most of it hits. Fortunately, it *just about* retains (demented) coherence but it does seem permanently at the moment of waking up hysterical and vowing never to eat Camembert again. SEAN CONNERY may have been right up there front and centre, but I fear James Bond got a bit lost in the hardware and panic and vast arenas and the cold, industrial look of it, shuffling about and waiting to save the day. As an exercise in satisfying and disrupting our expectations it’s still pretty bloody good, though.

The 007th minutes so far have: set up our hero: established a threat: boomed a tune and “girls” at us: exemplified the series’ habit (often good, often bad) for seeing how far things can be pushed and, now, total confidence in giving us the same, but different. And then came a 007th minute that did all of that, and more.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN ON HER
MAJESTY’S SECRET SERVICE. JACQUES STEWART’S
BATHTIMES ARE NEVER THAT INTERESTING.



ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

SCIENCE FACT! #6

George Lazenby Doing James Bond Acting is an anagram of So Maddening, Gaze Not Nicely, Job Beggar, which pretty much sums up the initial reception for him and the film, and his career thereafter. This one has a whiff of truth to it.

G' day.

Should you need a reminder of what's gone before, you can sit through the titles to this wonderful, wonderful film (those titles appearing whilst 0.07 is on the minutcliccker of your DVDmerliser – one suspects deliberately and if not, why not?); alternatively, and substantially more unrewarding, put yourself through the preceding pages of this egregious tripe.

So, On Her Majesty's Secret Service, the film where Bond goes down on one knee on at least four occasions – the gunbarrel, breaking into Draco's office and flinging knives despite the open door policy, lining up the shotgun wedding and the Chinese girl at Piz Gloria whose name, science fact, is Wan Nee.

On Her Majesty's Secret Service, the long but bothered-to-tell-an-actual-story film in which we see an athletic Bond move from enthusiastic hotheaded puppy of yet-to-mature-temperament to experienced agent by being broken and bereaved and understanding the consequences of his actions laid before him in the cold body of a woman he loved, played by an actor who came in for huge criticism at the time for having the temerity to be cast as the replacement for a podgy archetype but who turns out to own the dramatics of the part *utterly*, assisted by raised-game writing and direction, a Bond girl who can act, twinkly and charming Italian character actor support, an evident desire to turn out something Flemingy and special, probably to surprise and spite all the critics and some absurd press stories and demonstrate how redundant they all were. Rides around Europe in a lovely Aston Martin. Prickly and at times downright disobedient relationship with the boss, whose home he visits. Theme song by Chris Cornell. Only one of these assertions is untrue; I wonder if you could spot it.

Received wisdom for a long time was that OHMSS was some sort of unit of resistance, because it was terrible. Patently it's not – the production values are immense, the plot is amusing, the photography is beautiful and for God's sake they were filming most of it *up a mountain* not on a Cotswold carpark. One now wonders whether its revisionism into the motherlode of all that is now perceived as great in the series has swung its beazant too far the other way. The main "issue" is generally taken to be George Lazenby, and the determined naysayers, whilst acknowledging A++ production values, are fond of speculating "how much better" it might have been with Sean Connery and what a total binbag of old numpties Eon were for filming the books out of sequence. Apologies, that's "total binbag of old billionaire numpties, who make these films patently to spite us all, Eon", to give them their full title.

I dunno. Its status of standing slightly alone renders it special; otherwise it would risk just being another SEAN CONNERY film. Additionally, although he was hardly obese by 1969, one wonders whether Connery would have been up to it. There's an awful lot of physical activity here, and I can't help feeling there's a determined statement in having a series of energetic punch-ups in the first half hour – at least three – to contrast ConneryBond lumbering around Japan in his jim-jams. Compare the wheezy, dull scrap from the previous film that Bond has with Blofeld's Butch Blond Bodybuilder Boyfriend, played by Daniel Craig, with this Bond tumbling about in the surf or demolishing a hotel room or whirling about in a weird echoey locker room. If ConneryBond had been tumbling about in the surf, Greenpeace would have rolled him back to deeper water. ConneryBond was becoming a bit of a passenger in other people's dastardly schemes, just turning up at the end to set off explosions, so relaxed he hasn't bothered to change out of his trackie bums. *This* Bond propels both himself and the plot; all the incidents that occur here are a result of Bond running – in one glorious take – after a girl into the sea, like a young and stupid dog following a ball you've only pretended to throw. ConneryBond would have had an amble down, realised the water was nippy, hellish on the verrucas, and watched her drown, what the hell, he didn't even bother to find out the name of the girl in the last one. It's only, y'know, skirt.

As for making the books out of sequence, the previous whacked-out vision of rubber space rockets and poisoned string and a billion ninjas and Donald Pleasance touching nice young men on the hip, tended to give the game away that they weren't that bothered about making the books *at all*. That this is a proper adaptation, their finest adaptation and can stand, alone and aloof, a soaring alp to its surrounding foothills of Comedy Mr Fishaaaa on the one side

and Comedy Gaybos on the other, strengthens the decision; perhaps only in hindsight but no more than the hindsight that is generally currently to the film's benefit. As to utterly ignoring the fact that what such persons mean is that this one "should of" been made in 1967, well it wasn't, so tough and nurr and you smell of wee and my friend said you touched his front bottom. Additionally, the vision and meaning and theory of Bond in 1967 – to stretch it beyond reality with a doughy dollop of weird – would have meant an On Her Majesty's Secret Service where Blofeld was shooting jetpacked dollybirds out of a hollowed-out alp to spray the world's sweetcorn with their poison, and murder chickens and be utterly beastly to the sausage, Agent Campbell is killed by feeding him to Blofeld's pet Yeti and Tracy is murdered with a laserbeam fired from Irma's Bunt. Then, in this hellish alternative reality, when they realised they had gone too far and brought the 1969 one "back to Fleming", we would have had a film where a drunken racist fatso mopes about a bit, hangs about with an Australian bigot (played by "fresh new face of '69 (not that sort of 69) George Lizzinby, or something") and then murders an amateur gardener and his wife and falls off a wall. It would have been rubbish. Praise what we have, don't regret what we could never have received.

I haven't mentioned George Lazenby's performance and my impression of the ongoing revision of the film still leaves the Unkeen with this to splashwhack us around the debased cheeks. Well, that's OK – there are bits where he's not abundantly overgood, generally when thudding out some otherwise decently written one-liners, and bits where he's fantastic – the confrontation with Tracy in the hotel room, several angry scenes with M, the meeting with Draco, the fear shot through his face in the crowd at Murren, the proposal, the bit when he's sliding along grim-faced over the ice with his machine-gun

blazing and, despairingly, the end – in other words all the dramatic bits that move the story along. It's when he's trying to be funny or engage in cheeky banter that the talent comes across as emaciated – Roger Moore he is not – but, promise you, just consider the proper, solid, story elements he has to get his face round and his is a seriously undervalued and utterly, heartbreakingly credible performance – so, Pierce Brosnan he is not, either. He would have been great in a really serious follow-up (one that would sadly have made no money at all; we got pink ties, Bambi & Thumper and Widow Twankey instead) but, as noted above, regrets are the indulgence of the internet, and we don't have all the time in the world. We only have a 007th minute.

If you actually want some sense and information, buy Charles Helfenstein's monumental and seminal *The Making of On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the only making-of book that deserves its own making-of as the phrase "thoroughly researched" undervalues it utterly. Buy it anyway, even if you've decided you're going to kindly indulge my unresearched infantile drivel further.

Before we join the fun at 06.00.00, let's consider where we are so far. We've had the mercifully-otherwise-not-appearing-much Q banging on about atomic dandruff that would, and you know it, have actually turned up in the last lunatic endeavour. This is barked magically into the bin labelled "totally and utterly dismissed" by Bernard Lee, an efficient statement of intent set out for us straight away. I like this film already. We're introduced to both Moneypenny's pot of pencils and the concept of Operation Bedlam (a great name for an Operation, up there with Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Let's Kill Shepherds) and I am liking this film even more now. We had John Barry, more on whom in a mo, strike up with a fun bit of Bond theme as the As-

ton roars through a village at what may be dawn, but this becomes doubtful later. We had LOADS OF SHAKYCAM I CANNOT SEE WHAT IS GOING ON IN THIS CAR CHASE I HATE THEM I HATE THEM I HATE THEM, blah blah blah and etc, and we had Tracy appear to overtake Bond to his right hand-side only to actually do so on his left THIS EDITING IS A DISGRACE AND IT IS ALL STOLEN FROM BOURNE AND I CAN PRROOOOVE THIS AND I CANNOT TELL WHAT IS GOING ON AND THIS HAS POOHDUMPED OVER MY WHOLE LIFE BECAUSE I HAVE TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT BOND I AM THE ABOUT-BOND-EVERYTHING-KNOWER AND THIS IS A SENSIBLE USE OF THE ONLY LIFE I WILL EVER LIVE. And *etc.*

Perving slightly, and still wearing his comfy driving hat, he gives splendid hat in this one, Bond espied our Trace wandering into the sea and Diana Rigg looked unbelievable through a telescope; I should know I've been sitting outside her house all week with nightfinder goggles and gaffer tape (this, I hasten to add, is a *joke*. It's been a fortnight). Yet more of that Bondy blue-orange thing going on here with her hair contrasted against her dress, within the dress itself and, of course, the fabulously photographed sunrise / sunset / whatever.

I express some doubt as it's not abundantly clear what time of day this occurred. A dawn run through the village becomes much brighter with the choppy-changy chasey bit, and looked a bit like midday when Bond pulls up alongside Tracy's car. Still bright as he drove down the beach forgetting that the camera's loose on the back seat, and then back to a bit dark as he took that long, long, wonderful one-shot run down to, and then into, the sea, the sun on the horizon. On the basis that we come to learn that we're in Portugal, where the coast tends to face west, I'm guessing dusk but this a) upsets the theory that the events at the hotel casino don't then take place on

the evening of the same day and I'm sure they're meant to and b) exposes my ignorance of Portugal, which I can accept because I've never been although I understand that the golf courses are wonderful, which confirms my decision never to go.

Anyway, lovely crane shot of Bond carrying her in from the surf – he doesn't know she's called Tracy yet, and this may have changed his approach entirely, might instead have done one of those kneedrownings in the shallows he is about to perform, perhaps. Introduced himself in a chipper way – the faithful St Bernard licking her clean, he's such a good dog – hang on, that's not Jesus, it's just a fella – and then Bond came about as close to an execution as he's been in years and then he done flung an anchor – he used to be in the Navy, y'know, he knows anchors, taught him all about them they did – and then it got fighty and really noisy and Barryblarey and splashy and how on Earth did they manage to get so far into the water and isn't this great? Violence and beauty. Yeah. That's it, drown him with your knee, keep pushing down, God that's really brutal. He must be dead. Oh no, back he came with the anchor, particularly spiky one innit? Hold on, those guys were there all along. Why didn't they try to stop her from killing herself? Hmm. What does her father pay them for? Oh cripes, Bond just went and smacked him in the face with an oar. That's got to hurt.

This goon was pretty persistent, wasn't he? What's the audience currently thinking? Was he SPECTRE? No, can't be SPECTRE, isn't wearing the Olympic rings and on reflection it was brave of SPECTRE to associate themselves with an international organisation that [redacted due to being wildly defamatory about Lord Coe and that time he [doubly-redacted because that's very rude and he did a fantastic job]]. Can't help feeling that the London 2012 security contract should have gone to SPECTRE rather than G4S; at least SPECTRE

seem to have limitless recruits and the last thing they're going to want to do is call in the army, just in case their real plot is discovered. Additionally, their efficiency is unquestionable and their processes amusing. No ticket? Death, by McHot McApple McPie. Wearing clothing of an unapproved brand? Death, by the thousand sharpened Visa cuts. Cheerily chant that Australia para-rhymes with "failure"? Yes, you can come in. Sing it louder. Curiously appropriate, in context.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

George is looking cross and confused. To achieve George looking cross and confused, Peter Hunt has just whispered in his ear "In developed countries, January's a winter month, y'know".

Hang on, that Sheila's nicking me ute. And I've gone and left the gun in it: doh, what a Galah! Look at that, she's opened the car door herself rather than waiting for me to do it. That did happen to the other fella but when it did, he was a tranny. That one didn't look like a tranny, but one can never tell these days, and the water was pretty cold so the evidence may have shrunk a bit. Oh, I'm so confused. I need a tinny.

The minute gets going with a discordant note as a screeching man flings himself at Bond. This never happened to the other fella. He had screeching girls do that. Why can't I have girls do that? Bond gives him a hell of a ride, then drops him into some fishnets. No comment.

Lovely burbly Aston engine there; she seems like she can handle a big piston. Handy. And she can make tyres squeal on sand, which is a talent one has to look for in a wife, along with being able to make sauce béarnaise and not troubling oneself to live too long so one can get one with some important knobbage. Blimey, she's swinging that big end around like a beauty. Look at the Arston on that. Phwoaar.

OK, something I really don't understand: she is not stealing the Aston Martin but instead preferring to run back to her scarlet (uh-oh) bedpan on wheels. She must be mixed up, the crazy kid. This is the first signal. This and the fully made-up, well-dressed bid for oblivion, anyway.

Well, will you look at that? Look how far we have come in only a few years; it's Bond now doing the shoe-fetching, not sending his little island helper off to do it for him. The Women's Lib and Civil Rights movements subtly acknowledged in Bond picking up her clogs; science fact!

George looks knackered. To achieve George looking knackered, Peter Hunt has just had him involved in the most magnificent fight in water and sand, which is good resistance training and makes the thighs burn. He's also put him in a ruffy dress shirt, the fluffy fronds of which are now heavily laden with seawater, foamy detergent and razor shells. It was always a bit of a risk to have George involved in a fight in water; given that popular myth has him constructed entirely out of balsa, they were afraid he would float away. It turned out OK when they just weighed him down with impossible expectations.

She's driving off! But this never... oh, I get it now.

George looks cross again. To achieve George looking cross again, Peter Hunt has just asked him whether he knows how Christmas trees are grown. George does not know how Christmas trees are grown. George smash!

Now George looks a bit defeated. To achieve George looking a bit defeated, Peter Hunt asks him to think of coming into contact with Pam Shriver's backhand. Now George looks confused again, as he's never heard of Pam Shriver and hopes he never will.

“This never happened to the other fella.” You’re right, George, it didn’t, nor did he look at the camera, what’s he looking at the camera for, Oh God, he’s running straight towards it smiling daftly. Quick! Turn on the [censored]ing titles before he smacks his head right into it, comeon comeon, here he comes and... phew! *Titles*. That’s it, run away from us now holding the shoes while we cogitate what you just gone and said. Yeah, OK, fourth wall and all that but a) it does engage, he’s charming about it, at least he Knows. It’s. Only. Pretending. And b) it’s important with this one that the audience is engaged, isn’t it? And c) oh, it’s only daft fun and acknowledges that there is an audience out there who know that. And d) at least it avoids any use of the “he’s had plastic surgery” notion, which would be facile although not as stupid as the proposed further alternative which was “he’s had DNA-replacement therapy”, which is not science fact, it’s science [censored]ed and thank Christ they never used an idea as cretinous as that in anything they could be proud of. And e) it’s patently a homage to Ian Fleming smashing through his own crash-barrier of detachment in this film’s pre-published, largely faithful novelisation by plonking Ursula Andress in Piz Gloria in a paragraph that goes something along the lines of “I wonder if she’s recently been on holiday IN JAMAICA see the film of my book and give me money see the film of my book what do you mean rules against cross-media promotion, oh don’t tire me so with details, old boy, light up a gasper, have another vat of scrambled egg and quart of bourbon and sit back in the sunshine and let it do your heart some good. And see the film of my book.”

Would that they had left the acknowledgement at that, but as is now becoming the norm, they had to go a just bit too far and load it up with references with *He Who Must Not Be Named*, which undermines poor old George before he could get going. They’ve re-

assured us enough that we're watching James Bond – Aston, girl, goons, cracking and weirdly edited fight, thunderous music, wide-screen magic – without having to press the button marked “Instead of actually watching this film, here are some others you might have enjoyed”, a curious artistic decision on reflection. Continuity Girl had her work cut out here and she really shouldn't have bothered.

John Barry. In the last film, John Barry produced a score that had to cope with outer space, mountains, sunsets, rudely-mouthed rockets, fights at Kobe docks, M's private submarine, Bond “dying”, Charles Graylord, lava flows, hunting seashells, mini-helicopters and a billion ninjas and it all worked, it all worked *marvellously*, and it demonstrated as much range as surely any composer could ever be asked to demonstrate (until he outdid himself on *Moonraker*) and they *still* went and gave the golden dildo to Thoroughly Modern Millie which is hopeless old rubbish and isn't varied, is it? Where were the demands on Elmer Bernstein of giving us ageless and definitive melody for *SpaceGoBang* in one scene followed by *Boring-PastoralWeddingThing* next, and then *TheDonaldPleasanceTheatre-OfTheAbsurd* in the next? Nowhere, that's where. Accordingly, but wearingly unsurprisingly, “they” don't appear to have recognised the art of this score either, which is an utter stunner and, again, is called upon to give us driving dirty guitars and amplifiers and horns at their most Barryblaring at the same time as vast, soaring, epically glorious stringy bits and some weird shrieky moments and the most charming song in the Bonds (RIP Hal David) (and unfortunately also the most charmless with its highpitched infantile rhetoric that demands only two responses being a) yes, I know how Christmas trees are grown, they're grown in pooh and b) where's Josef Fritzl when you need him?). Tracy driving to her father's birthday treat of ritual slaughter and stropiness, the Gumbold safe, the helicopter

journey through the mountains, the ski chase, the dawn (and this time it is dawn) attack, that ending – and this title sequence, all of them splendid anyway but all of them indelibly marked by the Barry touch, all for the better. All neglected.

There's no SEAN CONNERYness here. As the symbol of a Union that has struck terror into the world and tried to take over large parts of it comes into view, I think that's the point of the story – unions, of all sorts – we're told it's Ian Fleming's On Her Majesty's Secret Service (and this is still on screen as we get to 0.07 which really cannot be an accident). They haven't even told us who's presenting it. They're putting Fleming right back there at the top of the shop, he's presenting it, and what a jolly good show that is, as is the show to come. That can't be accidental either. That's a rather interesting moment on which to have reached...

0.07.00

And there they go, defying our expectations once more. Lulling less intelligent producers and directors into a false sense of parasitic security by producing ever more outlandish spectacles to compete with the content and tone of *You Only Live Twice*, because that's what James Bond is, we get our first juddering reboot here and they went and done gone made a proper film of a tremendous book and left everyone else to lick their wounds as they charged on. "Back to Fleming" could in the wrong hands seem like an admission of defeat, or at least of a winding-in. This vast, ambitious film does much to demonstrate that that's a load of old beazants.

Obviously, that's with hindsight – history tells us that this wasn't a popular film (it still made millions, though) and there were "ructions", but it's hardly a failure. It's a rebalance, a sharp (and sour) restatement cutting through the self-indulgent fattiness of *You Only Live Twice*

and although part of me feels it would have been “nice” to continue on down this road, they did pick the one book left that still gave us the touchstones of enormous visuals and wild action and lunatic plot (what is Blofeld up to here? He’s hypnotised Joanna Lumley to murder defenceless potatoes unless he gets a title, like Earl or OBE. Hang on, that spells earlobe. Shouldn’ta cut them off then, shouldya? It’s very odd). The other remaining books wouldn’t have achieved so much if adapted so faithfully. *Diamonds are Forever*? It has a car chase and much hanging around diners and examining the food. *Bond* has a haircut. Dull. *Live and Let Die*? Probably would have incited global race war. *Quantum of Solace*? Two men sit around talking. Oh, don’t.

To some extent then, a harder part of me – and it’s difficult to express this – is pleased that it didn’t come off and they changed tack again, because one suspects the series wouldn’t have lasted. That it’s taken time to be appreciated for its many treasures is great, an entertainment that turned out, if not deliberately, to have been made for the long run rather than the opening weekend and the tie-in flick-knife. This is a quality product to be revered. Much more of this would have diluted its impact.

What follows this 007th minute is, as much as fate would have it as by design, a standalone Bond, a standout Bond for many, but again exemplifying the change and survive philosophy that keeps it going. It still has dolly-birds, it still has wonderfully awful jokes, it still has a final battle that outstays its welcome and therefore it’s not as if they did it all Dogme style just to annoy everyone. It obviously has the singlemost upsetting ending of pretty much any film, other than *Transformers* – hugely distressing because you knew there would be at least another one – and the reason it works is not only George Lazenby being better than he’s officially allowed to be, but also Diana Rigg. Albeit she doesn’t say much in her final scene, prior to this she has

THE 007TH MINUTE

been super and, whilst the Tracy of the book comes across as a greedy, indulged brat and possibly the least appealing of any of Fleming's heroines (a fantasy murder of a wife being no reflection whatsoever on his own marriage, none at all, God forbid), Diana Rigg *rules*. The dialogue – especially the poetry – could have failed horribly; she sings it. Telly Savalas I can give or take, not really as nourishingly dog-in-a-hot-car mental as the previous version, although his performance is subtle enough that the oft-repeated criticism about why Blofeld doesn't recognise Bond is floored by the look in his eyes when they do meet; oh, he knows, and now he has Bond trapped here, in this revolving restaurant of hypnotised jiggerboo. Might as well amuse himself; he's stuck all the way up here, none of them fancy him because he has no earlobes and that bloody cat's going down the bobsleigh run face first if it sprays into the bucket of Virus Omega again.

Although they had introduced the new Bond prior to the 007th minute of the film, the 007th minute of OHMSS is bold enough to twist the norms; to demonstrate the same, but different. The girl gets away. The address to the audience. The top-billing for Ian Fleming. Until this minute, we were watching the machine-tooled tropes of a Bond film. The 007th minute barrel-rolls us into the waves and tells us we're in for something new.

I accept, on reflection, that I have imposed interpreted intent into each of the 007th minutes thus far, using them as demonstrative of particular habits of the series. It is, doubtless, a contrived experiment, the results forced to suit the theory. This one, though, this one I'm just not so sure. I think they meant it.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER.
JACQUES STEWART LOVES CHICKENS BUT ISN'T SURE WHY...



DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

SCIENCE FACT! #7

Sean Connery donated his fee for the film to a Shcottish charity to enshure that he never had to go there again. He retainsh in touch with hish homeland by living in Shpain, Shouth Shudan and Shpittal.

Untroubled by any pretence at accuracy, the others in this series are available “on our website” which is a lazy thing to say and assumes everyone has access to this posh Ceefax thing, but on the basis you’ve downloaded this, you must, so cease snivelling; onwards.

“Snivelling” though, most delicious and underused word, seems to be the emotion generated by the seventh Bond fillum. By no means universal – it was United Artists, and I can’t believe I’ve done that “joke” – but the current thinking, such as can be extrapolated from the internet amidst the pørn and copyright infringement, has it as an aberration that does not follow faithfully the plot set up by On Her Maj.

Given that continuity isn't an express intention of the series – and would it have lasted as long if it were? Doubtful – is this a problem of the film as a piece of nearly-entertainment, or an imposition of a desire for continuity in hindsight? It's not as if this film was a commercial failure by sashaying down its chosen alley. So used are we now to clever / ludicrous / ultimately forgettable “story arcs” and box-sets to scrutinise and pick over and type furiously about, that we risk undervaluing the attitude that runs “sod it, it's light entertainment and I might actually enjoy it if I give it a chance”. Can we cope with something that has no motive other than what it shows us? Imposing a criterion that it can't have sought to achieve can't be a sustainable, nor fair, manner in which to approach it. It's like kicking the cat because it can't speak Gaelic or expecting The Actor Piers Brongnong to act. We are expecting too much and if it cannot manage our retrospective stampy-feet demands, one wonders whether that's its fault. I accept that if that proposition of blamelessness holds, the Pearce Brosmin example is not a good one.

One supposes that the point, invented for the sake of batting it down with something equally specious (how the internet works) – is that other popular fiction series – Jones, Wars, Trek, Who, Fox News – have continuity as part of their being, riddled through like maggots in a Sainsbury's chicken. Accordingly, we cannot contemplate – nor, it seems, accept – that another successful series wouldn't have dared not do it. Contrived continuity must be imposed and irrelevant bleating about its ostensible absence gains merit. To which one would politely observe – oh, *just knob* off, you lice. Less politely, those series and others, many others, regularly implode and disappear up their pooh chutes in the pursuit of cleverrrr and in seeking approval of those who would nod sagely and then argue on the internet about the significance of *all those tomatoes*. You're not a

real [insert name of “show”] fan if you haven’t appreciated the link between the scene where the hero picks up a Labrador puppy and bites its spine out and that bit in the umpteenth series when someone was nailgunned to an ocelot. Turn up at the seventh episode of a current television show, without having seen the preceding six, and picking up the plot is a challenge. Watch James Bond 7 and you get the idea of who he is pretty quickly. Every Bond film is its own entry point to the series.

Fifty years of not caring much about continuity, and Bond persists. Perhaps that’s how it’s done. I suppose there is a parallel with the long-running *The Doctor Who Children’s Show* as that reboots itself every few years / every few contract renegotiations and budget rethinks, although it does appear now to be gently meandering up its own backpipe, disconcerted by being certain it hadn’t eaten that much sweetcorn.

Strange how, probably the result of gathering these films on various formats and wearing them out in the pursuit for truth and continuity and jurrstice, a common perception that OHMSS was the odd-one out, the curiosity, seems to have passed on to *Diamonds are Forever*, such that its status as an abomination is only matched in abominationhood by that stuff about wearing a polycotton shirt, sporting a flat nose, nibbling prawn toast, enjoying a hearty bumming or having a haircut. OK, so it isn’t evidently a continuation of the previous film but given the reaction at the time to OHMSS (fair or otherwise), it was never going to be, was it? A harder than diamonds business decision and it worked. It had to work. It doesn’t appear that anyone was clamouring for more like *The Australian One*. Artistically perhaps a missed opportunity not to follow the story through; doing so would, I suspect, have meant the missed opportunity to make sixteen more Bond films... and coun-Ting.

Give the people what they want. It was popular and it had the unforgiveable temerity to entertain (the nerve of it) and the audience doesn't appear to have been all that worried that Bond had a) forgotten about the wife and b) had gone chunky and c) did you actually see the last one? No, but I hear it was dreadful and all about koalas; I did like the one with the space rockets though and MY GODFATHERS, HE'S WEARING A PINK TIE.

Anyway, the mad wife in the last one was married to the Other Other Fella. That colonial man was, after all, keen to point out as early as the 007th minute that he wasn't the same person, so it would be weird for this guy, Double-Cream Seven or whatever it is, to go about moping.

"Don't expect consistency" appears to be the "theme" of Diamonds are Forever, should it have such a thing and not just be my retrospection (I am allowed it, others aren't (also how the internet works)). The lack of consistency applies within, too, much of which is ably demonstrated before we hit the 007th minute. We've had Bond on a roaring rampage around Pinewood that may set up an expectation that this is going to be a brutal film about avenging the death of another man's wife. Fortunately for us it doesn't actually turn into Licence to Kill, a major plus for this film. That the first scene is supposedly Japan could birth the suspicion that it's meant to follow on from the spaced-out one with the volcano, and Bond has spent the last four years there, going sumo. It looks indoorsy and set-bound so far. Given that the previous pre-titles was beaches and surf and sunsets and fightiness and splashipops, this is disappointing but, still, look at the way that man can say the word "Cairo" without moving his lips; what a daffy old hoot beating people up is. Chap in fez, must be in Cairo, everyone in Cairo wears a fez, fezzes are cool, and isn't the molestation of culture funny? Yeah, ask

Marie. It's all jolly so far, this'll be nice, MY GOD WHAT'S HE WEARING?, that's a dreadful, dreadful shirt; you could house a family on that collar. OhmyGod he's strangling her and has an utterly demented look on his face whilst he does. It was all funny and now it's brutal. This never happened to the Other Other Fella; he was positively docile, tired after all that fightin'. I mean, if he wanted to borrow her bra he could ask more nicely, looks like he needs it, old Double-D-cup Seven. Now he twists it further; this is upsetting. I thought this was meant to be funny and bland and harmless yet it's actually shot through with a callous streak. "Consistency", eh?

Then we have a silvery-haired middle-aged poorly-dressed plump-codger turn up, and who's he meant to be? Oh yes, James Bond. Additionally, Charles Gray, a highlight of any film (would have made a smashingly kinky Penelope Smallbone; bet he's got great legs) seems to be giving us a Blofeld who has adopted the demeanour of Ted Heath, albeit considerably more friendly. I do like the cigarette holder; butch. Always nice to vada his dolly old eek. The complaints that this is nowhere near the Blofeld of the previous films are misplaced; in the books Blofeld went from thug to refined silver-haired gent to whacked out loon. The last three films have mixed up the order but it is True. To. Fleming. Well, ish. Something has to be.

What's not True. To. Fleming. is the astounding garb they have Bond in – Chocolate brown jacket (which he tried to eat) and black trousers? No wonder Blofeld looks amused. He seems nice, good, it's back on sitcom, OHMYGOD that finger trap is unpleasant, that's utterly savage, I'm upset again, although it may be that man's extraordinary sideburns that have done it. Ladies and Gentlemen, we are without doubt in the 1970s, a decade that produced nothing of merit apart from me. That's it, have an undemanding fight – it's not tumbly-surf and knee-drownings and vicious anchors, is it? – and

bung scalpels around; bit weary. It's not a film with many punch-ups. Fry-ups, yes. OK, dump him in the mud – that's fairly True. To. Fleming. and a neat combination of how Fleming killed Blofeld off and the mudbath sequence from the "inspiration" for this drivel, quite clever in "fact". Maddeningly unclear how lying in mud turns one into a fantabulosa dandy although it's more plausible a means of getting there than "DNA Replacement Therapy" and just typing that in the context of the villain changing his appearance reminds one what a grotty fish-breathed binbag of listless "homages" DUD is.

Hang on, he's just killed Blofeld. Surely consistent with the dreaded "continuity"? That's True. To. Fleming. in that he's burning in hot sulphurous mud, yeah? That Bond then proceeds to kill him twice more in the film is surely satisfactory? No? Dear oh dear, what do you want, you bloodthirsty lot, literal transcriptions of the books? They gave it a go in the last one, but that was worth doing because On Her Maj is a good book. The slippery-slope argument that everything Fleming wrote must appear would lead us to Bond 36: Sweet Tang o'Rape (not an easy theme song, but that Thicke man might give it a go). The repeated statement by those making the films that a lot of Fleming's stuff was "unfilmable" was a euphemism for "not great", and the novel Diamonds are Forever is in that camp. Camp being the operative word.

"Welcome to Hell" rather than "Here's mud in your eye"; a shame. "Welcome to Hell" being for many seething Bond "fans" as much a breach of the fourth wall as references to the Other Fella.

SEAN CONNERY is back for your adoration and again he was playing SEAN CONNERY not James Bond, so it makes sense he's not avenging any wife because it was James Bond who married the ker-azy lady. I have now inflicted continuity on the film and I feel wretched. Imagine him talking about "Tray-Sshee" and it would

have been peculiar, and spitty. SEAN CONNERY's starring in Doughnuts are Forever and that thing about a moment on the lips, lifetime on the hips, is spot on. We've learned that Miss St. John's costumes were by Don Feld, whose brother Blo had his ballgowns done by Danny LaRue. We've been invited to touch it, stroke it and undress it. Sounds not so much like a gemstone as a foodstuff, but hard to say which, unless she's singing about a tummy banana. And on that point, we come to

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

The main title was designed by Maurice Binder it's all fairly calm and stately after crazy dots, spunky spurtiness, slick lava pouring over Geishas, then clocks and egg timers and things whizzing about all. Suits the tempo of the film; it's subdued (in a different temper I would write "thunderingly unexciting"), and it keeps us sedated in the relaxed / arthritic mood of the brief pre-credits sequence. It's very 3 a.m. jetlagged peep-show seedy, and as such fits the depiction of Las Vegas that comes later in the film. If it's intended to reassure the audience that this isn't OHMSS again, then it's as comforting and firesidey as any parade of naked women cavorting over gemstones will ever be. There's no urgency on show and, again, this fits the film well, bearing in mind that there's no plot to bother us until half an hour to go, the rest of the film tapping out free-form improvised scat jazz until the show bothers to start. When the film finally decides it had better give us a proper tune, one that you can follow, by then all the abstract noodling has distracted you from noticing that the story isn't coherent. Diamonds are Forever doesn't build to a crescendo, it just ambles flabbily until they bring the lights up and it stops and, had that not occurred, it could have gone on for a week, by the end of which no-one would have understood what had happened, despite some good moments here and there.

Some would suggest that this is “meta” in that it fits the (very lovely) loungey score and the atmosphere of the casinos and the (on the record) interest of Guy Hamilton in this type of nonsense “music” and Putter Smith turning in a startling acting “performance”. Others would suggest I’m making this up to find something to defend a random series of individual incidents where caustic bantering has more energy than the ostensible action. The idea, that they were let loose to busk something up, might explain such variety in tone and it’s hard to fix on the film as one thing or the other (the “one thing” being “rubbish” and “the other” being “utter rubbish”). I don’t know – I think I’m beginning to convince myself that it may be an elaborate joke, a laboured jamming session with a hairy pig driving a moon buggy to provide a pulse.

That bit on the “Making Of” when Connery burbles on about the script and it having a definite beginning, middle and end... it’s “some fibbing” isn’t it? His faraway look, not meeting our gaze, is a giveaway and suggests they were holding up a creamy gâteau just out of shot, promising it as long as he said something nische.

The production was managed (more “coped with, just”) by Claude Hudson and Milton Feldman and although doubtless it was a technical challenge, there is a whiff of cutback. Loads of it takes place indoors at a gentle, play-for-the-day pace, a comedown after the previous three widescreen sea, space and skiing ultra-spectaculars. The locations, Amsterdam aside, all look bashed about – Las Vegas looks horrendous and not even the sort of dump one would threaten one’s children with – but perhaps that’s the idea. Moving from that total grothole to an oil rig is an improvement, and I’m under no illusions that setting off explosions like that must be tricky, but it’s not evident that SEAN CONNERY moved very far in his portrayal of Double-Chin Seven beyond a series of sets / the catering bus. Maybe

he went to one or two locations and in that, there's another DUD homage – a fat Bond, Double-Helpings Seven, goes nowhere in a meaningless pebbledash of loose ideas. In defence of this decision, this film's not really showing me places *I'd* want to go to either.

Here we have a green Buddha girl – a reference to SEAN CONNERY's godlike body – with gemstone in her navel. The final scene of DUD was a homage to this, as well as to utter dreadfulness.

Shirl's telling us that Diamonds ARE forever, as if we were in doubt; seems very insistent. Calm down, honeypie. Unlike men, the diamonds linger. Oh, I *know*, lovey. They just use one, don't they? The bastards. Even when you've touched, stroked, undressed, tolerated the [censored], watched them eat a fried egg sandwich and realised the magic's evaporated, wondered about whether your mother was right after all and considered taking a breadknife to their Brownjohn, they don't "linger", do they? Speaking as a "man", I'm not sure that's fair. I would love to linger on the sofa with a bucket of wine, but Mrs Jim keeps throwing me out of the house to take the children swimming or to rugby (the game, not the place: we quite like the children and wouldn't do that to them) or if I've done another "bad thing". I'm not convinced that a notable quality of any diamond is its tendency to "linger", an odd capacity to hold in esteem given that it is inanimate, statutory Sean Connery comment.... *here*, unless of course she's actually said "blinger", which would be appropriate but ghastly at the same time.

The editors were the magnificently old-fashioned-namey Bert Bates, and John W. Holmes A.C.E. (Ace!) – presumably not the Big John Holmes of adult entertainment fame but this being Diamonds are Forever I'm making no assumptions. Quite who could have edited some life into this and tried gluing it together is unclear. It's evident that a fair chunk giving purpose to the "character" of Plenty

O'Toole was sliced out, so when she does end up in the pool of a house we didn't know existed, or somewhere or something, it's not impactful. I'd forgotten about her. Oh, for some shakycam to liven things up. The car chases go on forever, forever, forever and eeeeever and evaaaaHHHH, and the oil rig fight doesn't catch fire, not even when it finally does. It may sound that I'm laying into the film – I'm trying not to, I like it in small bites, but I doubt anyone could eat a whole one in one sitting. Cue “this doesn't appear to have stopped Sean Connery” comedy observation.

Ken Adam. It doesn't become a flippant piece about forty-odd year-old harmless nonsense to provide criticism, albeit it would be hugely appreciative, of the work of Ken Adam and his making of the look of the Bonds. I suppose for the sake of coming up with something new in this contrivance of picking one minute and using that as a springboard for laboured comment, the funny – deliberate – aspect of the design here is that all the (let's not shy away from this) *staggeringly* camp and theatrically showy settings – the penthouse, the bridal suite, the cruise ship balcony – are not the property of “arch” villain Blofeld and his dressing up box, but that of Willard Whyte who, with his total non-interaction with any female character and determination to hang around “the john” for reasons better left uninvestigated, represents the nice face of committed bachelordom, rather than the sort that lifts your shirt only to shove a grumpy arachnid down it. Blofeld's lair, in comparison, is an oil rig. With its predominately male environment exerting themselves for the next greasy gush, is patently as thunderingly heterosexual a place as there could be.

Men are mere mortals who are not worth going to your grave for. It's a great line, and it's a fun song, and at least Shirley's not singing about a man who murders women this time. Instead, she's singing from the perspective of Willard Whyte. Again, I'm not sure anyone

else could have sung this. It's more mellow than the barky shout brass of Goldfinger, but that's true of the film generally. With Connery, Hamilton, the largely American setting and Shirley Bassey, the let's go back to Goldfinger parallels / intentions / accusations aren't surprising, but the product doesn't end up being a rehash and thankfully they dropped the idea that the villain would be Goldfinger's twin: Gert Frobe in drag would have anyone questioning their sexuality and going off and living as a celibate hermit. It might have brought about the extinction of humanity; although a more cost-efficient method than building a space station and spitefully chucking orchids at folk.

Director of Photography was Ted Moore B.S.C. (Back! Sean Connery). Trouble is, he's made everyone and everywhere look horrendous although I accept that the raw material wasn't glittering. Double-Dough Seven looks knackered, coaxed into shot by a bacon double cheeseburger on a fishing line, and the locations aren't eventful. There are nice shots of the Death Laser From Space hovering over the Earth but this random thing aside (and it *is* random – how do we get to a Death Laser From Space, other than “we do”?) most of it's just people standing around sets lobbing withering put downs at each other without going anywhere or doing anything. If it was intended to make Las Vegas look like the dumping ground of the fat and terminally poorly attired, he succeeded. Occasionally there are some pleasant shots displaying the wide open, featureless and barren spaces of “South Africa”, the USA and between Felix Leiter's ears, but it's hard to put one's finger on what they were after. It's possible that had it been more expansive some of the snappiness of the badinage would have been lost in the visuals; may be something in this.

I don't need love, for what good will love do me? Oh Willard, shush. You have lots of money and a nice flat and amusing phallic projectiles with which you could have fun; you'll find a chap

one day, you're a bit of a catch although – bit of advice – installing CCTV in the lavatory could disturb. The song goes lounge Vegas now, very smashing but still doing nothing to jigger the languid approach. John Barry composed AND conducted AND arranged the music and after all that – and there's splendid sleazelounge stuff here although he's not called upon to produce action music because there's no action to music – it's not surprising he needed a lie down and not do the next one. Black Donald's lyrics are entertaining, he does this sort of thing very well (generally – one shudders at imminent Lulunacy), and it's diverse to have the song written from the perspective of a gay man; nothing in the hiring of Shirley Bassey to deliver a torch song does anything to dissuade me from this view.

Associate producer Stanley Sopol appears a lot on the “Making Of...” going into the background to getting Connery back, although SEAN CONNERY misunderstood that “several hundred thousand pounds” wasn't the desired fighting weight. What comes across in the histories of the film, official and otherwise, was determination to prove that Bond was BACK! and confidently so. Quite to the contrary, what one sees is a spectacle unsure of its identity. Is it camp one-liners and sassy broads, or vicious drownings and bolt guns to the brain? In seeking to produce both comedy and sadism, it goes to extremes in each without treading that delicate middle-ground balance deftly followed by the preceding entries. It's confused in its own body. So heavily dependent is it on SEAN CONNERY, fat jokes aside he's photographed and dressed to look *huge*, towering and glowering over everyone else, one is left wondering what it would have been like with John Gavin. Without doubt, more of a mess. I'll give him his due (but not more cake): Connery's worth every penny paid and, in giving it away, worth many pennies more. Keep your mind and eyes fixed on him (try not to look at the after-sundown

white dinner jacket nor the purple lapels on his black one; ugh, both) and the discordant nonsense fades. Lose that concentration and you are left wondering why various things are happening and whether you're interested in them doing so.

Two silhouetted women nearly spinning a diamond around; the motion of the diamond is distracting one from the fact that the women are naked. And that they're the same woman. Good old Mo.

Screenplay by Richard Maibaum and Tom Mankiewicz. This is where *Diamonds are Forever* shines; it's better to listen to than to watch. Everyone's at top rat-a-tat-tat turbobanter speed, most of it is amusing and deft, it just snaps around and is a hell of a stunt to pull off. Finally, one realises what this is. The 1970s, the era of the Bonds taking the piss out of other genres including themselves, starts with a gangster film-smartmouthed screwball comedy (little else explains the hilarious garb of the Brains Trust and the development of the initially sass-*ay* Tiffany Case into an imbecile) with a penchant for cross-dressing camp and a surprisingly violent streak and a Death Laser From Space: it's *Some Like It Hotter*. It took me years to realise this but a lot of the tics are there – it has an unfathomable plot, like *The Big Sleep*; it has characterful henchmen with sexual deviancy as a twist, like *The Maltese Falcon* and its ilk (Mankiewicz is on record as saying he imagined Greenstreet and Lorre as Wint and Kidd, so this is not me making it up) and it has goons and broads and machine guns and it basically takes the Hays Code and jams its fingers in a trap and flings scalpels right in its silly old face.

The even more sophisticated thing the screenplay does is to take Fleming's bitty, episodic road trip (with fighting) and gives us that, if not to the letter but definitely in the spirit of what Ian Fleming was doing. He gives us a romanticised picture of the American gangster, a mocking scrutiny of American habits and places, a slightly clichéd

“hardened woman” and a peek into the “underbelly”, which he saw as America being full of diners, a point this film interprets as SEAN CONNERY eating everything in them, and Fleming’s vision of an America full of colourful characters is interpreted here as it being gaily awash with homosexuals, which experience dictates I agree with. Fleming’s work a fond pastiche of Chandler’s books, this film simply does the same, except taking its lead from films. OK, it adds a Death Laser From Space which takes things beyond this notion and into an idea marked in red pen as “A Bad One”, but what it begins to demonstrate is that they didn’t have to stick slavishly to what Ian Fleming had written to be able to get his *ideas* across. So, proclaiming that this was SEAN CONNERY in Ian Fleming’s Diamonds are Forever isn’t as untrue a statement as it initially reads. As far as that’s a tenable argument, this is a faithful *adaptation* of Ian Fleming.

Whilst that suggestion sinks in, Willard Bassey is reminding us that diamonds are forever, forever, forever... and we reach

0.07.00

A strange film. It has cracking dialogue but is proudly sedentary, although if you accept the “gangster / screwball” idea, they’re not that action-packed either. A lot of bugger all happens from now on –we seem to spend hours at CircusCircus for no purpose, which is not at all interesting. Save for the abundant and out-of-control cruelty. Another proposition, gang – is the Bond seen in the four Hamilton films (and especially in the Mankiewicz / Hamilton films) that appealing? He’s a bit of a stinker and there’s a lot of threatening of women going on in each. It’s a popular, lazy, suggestion that the Bond of the books is a darker creature than that of the films; granted, the Bond of A View to a Kill is a genial quichy duffer but in these four films, surrounded by cheery harmless nonsense that happens in each, he’s actively unpleasant at times. Man-talk. Pussy in the hay.

Marie. Slapping Tiffany about. Threatening Rosie. Deceiving Solitaire. Slapping Andrea Anders about. That's going further into grim areas than the man in the books but it seems to go unacknowledged because – look! – a moon buggy! Cool. Hmm.

There's more to this than I expected, and I'm not just talking about SEAN CONNERY having bigger tits than his leading lady. *Diamonds are Forever*, a pastiche gangster novel, produces *Diamonds are Forever*, a pastiche gangster film brought up to (dated) date with Mr Wint and Mr Kidd, who seem very close and the way they walk off hand-in-hand suggests to me that they are brothers. It's safer to think that; the thought of the coupling in which they engage will now enter your subconscious and is safely planted to emerge at an inopportune moment, possibly when a-coupling yourself with a loved / bought one. Yes, they were in the book, but that was 50s suggestion, a park-bench fumble in a damp raincoat of a life. This Wint and Kidd are celebratory: here, queer and fill you with fear, although not the last one in all honesty. They went through a period of being offensive; now it's a historical document to be looked on with fondness. The thought that can't be shaken is how Blofeld recruited them. But let's not dwell. Nor on the fact that I initially wrote "how Blofeld came across them", because that would be mucky. Ignore also the nagging concern about why a patently HomoBlo keeps a double of himself hanging around his home. Bad thoughts, naughty thoughts. Get back on track with worrying yourself about why SPECTRE's not mentioned and whether Blofeld is now in his "Consultancy" years and they dumped him once they found out he'd spent the photocopying budget letting out the seams on Irma's dresses so he could fit in them. Oops, naughtier thoughts.

The same old gang are here and for whatever reason Q is flown out to Las Vegas and that's All. Such. Fun. and Moneypenny proves

THE 007TH MINUTE

herself wretchedly heartless by asking for a diamond in a ring. Dear oh dear, you cow, you could at least wait until his mentally-ill-death-in-car-sabotaged-by-sinister-agencies-wife was cold, but it's one way of us finding out your first name, Camilla.

Bathosub, Chinese man going "Aieeeee!", Bambi and Thumper being "athletic women with time on their hands, training partners, what rumours?" application of Shane Rimmer and you know the rest; pick your favourite bit. It's easier than thinking about the film as a whole, because that just makes one's brain go hurty trying to work it out.

The 007th minute of *Diamonds are Forever*, of itself, is a set of credits. In picking a lone minute, though, it's an exercise in the watching of this mixed-up kid. You could pick random minutes of it and find that the tone is "patchy". It's not the lazy drift back into old routines that some would assert: it's actually an experimental film, disguised as popular entertainment, in which "they" are using two hours of our time to try to establish what they should now be do to keep the CircusCircus going. That it does entertain is incidental to its proper purpose which, burned by the reception of the last one, is to shove random things out there and see what appealed.

Fortunately, much did.

Anyway, it's late, I'm tired and there's so much left to do.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
LIVE AND LET DIE. JACQUES STEWART HAS NO DESIRE TO
BE HELD UP, CARESSED, TOUCHED, STROKED AND
UNDRESSED. HE HAS BEEN KNOWN TO CHANGE HIS MIND.



LIVE AND LET DIE

SCIENCE FACT! #8

Contrary to popular belief, Roger Moore is actually the name of the facial mole, which is sentient and, since being lopped off, has had a solid career as Mark Wahlberg. The host body's name was actually Wendy Norris.

So the last one was unrestrained, directionless and flabby, a scattergun collage of tat with a distractingly sinister undertone. The film it was purporting to criticise was no better, but I could argue – if bothered (not very) – that “review” and “reviewable” being of similar hopeless natures is a tremendous joke and, more pompously (it *is* possible), that Diamonds are Forever is a corrupting influence not only on the young but also on the decayfrayed and moth-chewed, i.e. me.

Its corrupting influence on the next few films is a popular perception; that it was with *Diamonds are Forever* that the rot set in, that shocking rot of making millions of dollars, oh that hateful, *hateful* money. The burden. Oh, the humanity. Will no-one think of the children? Tonally, its successor does look like someone was thinking of the children as it appears a gentler affair, or at least a more even one, absent the violent mood swings of Connery's *Fat Vegas Comeback Special*. Obviously that's only perception; it's simply much better at disguising its bipolar, filleted soul, if only by dint of having a story this time, to distract one from all the jarring inconsistency that's jumping about like youths at a (ahem) "jazz funeral". I don't want dancing like that at my funeral, although I am trying to engineer it that there will be a fight when they find out that the money's been left to, oh I dunno, donkeys.

Trying to convince you this one's going to be more focussed on whatever is going on, even though it's the same old cack really, quick-ish run through of what's going down in funky town prior to the 007th minute. Bit of a chicka-wah-wah jazzy Bond theme there and then OH MY GOD IT'S SHAKYCAM ZOOMING IN ON THE UNITED NATIONS; BOURNE WAS SET IN NEW YORK AND WAS ALL SHAKY AND THEY ARE JUST COPYING BOURNE AGAIN, I TRUSTED THEM AND NOW THEY HAVE JUST SHAT IN MY SORBET etc.

Interesting seating arrangement at the U.N. – Hungary, Sweden, two representatives from Nowhereland (probably Canada), Honduras (played by the look Tom Jones is currently bestowing upon a bemused nation) and then the UK. Mystifying order, unless it's "Ascending order of per capita production of amateur pørn per square mile" or "nations least likely to win Eurovision again (except Honduras)". A fatty gets his brain dynamited (would have been a great effect) by

an eeeevil plunger – you know it’s eeeevil, there’s a red wire – but it was a boring speech anyway and only of interest to Hungarians, so probably about leather jackets, Croatian prostitutes or ham.

Next, an oddly deserted New Orleans with yet another funeral starring Winnie Mandela and it’s quiet so far; not the scene, the soundtrack. And the scene, obviously. But by this stage in the film, David Arnold would have given us an hour of his...y’know, that *stuff* he does, flinging around notes and chords and noise as if they were in danger of dying out and he had to collect them all in one place at the same time. Little fat jolly-faced chap with knife was played by (science fact!) Harry Saltzman who, being a loony, took it upon himself to empathise with his cast by blacking up. Their reaction is unknown. Stabbed “Hamilton” (har de har har), a man with an American accent but who we learn from M was “on loan” to the Americans. Is this how it works? Blimey. Did we just lend Burgess and Maclean to the Russians, expecting them back at the end of the season? What did we get in return for loaning Hamilton? (I am bereft of ribs, for my sides have split). Bet it was Shane Rimmer; it usually is. Lickle Harry Saltzman gets away with this murder and another one later – no retribution whatsoever. Bond doesn’t even get to be obnoxious towards him which is a surprise because he achieves it with everybody else. Unless this wee chap is the owner of the hat seen later on, and he did indeed lose a fight with a chicken. Comes of fowl play. (Sorry).

A lot of grooving ensues and doubtless less enlightened souls will assert that this is a racist depiction of “black” people in the out-of-control limbs and jibbering and jabbering and not making sense and waddling about, but writing as a “black” “man” I can confirm that this is exactly how I was behaving in 1973 so as far as I’m concerned it’s entirely factual.

Last thing we witnessed – hang on, where’s Bond? Don’t say he’s stuck in the door again, the deep-fried fool, live and let diet, tsk! – was entertainment on San Monique Delacroix, to give it its full name, an island in the Pinewood Garden (why can’t this be a euphemism? WHY?). A third victim, and we’re not told yet that he’s British – he could be anything, even French or something equally horrendous. Why must we assume that because he is white, he’s British? It’s this sort of presumptive, casual racism about white persons that dates the film horribly. In due course we will “learn” that this is Baines, with whom Bond shared a bootmaker (an eminently Roger Moore line, no-one else could get away with it but seriously, a *what?*). Subjected to the indignity of watching bad dancing, Baines doesn’t look happy; perhaps his new boots are hurty. All this malarkey for the crime of stumbling into some shrubbery. I did that once, although I had enjoyed two pints of gin. Perhaps that’s what happened to Baines too; he looks like a drinker. Not too keen on Snakebite, though.

All very strange, disconcerting and disjointed, and this continues into the song. Possibly diluted by years of tedious overexposure in signalling the crowdpleasing singalong end of multiple joyous Royal events – various Jubilee concerts, the opening of the Duke of York’s latest chin, Princess Diana’s funeral, that sort of thing – this must have been *unexpected* back then. Louche Shirl and her unpeeling carress of docile sluttiness and then... this, this wild and glorious thing, helped on its crazy old way marvellously by the titles which have, even before the 007th minute, brought one burning skulls and the best – by far the best – word-by-word introduction of the name of a Bond film. Those opening moments of the titles – Roger Moore as 007 (coming back to him in a moment), wide-eyed girl’s match-head going flambé, LIVE. AND. LET. DIE.: it’s a major Bond moment,

it truly is. You know you couldn't be watching anything else, even though you would have sworn that you'd never seen anything like it. That balance, achieved more often than not and increasingly difficult, that's what keeps it all going. Fifty years. Blimey.

We've just been told that Paul Rabiger is "Chief Make-Up", presumably a distant relation of Chief Buthelezi or, given the unfortunate "Mr Big" mask he may have designed, it's Chief Wiggum, and we're then ordered to give The Other Fella "Hell", sound advice because giving him cake makes him prone to bloat, as we reach...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 LIVE AND LET DIE

A woman dances in front of some optical fibres as the noise gets even more insane. That sentence tells us that what we have here is a) James Bond and b) Maurice Binder and c) reassuring, but reassuringly different. Much of what we have witnessed so far meets the evident desire to introduce a new Bond without making the same errors that smothered George Lazenby, the constant reminder of Connery. There is no acknowledgement of the change of actor, which helps Roger Moore settle in. Such references to the past as there are, are subtler than those inflicted upon OHMSS. The usual crowd of hangers-on are kicking about (apart from Q; who cares?), but there's a twist! They're not in the office! They arrive at Bond's shagshack early in the morning. Is 5.48 early? I've usually breakfasted by then and have a good seven hours of the day before the children bother to get up. Fair enough, Bond does look fourteen here and has a teenage boy's "beige" sheets, so I suppose it's consistent. The plot is largely Dr No and his murdering of British agents but there's a twist! There's no Buddy Holly / Ben Wishaw to call W6N, which saddens, but Baines isn't as much of a hottie although his chebs are the same size. We see Bond's flat, but there's a twist! It is an underground lair and, looking at it closely, appears to be a sodding museum, brimful of ghastly nautical tat. It even

has a coffee shop where the staff don't know how to work the machine and it takes a geological age to get an espresso. Same / different interface paradigm. There is, I suppose, a patent Connery homage at the end in the way Dr Kananga swells up as a blimp.

The dubbing editors were Teddy Mason / Jimmy Shields (please don't read that as Teddy Mason stroke Jimmy Shields, that's a mucky stage direction) and Chris Lancaster. Some new names kicking about these credits, but enough of the familiar to hold on to. A partial rebootmaker, then. Sound recordists John Mitchell ampersand Ken Barker recorded a lot of sounds, including that of a villain encountering death by flatulence (seriously, who thought that was a good idea?) and I don't want to know how they foleyed it, but I've a vague and unsettling feeling they met my mother-in-law. That, or it's a homage to the novel's chapter "The Undertaker's Wind", and I suppose he's off to N***** Heaven too, but we won't be talking about that. Sound's certainly all over the place in the "song". Linda's hammering away at that keyboard with at least two fingers. *If not three*. When it's performed now, this bit comes with the keyboarderator hammering at a Bontempi with a prosthetic leg. It is unclear what Sir Paul is telling us at such a juncture although one doesn't so much listen to the man as wonder what colour his hair's meant to be. Live and Let Dye.

The colour is by Rank Film Laboratories and all characters and incidents are fictional, blahdy blah. Don't be fooled. A politician exploits gullible belief in a crackpot religion to fool simple-minded voters into keeping him in power whilst he pursues criminal capitalist money-making schemes overseas for himself and his cronies. No, you're right, it couldn't happen. Total fiction.

The next names are of those who co-ordinated the stunts, and it's now "stunts", moving on from the previous "action sequences",

which did sound sniffy. Man, we ain't got no "action seeeee-Quences", we got STUNTS, brudder, and my giddygoo, what cunning stunts they are. I suppose "stunt" may define a moment rather than a whole sequence, and there's no moment more defining Live and Let Die than Ross Kananga and the alligators. It's such a stupidly dangerous thing to do for the sake of light entertainment that it's still amazing. This is no Moon Buggy, no sitting in a crane whacking about a camp old man, this is lethally dangerous. It's only a film. There's a reality to the work of Messrs Simmons, Kananga, Smith, Chitwood, Comeaux and Bennet that – Lazenby tumbling about as an exception – may have been lost in the previous few. Roger Moore is in the boat. Roger Moore is in a swordfight. Roger Moore is in that out of control car. Roger Moore is still thin enough that it *could* have been him on the crocodiles or kissing Madeleine Smith. It's still sufficiently convincingly staged that although there's much more stunt work in this film that I ever remembered, it's yet to become a lie that it's Roger Moore as James Bond. The boat jump, the bus crash, good stuff, look like he was there and I suspect he was. Granted, the Harlem alley fight has no spice but one hardly notices given that one's wondering how they managed to find anywhere so ghastly to film, outside of Bracknell.

There's a lot of imagination with the stunts – more so than endless circuits of a Nevada car park – and again, same but different, it's fun stuff that James Bond would do. This new, active James Bond, anyway. Give him a few years and it'll go lumpy but it is a joy to rediscover how much running and jumping about Roger Moore does here, and that he was better at action than I ever used to give him credit for. Some questionable character traits aside, he's a tremendously watchable James Bond, and these folks in the credits, they made him look *good* rather than *old*. Splendid work.

Filament lady's having it go purple and green and it's unclear what she is miming. I'm wondering if those fronds are lifesize and she's really tiny. Perhaps she's warding off an ant. Giving it some cavort, has to be said. Not an easy tune to dance to, so let's not mock too much, especially as it's now gone relaxy and stringy and the optical filament chaps have taken it upon themselves to turn a lovely blue, just in time to introduce the star. Good though he is, it's not Roger Moore. Great though he is, more on this shortly, it's not Yaphet Kotto. Geoffrey Holder, choreographer, dominates this film because he's just so terrifying. To an extent the performance – and as the performance is so overwhelming, the *film* – is made by that final, brilliant moment on the front of the train (*what* an ending). During the rest of it he's such a cackling loon that he cannot fail to entertain, even if there is a risk that he overshadows the principal villain, although it's hard to see though how anyone could compete with “Zombie Weirdo Undead Hench”. Suggest it now and he'd have “issues” and try to cop off with Sophie Marceau. Stuff that; Baron Samedi (that's Saturday for those of you who speak French. No it's not; it's Saturday for those of you who *don't*. Those of you who speak French already knew) would just bite her head off and do something unspeakable to the corpse, chortling like a demon; far more engaging. Whenever he turns up, it's bliss. I'd love a laugh like that. Would be great in supermarket queues. I anticipate that they would “disperse”. An unexpected item in the bagging area.

The sort-of Archbishop of Canterbury of this Voodoo jape, he's at his most demented towards the end, when Bond interrupts the convening of the San Monique Delacroix General Synod with a big silver gun, shoots a lot of sword-wielding foreign types in a joke evidently stolen from Raiders of the Lost Ark eight years in advance, and the Baron keeps getting himself unkilld, the nutter.

Quite how the film retains its kiddie-friendly certificate with this lump of Mad leaping out from behind gravestones is unclear, especially as he's involved in the most peculiar image of the film (an achievement, film's full of them), when half his head is *shot off* and he just rolls his eyes upwards to look at it, smoking away. Stuff of satisfying nightmares. That the remainder of the cast manage to shoehorn in any performance of their own is a success, given this gleeful scene-larceny. As for the choreography, it's best summed-up by the contortionist who repeatedly thrusts his underpanted crotch at us. That is entertainment. The Actor Pursss Brushman "talking" about Stockholm Syndrome or Helsinki Hurtyhead or Oslo Orribleness is not. Given that he's undead, they should bring Baron Samedi back. He could have been the new M You'd have liked that. Plenty of sins to think on, one imagines, and that wouldn't have been Bourbon he drank.

The costumes were designed by Julie Harris and although the seventies Bonds come in for lazy criticism of how the hero was clothed, they're not that outlandish, even here. Bond is largely splendidly dressed – the suit, coat, gloves and Royal Navy tie in the Harlem scenes are exceptionally nice – although I'm not going to insult you with defending the monogrammed dressing gown nor the pastel blue suit with vest and (God Almighty) a white belt. I suppose it's an update Connery's Crab Key / Maimi Beachwear of a similar hue. Still, he's on holiday, ambling around on a half-hearted investigation whilst getting to go to some lovely places.

Time's been reasonably gentle on Dr Kananga's outfits too, he looks sharp, and obviously most of what poor old Jane Seymour has to strap herself into is for comic value, but as far as practically everyone else is concerned, the decades have demonstrated the mean streak Bond exhibits when holding Rosie Carver at gunpoint (with

thin wrists: evidently not a fourteen-year-old boy after all, they have strong wrists; I know not why). The leopardskin, the suede, the collars, the hats, could all be forgiven by the argument that they are contemporaneous and realistic to their time but given that there's a guffawing, leering, unmurderable maniac cavorting about in a top hat and rags, there's a limit to "realism". Everything is "colourful", and I'm being careful in the use of that word, but even so, it is gruesomely dated. There have not been 50 years of Shaft films. It's the trap the Bond series gets itself into when seeking to be hip and groovy and rock-on daddi-o and follow trends; a lack of confidence in accepting that it itself is the trend and everything else is just a parasite. It may have wanted to look up-to-the-minute here, but that minute passed long ago. Insofar as what people wear in the current Bonds, they tend now to go for muted and classic, the principle being that the film could occur anytime, and not watched through dark glasses with a carrier bag on one's head. On that, one has reservations about *A View to a Kill*, but those will be expressed when we dance into that fire, later, save to observe that the Moorera (one word, it's better) is bookended by two films nailed onto their respective decades. There may be a piece about how those two films demonstrate social progress between their years, although this is a flawed theory as they have similar points: Bond sleeps with a "black lady", there's a non-comedy policeman, the villain is creating a monopoly in a commodity one uses to function on a daily basis, the villain turns into an airship or something and there's an ancient leering cadaver shoved in, to make one feel unsettled at how inappropriate much of it is.

Casting was directed by Weston Drury Jnr and although one suspects that casting of Roger Moore was more – much more, Roger Moore – in the hands of the Salty Veg, "junior" does appear to have

rustled up interesting folk. Jane Seymour, for example. Quite what the mother of Edward VI could bring to the role of Voodoo Witch was unclear, although as she died in 1537 it's a joke at the audience's expense that Baron Samedi is not the only zombie kicking about. Likening Ms Seymour's performance to one of the brain-sucking walking dead is unfair although I have never worked out, if a prisoner all her life in that massive chastity belt of a house on a fly-speck in the Caribbean, where it was that she acquired that accent of hers. It suggests time at an English or Swiss ladies' school and the chances of coming out of one of those Virgin Megastore hellholes "intact" are damned low. Me lads (I am referring to my two eldest sons, not my testicles (for once)) were invited to a "prom"(oh dear) at one of these earlier in the summer and they're still traumatised now, having been set upon by a pack of pubescent velociraptors of lust with the stated aim of "draining all the moisture from your body". I think you can get an A* in that. Solitaire can only have obtained such beautiful vowels by extra sessions with the Deportment and Elocution Master and marvelling at his diction. This realisation – she's basically a trust-fund strumpet with a Paul Daniels Magic Set – changes the power dynamic in the film. The first time she meets Bond and he picks "The Lovers", who's to say *she* hadn't loaded the pack too and every action hereafter is to lure Bond in? There's an International Baccalaureate in that too. It's a more – much more, Roger Moore – positive reading of what appears to happen, a trick by Bond just because he needs to give his lads some exercise, and roger more. As well as sinister, Bond's extremely foolish – he likes carrrrdds and gambling, and having someone around able to predict the outcome would have been a winner. Twerp. And probably rapist. But mainly twerp. He could have made a fortune and bought yet another model ship for his flat. Inveigling an innocent into bed because it is [chosen religion's] will...hmm... perhaps he is still playing a saint.

The casting's biggest plus here is Yaphet Kotto, who amidst the ludicrous hi-jinkery gives what I firmly believe is one of the best performances as a villain in the series, but one that always seems neglected. Yes, I know it ends in a hateful way – why not have him eaten by the shark as per (ish) the book; perhaps “There always was something fishy about him” wasn’t that good a line – but don’t let that cloud the judgment of the rest of it. It works both ways – Elektra King has a *splendid* death, but what precedes it is a monument to poverty of interest. The particularly dynamic thing they have Kananga do is engage with Bond on an emotional level, and frequent flights of intense – credible – rage do bring home how upsetting it must be to have one’s schemes and domestic arrangements disrupted by this *really annoying man*, with his quips and his leering and massive cigars and nicking one’s bird and his punchable face and general all-round *ngggggggggg*. Homaged (deliberately) by Jonathan Pryce later in the series (another villain I like that no-one else seems to), we get to see human reaction to Bond here. Up to now, the villains have tended to be stand-offish and proud – this is not a characteristic of Dr Kananga. The post-Butterhook (great line) scene with Solitaire is raw and brutal and possibly the first time we’ve witnessed Bond’s effect on others, the inconsiderate ratbag. He really doesn’t take their feelings into account, does he? It’s a world away from the hissop-drenched bon mots of Charles Gray’s ennui or Adolfo Celi seething, but shrugging it all off with a wave of a harpoon.

This isn’t to say it’s all boiling-over menace that Kotto brings. Most of the time (when not made up as Pennywise the clown) he’s having a bit of a hoot and the look, that *look*, of determined, fiendish glee on his face when cutting Bond’s arm for the shark, it’s spine-shivering. It’s an unfairly ignored performance – the filmmakers perhaps reflecting on the detachment the Diamonds are Forever

~~Liberace~~ Blofeld, whose boredom with his own scheme is so obvious one could dig bits out of it with a spoon. What we have here is our first emotional bad guy and some of the strongest evidence against the indolent observation that the Bond films don't require or exhibit much acting. He's a brilliant contrast to Roger Moore, and I'm not talking "colour"; Moore suppresses his energy (to great effect – it must be quite hard to appear so relaxed and takes more talent than he's officially allowed to have) whereas this guy lashes out in wild mood swings. Bit like Max Zorin; another Moorera bookend (the rest of Moore's villains tend to be as even-tempered as his Bond). A roaring rampage of lust, a big old bucket of crazy, we couldn't have asked for a stronger villain to get this v2.0 of Bond underway.

The major cause of his ire, that Bond plays Solitaire before he does, does bring up a disturbing suggestion – I think it's intended – about Kananga. When chiding her for not spotting a man in a hang-glider despite that night being blessed with broad daylight, he burbles on menacingly about Solitaire's mother (Freecell) losing the power and being no use to him, and that it's all his right to take away. So, is he her *dad*? He does seem a likely amount of years older than her. That adds a bit of... hmm to it all. Hmm.

Hmm.

Yet, it's Scaramanga and Zorin and Drax who tend to dominate the Moorera for "memorable" villains; why? Is it that their plots had wider scope? Probably. This one is "smaller" in its conception and although Live and Let Die always seems popular with civilians (i.e. real people, not Bond fans), I'd lay my loaded deck against yours (not a euphemism although the offer stands) that none of them could recall what the villain's up to in this one. Hindsight continuity raises an interesting ponder. What happens is that James Bond disrupts aggressive free enterprise once more (a swamp of Black Russians,

JDubya; you're quite right to ask whose side Bond is really on). In effect, he saves the Mafia and keeps narcotics distribution in the hands of a load of people rather than just one, an action that sets up the "War on Drugs" to fail spectacularly. Berk. Additionally, it keeps the door open for the likes of Franz Sanchez, so ultimately Bond is responsible for his existing at all. It's a subtle set-up for the film's unofficial sequel, *Licence to Kill*, with its same source material and same Leiter. No wonder Bond looks so miserable throughout that; everything that happens was his fault 16 years earlier when he was quippier and had less terrifying hair. It's not anger, it's not revenge. It's guilt.

The one thing about Kananga that irritates is that he is a classic example of the villain drawing Bond's attention directly towards him, albeit this would be shockingly homaged by *Die Another Day* and Graves' out-of-nowhere invitation to Bond to come to Iceland – why *does* he do that? Anyway, back on this one, if there had been no pimpmobile and no boothturns, Bond would have got nowhere, particularly because of his reliance on Felix Leiter and his unfeasibly long telephone cord and natty man-bag.

Maurice Binder's titles are, let's not wordmince, exquisite. Wild in (mainly) black and red, making an effort here after the muted display for *Diamonds are Forever*, this song certainly giving him much to play with and opportunity for disjointed eroticism and exploding skulls. He's also introduced that lovely floaty / watery font and albeit that's something that I recall having been ripped-off in many a pastiche, from memory it only occurs here and in the next film. I would love to see that make a comeback, just helps me get in the mood for "Bond". It's possible that he's overexerted himself as from now until *Licence to Kill* (and especially *Licence to Kill*) there aren't many new things on show, and the titles for the Dalton films in particular don't

stand adequate testament to the talent that these demonstrate, tending to fall back on some guns, bright lights and static women over whom Mo spunks his junkanoo. Admittedly, the nature of this film's occult imagery helps and he's added to the tone beautifully here, not least with what's about to appear, a slow image of a woman in widow's weeds, blue and white smoke billowing around her as her head gets bigger until we realise she's another match-head and then her skull explodes again. Fab. Parental Guidance – sit a five-year-old in front of this and you've either got a Bond fan for life, or serious trouble with the NSPCC. It's worth the gamble.

The production was supervised by Claude Hudson, Derek Cracknell Assistant Directed, or directed the assistants (unclear) and Bernard Hanson managed the location, of which there is more than one and, unlike the preceding film, the lead actor does appear to go to them all. Roger Moore prattling about in a swamp, Roger Moore striding through Harlem, Roger Moore topless in Jamaica, for the benefit of the pervy killer scarecrows and reassurance that one doesn't have to look like one's been carved out of marble by a Renaissance Bachelor to play James Bond. Roger Moore driving a Mini Moke and a bus and a boat: it's outdoorsy, it's fresh and lively and although it's the United States again, this time they've picked visually appealing and unusual bits in which to do visually appealing and unusual things, rather than drive around a parking lot in a hatchback or slog through crummy desert in a moon buggy (which is just another car chase when it comes to it) or lumber about an oil rig trying to avoid being fed salad. Ted Moore (B.S.C. – Bye-bye Sean Connery) and his photography also make the North Shore of Jamaica look splendid and other-worldly, clues as to why Fleming bothered with it. My mother "fell" pregnant with me (how does one "fall" pregnant? It suggests a precise aim) at the time of the filming

of this. She is from just outside Montego Bay, I was born there and she still lives there and she could of course tell me many anecdotes about how exciting it was back in late 1972, except she cannot for at that time she happened at that time to be living in the wrong Kingston (-upon-Thames, not -upon-Caribbean), the irresponsible cow. It could have been worse – it could have been Kingston-upon-Hull. This doesn't stop her claiming now, as do all her friends, that she was an extra in the film, although oddly she has never been able to identify herself. My likening her to a one-hundred-year-old croc didn't go down well.

Hang on, he *is* singing “...ever-changin’ world in which we live in”, I’m sure, just at that bit. Still, what does he know, he died in 1966. Another zombie. So, the title song is composed by Paul and Linda McCartney and performed – that’s definitely the word – by Paul McCartney and Wings, albeit Paul McCartney is performed by Baron Samedi. One wonders what they were on and, despite the evidence of this dirty voodooing lunacy, why it is that popular perception has Lennon as edgy and McCartney as threatening as a day-old puppy? It must chafe so. Imagine there’s no heaven. No, John, you hairy Scouse fool, one has to imagine that there *is* a heaven. This is how faith works, you nasal imbecile; taking it upon oneself to believe idiotic mumbo-jumbo rubbish is basically the point. Imagining there’s no countries and nothing to kill or die for makes the concept of James Bond redundant, doesn’t it? Bugger off back to bed, there’s a good chap, and try to come up with something as inventive as this.

It’s burny skull time once more and, ooh, hands in prayer over a naked girl’s bottom. Will they open so we see her Tee-Hee? I do hope so. So, the music score was by George Martin and it’s an odd one; not the music itself but the fact that for great sodding chunks

of the film, there isn't any. What there is, is fun and distinctive and, particularly the bit played under Bond and Solitaire's first chit-chat, rather beautiful but long passages of (especially) the bayou chase rely on ambient noise, the (splendid) sound of the boats' engines and the background wailing of a tedious Southern stereotype. When the music does turn up, it's a pleasure and perhaps one is spoiled (literally) by the Arnoldtat of every last nanosecond of a film fully and utterly muzaked to death, but this score is so much fun it's a shame we don't hear more of it. It's the first time since *Dr No* we haven't been Barryed and perhaps George Martin did come up with something that John Barry would not have. "Could not have" would be an insult: Barry patently demonstrated "some" range in all of his scores, so it's not as if this would have been beyond him, but it's no regret that he didn't do it; what we have is novel and entertaining and, when it does bother to attend, bloody good.

Tom Mankiewicz is on his own for this one, and again he's given them splendid, florid dialogue to chew, not least the wonderful observation about names being for tombstones and pretty much everything Bond says. What he has Bond *do* is of more "concern". Patently there's a hard core of folk who would never accept Roger Moore as James Bond on the basis that he's too light, too flippant, and there are times throughout his seven films when he is indeed depicted as The Fool who sails through in underwhelming peril whilst mad things happens, then he blows up a base, cue snog, cue song, cue James Bond returning. On this evidence, especially in the attitude to women, he's harder and nastier than the Bond of the books who, albeit given unpleasant private thoughts, tends to be outwardly gentlemanly and protective of women, even when curing them of gay. MooreBond here is an utter bastard to Rosie Carver (dressed in homage to Marouane Fellaini for no explicable reason) and things

don't improve when seducing Solitaire into a night in her (dull) bedroom. The next film's even more questionable. Odd. A veneer of manners and charm to get by, but underneath it, morally dodgy and with capacity to be utterly perfidious? Keeping the British end up?

Fortunately, there are characters more – much more, Roger Moore – appealing in the film and lots of people have quite a bit to do. Fortunately, unlike its immediate predecessor, much of what they do is germane to the actual story. Tee-Hee, as an example, could come across as a bit of a thug but he's lucid and says fun things, is the source of the butterhook joke which is probably the best throwaway line Bond has, and benefits from a great introduction, bending Bond's phallic least little thing to stop him annoying the laydee. Also quite fond of "Adam", a consistently malevolent bod who provides some splendid aggression and seems to be the only person in the film who remains completely unimpressed by or respectful of Bond, which is quite a refreshing attitude to take by this stage: nice to have someone who doesn't want to swap pithy barbs, just out-and-out wants Bond dead.

...Sheriff Pepper... well... some of it's fitfully amusing, most of it goes on *far* too long and labours the joke. This review is brought to you by Sheriff Pepper. I suppose creating an idiot white man helps detract from accusations that would come with having villainous black characters, although they're carefully and deliberately stated to be on Bond's level of intellect, if not higher, resourcefulness and style (although the dialogue given to the goons in the pursuit around the airport hangars is rum). I suppose Sheriff Pepper is such an extreme caricature that it cannot be seriously taken to mean anything sinister and it seeks to assert that in mocking him, and with all that "cueball" stuff earlier, one is only being racist about one's own race, which is fine (a ludicrous assertion, especially so given Strutter's

wincing reference to “spades”. He can say this because he is black, can he? I see). I suppose making such a character a fool undermines their “views”. I suppose having such a character means you can get away with the stuff you were *itching* to put in there anyway (and justifying his reappearance for this purpose next time around). Is making the villains serious (or at least, un-buffoon) any less objectionable, though? Black people can be idiots, y’know. They’re *people*. One wonders if in trying to shy away from mocking the actions of certain characters, it falls into the trap by the back door anyway. True, Rosie Carver is a hate-filled creation, but that is nothing to do with her skin but because she is a womankiewicz.

One also wonders if this isn’t worth bothering one’s (exceptionally) pretty little head with and just accept Manky’s justifiable observation that it’s a James Bond film and he’s going to win whoever he’s up against. Is *You Only Live Twice* racist against the peoples of Worksop? Is Octopussy racist... actually, *bad* example. Ah well, maybe it’s not something to be worried about, plenty of people have seen the film and enjoyed it over the years and, of course, Sheriff Pepper’s genial approach to “other” folks is only a homage to Ian Fleming after all.

Oh my norks, those hands are going to part and we’re going to see her botty-bot. Oh, what a shame, it’s just a chapess doing some Binderwrithing. Maurice, you’re such a tease.

Floating in, it’s produced by Harry Saltzman and Albert R. Broccoli and it’s fitting we have these two turn up in this 007th minute. Your main star has gone, the first replacement “failed”, the lure back was successful but incoherent; Bond’s in a state by this stage, frankly. And instead of trying to make another stately Connery film, or something a bit less weird to ensure your leading man wasn’t overwhelmed, you went and produced this looser, more – much more,

Roger Moore – casual-feeling, totally mad thing, all crocodiles and rubber masks and bell-bottom pantaloons and zombie death cults.

I suppose the logic would be that if Roger Moore could survive this, that the audience wouldn't lose sight of him despite all the wackiness going on, he was bound to succeed. It works. Moore is as magnetic as his watch, largely because, a few glitches aside, he's easy to watch and is a sensible and reassuring – and fun – presence around which they can get away with some very unusual ideas. It does come across as a reversal of Connery, whose spiky presence is the only glue keeping Diamonds are Forever together and which had to be muted in *You Only Live Twice* lest it react badly to its insane surroundings. Roger Moore's Bond allows them to keep his character reasonably consistent and watchable throughout his tenure whilst upping the weirdness around him – black magic witches, apparently invisible space stations, metal-teethed giants, Steven Berkoff, triple-nipple, supertankers, spectacle, spectacle, spectacle – and with a lesser or different Bond, it could all have collapsed. Anyone else wouldn't have had the strength of character and what Moore makes look shockingly easy was the result of proper talent in doing so. For other reasons patently one of the finest men of our lifetimes, for professional reasons Roger Moore was an absolute, critical requirement for the development and survival and continued entertainment value of the James Bond series. Seven films, some of which aren't super, but *he* never let us down. Messrs Saltzman and Broccoli, in your decision-making here, a tip of my small, chicken-feathered hat.

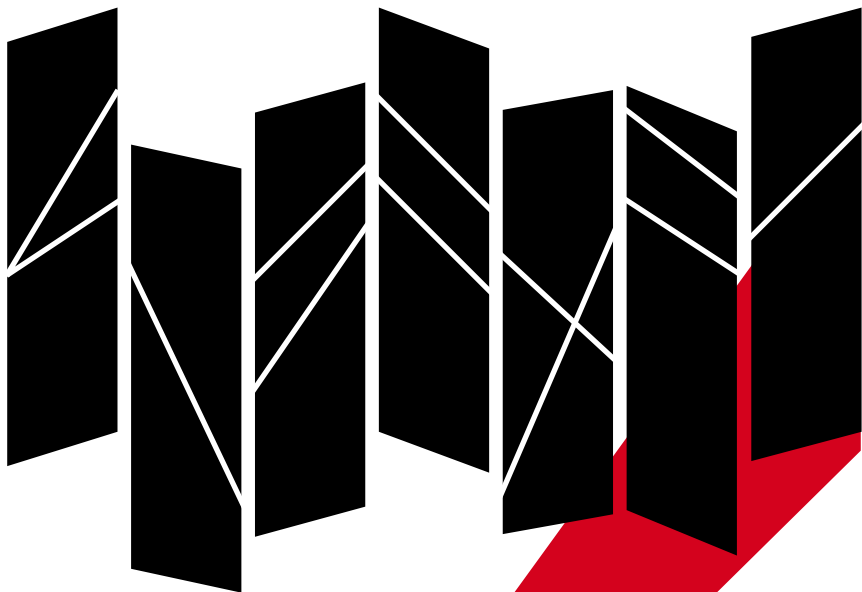
Upon which, we reach 0.07.00.

Of what follows, most of what I wanted to say was sprungboard out of the 007th minute itself. It's by no means a perfect film, it could definitely do with more – much more, Roger Moore – pace

(although it may be the absence of music that makes it feel slow) and the tone for Bond going forward is yet to settle, but it's an improvement over its predecessor in three key areas. Firstly, the ambience is much more even and although there is still a mix of unexpected cruelty and broad comedy, it's not as far at the extremes of either as *Diamonds are Forever*. Secondly, it bothers to trouble our minds with something that's nearly a story and not just ideas that could be displayed in a different order and make as much sense. Thirdly, and critically, it does feel fresh but still identifiably Bond and much of that, because he's not surrounded by dinner jackets and martinis and Aston Martins and Q, comes down to Roger Moore. After *Diamonds are Forever*, James Bond's difficult seventh jazz-funk album, there was a new direction emerging. What the particular 007th minute itself shows is that they weren't afraid of being bold – very bold, quite noisy actually – in bringing in a new Bond. No longer the insecure reminders of Bondsh Pasht, we're doing something different now – and it sets up a healthy precedent, one that's stood them well over some traumatic moments when changing Bonds at other times. By no means as radical a shift as the *Casino Royale* one, the poppyseeds of bold decision-making and trying new things out are here in *Live and Let Die*; if it's alterations you wish to make, you get away with more – much more, Daniel Craig – if the big part (fnarr) is perfectly cast.

It was.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN. JACQUES
STEWART ONCE LOST A FIGHT WITH A CHICKEN,
BUT THEN HE DOESN'T LIKE COCK FIGHTS. MUCH.



THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN

SCIENCE FACT! #9

If you were to order a “Christopher Lee” in Thailand, you would be served with a “Cresspresso”, which is a bitter coffee ground from cress, mutual indifference and broken dreams. A “Herve Villechaize” is largely the same but Venti or Grande or whichever one is smaller, I dunno; no-one really says those things do they?

I have made a serious mistake.

Such confession doubtless prompts troubling thoughts in the reader, replacing that one about whether your boss is contemplating having you killed, namely:

- A) of course you have, you clot. You've subjected yourself to The Man with the Golden Gun; and / or
- B) only the one serious mistake? In a whole lifetime? I find this unlikely; and / or
- C) you haven't gone and told someone about that thing, that really bad thing you did, twice, with [name redacted: seditious libel]; and / or
- D) you've gone and spent the pocket-money Mrs Jim permits you on obscenely expensive wine again, haven't you?

Tackling these in reverse order, it's D) how is this a mistake? Don't understand; C) not yet, but blackmailing Clarence House can be protracted; B) find it unlikely, then; I am evidently a god amongst worms and A) ouch. Smidge harsh, pickle. More on this "soon".

Nope, the serious mistake – and By Toutatis, is it serious – is that anyone bothering itself to consider these fistfuls of red-hot excreted tapeworm as anything approaching a meaningful enterprise and is playing along interactively (in which case I pity them, but pity more the people who know them), will have realised that the timings of the 007th minute in each case so far is "off". Timing's never been my strong suit. I have more offspring than the rhythm method and piteously listless willymilk otherwise allow, and there was that time I sat next to Kevin Spacey on a train and failed to repeatedly smash him in that face of his with my bony elbow for making me sit through Pay It Forward.

What I've been doing is just taking minute 0.06.00 to 0.07.00 as counted down by them little green numbers on the magic disc masher, blithe to the fact that these start ticking my life away the moment the latest version of the studio shows the latest version of its logo upon which it has spent the latest version of money it doesn't have. That's not actually the "start of the film", is it? Should "really" start timing it when the gunbarrel heaves its weary self before us, although this would mean that Quantum of Solace never begins, rendering pleasure to those persons who see fit to express their exciting view that they rathered it had not, although this would mean they had nothing to tediously bicker about, rendering the internet null and void.

Accordingly, the precision of this exercise is tainted and because A) I am very lazy and B) I can't be bothered with a B). See "A)". It does disrupt the aesthetic splendour of finishing on a precise

0.07.00 and instead concluding the 007th minute a random fifteen seconds or so beyond that target, fifteen seconds being long enough for MGM to turn up at the start, roar a bit and go bust again. Still, it would be a more credible exercise (if ultimately equally pointless and timewasty) to do it “properly”. This means that we can play a jolly game. It’s more thrilling than carrrrds, anyway. Would those previously abused 007th minutes be any better, adjusted to suit an attempt to pay attention to detail rather than sitting on the sofa scratching myself, typing a lukewarm gush of drivel and letting the roast-hot laptop battery curdle the cocksnot in my nadgers into brie? Let’s see.

DR NO – we lose most of Buddy Holly, a pity; seventeen seconds of horn-rimmed (not a euphemism) splendour gone forever from the 007th minute. Yet, we gain overall. Rebooted premise applying, during the 007th minute we gloriously receive some banco / suivi piffle and the elderly chap to the right of the Scarlet Strumpet overacts violently. And there’s the back of Connery’s head. Oh dear, she’s about to lose again. Men leer, Bond flips his eight, that’s yer lot. Still as definitive and it’s still the case that the introduction *will* happen with 0.07 on the clock (however you calculate it), so it’s a more 007-y 007th minute. One nil to the reconsidered arrangements.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE – the loss of chessiness can only be a good thing, so we’re onto a winner already. We still get cigarette-eating and weird water-drinking, cigarette-eating and weird water-drinking fans (some of you must be; express yourselves, start a blog). At the rump end of this 007th minute there’s now an extra sixteen seconds, plenty of time in which to perform a startlingly brilliant “bit of chess”, or more than enough time to get heartily sick of it. Additional thrills are King to Rook 2 – I mean, King to Rook 2, what a cretin. Everyone knows that’s crap. Look at him; I

bet he holds his knife like a pen and says “haitch”. King to Rook 2, indeed. Tchoh! – and here comes Kronsteen for the kill, picking up a big ivory knobbly one but no! The suspense! He doesn’t put it down again (I think one is meant to) but shoots a mean little look at Jennifer, who is now frowny. Ach! Too late have I done gone did realising that I shouldna done gone dood King to Rook 2 but shoulda done gone did fling the table to one side and lamp the sinister little [censored]. Hmm. Largely because it ups the uncontrollable drama and sexual tension, this has to be an improvement over the original structure. It’s viciously tense. Two-nil to the new directive. Can’t imagine why I didn’t do this before. Oh yes; couldn’t be bothered.

GOLDFINGER – fifteen seconds. Odd how the timing’s inconsistent, although it’s probably me again. Stuff it. So, the 007th minute now loses fifteen seconds in which we used to learn of Ted Moore’s Bachelor of Science (or whatever), assembly editors, sound recordists and flippy-flappy licence plate gobbery. L.C. Rudkin’s gone! No. *This will not stand*. Safely still encompassing Continuity Gurrll and a gently undulating putting surface, the 007th minute gains something exploding across Margaret Nolan’s back – hm – and then setting her on fire whilst Harry Saltzman and Albert R. Broccoli loom over her as 0.07.00 turns up. Appropriate. But they get enough attention anyway and the loss of L.C. Rudkin is a shock so, surprisingly, that’s one back for the Good Old Days and The 007th Minute We All Knew And Loved. 2-1.

THUNDERBALL – fifteen seconds, so reassuringly the same as Goldfinger but a very widescreen fifteen seconds, and that’s the point, see, yeah? Right, so most of the snot green awfulness is lost, to be replaced by a rather brilliant silhouette filling the screen as Kevin McClory’s name wobbles into view and Tom Jones faints into a big sweaty heap on the floor. Hard to say whether that’s an improve-

ment. No score draw, and it's half time. Still 2-1. Back after some persuasive words from Lager, a car, online gambling and more Lager.

YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE – getting on with things more swiftly, an unlikely comment for this film as a whole, we only have twelve seconds to add. Unspared, mercilessly, and shoved in time's big pirhana pool are SEAN CONNERY and Ian Fleming, fairly bold decisions to dump these although one of them was jettisoned by the film anyway. Top end gains are William P Cartledge, who comes across as a good sport, doing assistant-directing (I think it involves directing traffic and shouting at indigenous populace lest they fall under a Bondola), Robert Watts as location manager (and that was some location to manage, I'll have you know), Ernie Day operating a camera, Angela Martelli as Continuity (not Continuity Girl – emancipation has hit!) and the return of Newell and Rabiger, the scamps. It was all going so well, and then they turn up to make SEAN CONNERY spend the film looking like he's had a stroke. Still, in embracing gender-equivalence, although it's a mystery why Continuity should be the preserve of women – are they more consistent than me? Perhaps they “linger”. Discuss. (Don't) – it's the new boy beginning to forge ahead. 3-1. It could be a cricket score. For those not aware, cricket is the English version of Lethal Weapon 2.

OHMSS – I know the film has girth, but eighteen seconds less / more / however this works of the 007th minute? Nearly a third (I think that's right) shaved off and then bolted back on? This never happened to The Other Fella. We lose Bond being mounted from behind and squealywheelysandypops. NOT good. Yes, so we gain “Starring George Lazenby”. Questionable substitution. Not sure of the tactic. Own goal. 3-2. Not even disallowed by the presence of Diana Rigg and Telly Savalas. Not even they can rescue it. Nor all the Steppats, Ferzettis, Scoulars, Maxwells, “von” Schells, Bakers

and “as ‘M’”s, although to be fair they did give it a good try, especially George Baker and his use of a preposterous comedy accent to dub Bond, later homaged by The Actor Piaerse Brognam throughout four whole films. Very much on the line, but it stands. Oh, the crowd are getting angry, largely because they’re wondering why I’m engaging in this displacement activity rather than “reviewing” The Man with the Golden Gun. Oh come on. You’ve seen it. You know why.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER – back to normality (hah!) and just thirteen seconds to muck about with. During which time Connery’s probably had “a” kebab. Not lost too much, it’s credits, still have the opportunity to be mystified by the unlingeringness of men and that they are not worth going to one’s grave for (and they won’t come to the funeral anyway, and even if so, definitely not for a cup of tea and a slice of fruit cake afterwards. Just not keen on lingering, y’see). New moments of 007th minute bring us Saltzman and Broccoli once more, so we know who to blame now, and that it was directed by Guy Hamilton, taking the positive daily workgrind mantra of “every day something new and different” too literally, the film being not so much directed as shoved about a bit, its yo-yo tone a homage to the 1967 Casino Royale, although with less coherence. Hmm. No goal. It’s still 3-2 as we head into the final moments. And how much time added on...?

LIVE AND LET DIE –...fourteen seconds. Fair chunks of Filament Lady go but she was getting tired doing all that waving. Yes, bye-bye dear. Geoffrey Holder’s still in there, defining the 007th minute of Live and Let Die as much as every other lovely minute of it, and we get added Guy Hamilton, marginally more focussed this time, and magically, right on 0.07.14, *right on it*, right at the point the film is 0.07.00 old, not a second either way, it’s Roger Moore. As James Bond. Having a kip. It’s deliberate, it must be. Even if it’s accidental

it's brilliant; a resounding top corner piledriver to make it 4-2 to the new way of thinking. Some people are on the pitch. They think it's all over.

It is not.

Taking that as having sorted “everything”, all's right in the world and we can move away from turgid, self-indulgent non-comedy to *The Man with the Golden Gun*. You decide how much of a shift that is: many take the view that they're close neighbours, therefore no need to hire hirsute cromagnons and a van. It's not the most popular of the films, is it? *The Man with the Golden Gun*, a film about the energy crisis that then sees fit to demonstrate precisely that over two long hours during which bum all happens. *The Man with the Golden Gun*, blessed with nice and unusual locations and engaging performances by Maud Adams (especially) and Christopher Lee but weighed down like puppies in a canal-bound binbag by dismal smut, tit “jokes”, Britt Ekland's *curious* acting, Sheriff Pepper giving racism a thorough test-drive and, of course, Nick Nack, played by Billie-Jean King in a hat. *The Man with the Golden Gun*, a film with an outrageously dangerous car stunt, that molests its impact by having a swanny-whistle blow; what next, a frickin' kazoo? *The Man with the Golden Gun*, where the titular (see, it's got me doing it now) gun is neatly put together but that's really no metaphor for the rest of it, comprising two stories crunched artlessly and tragically into a coupling, forced to mate unenthusiastically at Golden Gunpoint, no love behind the eyes, when otherwise each element would contentedly have no business being anywhere near the other. Bit like the time I went to “Wales”. One part of it a cat-and-mouse tale of two ghastly psychopathic misogynists circling around a horribly abused woman who they both proceed to abuse further, who comes to learn far too late that these chaps are exactly the same;

the other part statutory supervillainy about weaponised sunshine ultimately foiled by a quipping waxwork and a talking bikini (no, not *Die Another Day*, but I see your point). By themselves these are engaging ideas that can provide grand entertainment for differing moods, but mashing the two into a loveless marriage by means of a stunningly crapulous and illogical coincidence doesn't double the excitement, it just dilutes it. Another one where the tone is, let's be nice, "yet to fully settle down".

I do like *The Man with the Golden Gun*. It's harmless. Actually, it's docile. Actually, it's inert. Actually, I don't like it. See? "Tone". Spurning the invention and energy of *Live and Let Die*, this ambles along without being terribly bothersome, but it does feel like it's going through the motions, like a Beirut bullet poohed from Bond's botty. There's an awful lot of hanging around, there are some good bits but they're stolen moments, lucid intervals, and then it stops. Not saying it is bereft of ideas: some are appealing (albeit primarily in the Andrea Anders story, not the "Solex" guff) but such as are there feel stretched out – the car chase and the klong chase go on forever – to the point the joins in the screenplay splinter, cracks abundant. If more – much more, Roger Moore – happened it might recklessly risk being exciting; alternatively if it was edited to an hour. This theory that Bonds need be a couple of hours long *at least* is only sustainable if there's a couple of hours' worth of stuff to do. Goldfinger, *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Quantum of Solace* turn up, do their thing, bugger off again, fond of them all for so doing. The most significant kill of *The Man with the Golden Gun* is time. Arguably they filled *The Spy Who Loved Me* with too much, but at least it's not boring. This one holds just about (but barely) enough to engage intermittently but it sails dangerously close to sinking in mysterious circumstances and looking a bit rusty, lopsided and stricken.

This leisurely stroll through mild peril is exemplified in what happens up to and then throughout the 007th minute. Up to 0.06.00 we've had an indigo gunbarrel, odd but probably a signal that this does get a bit blue and is not for kids, even if it does wallow in the childish by having the Bond theme played on a tambourine and a whoopee cushion. No guitars evident, saved them all for the "song" I guess. Really shouldn't have bothered.

Nice island, man with three mammary glands which entirely justifies all the breast jokes – it is dealt with at a juvenile level – and leads to useless Q's most useless gadget and aggravation about considering whether the taxpayer should have its money spent making Roger Moore a right tit. More disturbing is Scaramanga's strange chest hair, although it's obvious that they shaved some – but not all – so they could apply a nipple that looks like the flange from the top of an Actimel. How very half-hearted. How very The Man with the Golden Gun. Maud Adams has wiped TripNip down and looks distracted in so doing – perhaps she's found another one on his inner thigh. She doesn't look happy, nor need she – when the champagne cork bursts and there's spume everywhere, she's going to get it in her hair and it's a sod to shift. An interesting character with motives and tragedy, the film goes into decline when she leaves it, involuntarily.

Then we had Skeletor appear and you could tell he was a villain because he's wearing a navy shirt and a yellow tie. He is played by Blofeld's last remaining Las Vegas goon and it's nice to have such a vital character return. I seem to recall his name is Rodney, which is the very definition of not bothering. Might as well have called him Geoff. Still, one can try too hard, Mr Kil. No-one said anything for a minute and a half until the product placement starts with a scream for "Tabasco" (registered trade mark) which is the slippery slope towards AMC showrooms (and makes one wonder where the shops

are around here) and we had a look at Scaramanga's butterfly collection: he seems nice, why is Muttley trying to have him killed? It is an interesting idea to have a duplicitous henchperson but more – much more, Roger Moore – could have been made of it. Hey ho, it's The Man with the Golden Gun, and making an effort would have been disconcerting and out of character.

We have also seen Scaramanga's gymnasium; he needs to work on his pecs, he has three after all. Skeletor went all cackly, suggesting he's up to no good but then there were weird goings on in the Pinewood Funhouse (a filthy euphemism) and another skellington and a bar-room piano (Christ) and an Al Capone dummy that blinks when it fires which is either an incredible animatronic and obviously where the budget went or cheap any-old-thing-will-do-by-now. Comedy music; total shambles. Boggly-eyed Rodney, his lower dentures about to flee the film (lucky them), he hasn't seen so much slapdash crumminess in one place since Vegas. But he's no fool; manages to take off both of Capone's arms with one shot. He's a good assassin too and doesn't come laboured with a Lulu theme song; bit of a win.

On and on it goes – stretching it out until we finally reach...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN

There's Christopher Lee – sporting an extraordinary hairdo and a divine navy leisuersuit with ivory piping, unzipped to the abdomen – trying to get at his leeedle Golden Gun in some mirrors. Couple of things to note. Firstly, the gun appears mounted on a crow. I have absolutely no idea what this is meant to signify, unless it's another unarmed thing Scaramanga has shot (it's not as if his victims in this film were actually able to defend themselves, is it?). Alternatively it's one of the birds from 3 ½ Love Lane, a neat reference albeit the

execution is peculiar. Alternatively alternatively it's a prop hanging around Pinewood with all the rest of the rubbish on show here and whilst using whatever's in the loft instead of coming up with something new is cheap, it's very The Man with the Golden Gun and is ultimately less shaming than taking any pride in creating these awful things from scratch. I prefer to think of it having been hypnotised. That or it's watched what's going on, fallen asleep and it's just there, dozing gently, its slumber unthreatened by the prospect of anything happening.

This is markedly the longest of the pre-credits sequences so far; unjustifiably so. Big solid slab of sod all. By this time in Dr No we'd had murders, same for Live and Let Die; in Thunderball there had been transvestites and jetpacks; in OHMSS George had done drownings and been jilted and in You Only Live Twice, James Bond was dead. They've had as long to make this since Live and Let Die, as they did between Live and Let Die and its predecessor and in *that* time they came up with something weird, wild and wonderful, cast a new Bond and tried to kill Baron Samedi nine times until they gave up, relented to his sinister rider demands for blue Smarties, a scythe and a buttered binman, and put him in the film instead. This is two middle aged men, Frank and Rodney, wandering around a warehouse. Slightly disappointing.

The second thing to note is that this bit with the mirrors is a major blooper as Christopher Lee cannot personally be seen in one, science fact! Overall, he's fine and as dignified as the film lets him be, but it's plain that the motives (such as they are) of the character he is ordered to play (such as it is) are all over the place. Firstly he's not bothered with Bond, even as a love-rival, and then he suddenly does want rid of him for...why? Just because Bond's coming to rescue Goodnight from a life of going at a Golden Gun like a dog

with a mouthful of hot chips and having Francis show her his salty Junk and admire his many watermelons? Why does he have the power plant when he confesses that he doesn't know how it works and seems to populate it with a mute who has wandered in off the set of a pørn film? How did the island have any power anyway before he got hold of the Solex? Did Nick Nack generate electricity by running around in a plastic wheel? It was all going along quite nicely with his horrible attitude to Andrea Anders and making her lick his pistol and then, once she's been offed, he's at a loose end. May as well become a mad supervillain because we've half an hour to fill and we require an explosion. Scaramanga becomes progressively less interesting the more the film stumbles along – the only interesting fact about him by the end is that he keeps sealed but empty bottles of wine in his bedroom, the big weirdo, and M has his direct line (???) which makes the film redundant (no comment) – although it is neat that Bond ultimately shoots him through that third nipple.

“I fooled you”, screams Midgely, and it's right, he did, I thought this was going to be exciting. The revolving mirrors were ommidged in *Die Another Day*, in that bit where Lee Tamahori looked in them, adjusted his bra and took a long deep moment of reflection about what he was inflicting upon us. I think it's a deleted scene.

Worried look on Scaramanga's face. Not surprising; he's regretting the day-glo purple bricks. Probably also concerned that the honky-tonk piano's going to start up again or that his waxworks are...coming back to life. Record states that Manky was thinking of Jack Palance as the villain; strikes me that Vincent Price must have been in with a chance too.

Right, so a wide-shot of the main arena of the “fun” house. “Fun” in the sense of “fun” sized Mars Bar, i.e. not a source of fun at all,

and tiny. Bit like Nick Nack. “Wide-shot” is exaggerating too; all the film, especially this, looks compressed-for-TV, a long way from the spectacles we were given 1965-1969. You now need spectacles to see anything. It’s boringly photographed and underwhelmingly edited. Bring back Peter Hunt; we’d have been through this in one minute. Whereas previous hollowed out rocks have given us monorails and helicopters and space rockets, this downsized austerity version has cardboard jaggedy red and black shapes and green footlights and, mesmerised ravens aside, could pass so convincingly as a 80s dance studio you expect Scaramanga to be wearing puce legwarmers.

There seem to be two Skeletors on show, presumably “mirrors”, although when we hit the end of this scene – if we ever do – one of them is standing where the Bond waxwork appears. This is not a mistake – it came to life and walked over. Skeletor’s looking really sweaty; he wasn’t expecting anything this horrible to occur. Don’t think any of us were. Quite what he was expecting when he accepted the challenge from Nick Nack – played by Tom Cruise. Standing on a pouffe – is unclear. You’re off to the private island of the world’s greatest hitman not as training bait, not that at all, perish the thought, but with a very good chance of killing him, despite his knowing his way around and your being a bit, y’know, old. Hm.

“Now...how are you going to get down the stairs?” He’s going to turn into a bat and fly. Haven’t you seen any of these films? C’mon Frodo, pay attention. “So near, and yet so far.” Quite true. So near to the credits and yet soooooo farrrrrrrr. Fairly steep stairs there, decorated in brown and orange – the 70s, bless – and even waxy Al and his boys have wandered over for a look. Al’s so thrilled it’s made his arms grow back. Actually, this is quite exciting, flickery

lights and shrill music and it does appear to be Christopher Lee doing his own stunt here, tumbling forward, plucking the Golden Gun from the raven and fires and Rodney gets a third eye (which is more impressive than a third nipple) and it's quite graphic on pause y'know, and...

0.07.00

Ooh, nearly.

Now that we're playing the game properly – low threshold of “proper”, granted – I'd say the wobbly old waxy dummy of Big Rog – homage in Octopussy onwards – is about three seconds outside the 007th minute, so near and yet so far, although therefore it does appear when 0.07 is on the ticker. Which is the most interesting thing to have happened, although competing with the fact that it wasn't actually there a few seconds ago. Why does he have a waxwork of Bond? Who made it – Nick Nack? Presumably he melted down the Connery one and still had enough left over for Al Capone and some goons. Plausibility not walking tall around here either, at least it gives Andrea the inspiration to set her plot in motion, although it must have been a downer, when having her arm nearly broken by Bond, to realise that the dummy was in fact much nicer.

While I'm on it, that scene in the hotel bedroom when Bond and Andrea first meet: I veer between admiring it and worrying that it's the crassest example of the Hamilton / Mankiewicz approach to both Bond specifically – a mean bastard – and women generally. MooreBond starts as deftly amusing as only he can be, albeit he is leering at a woman showering, and then very, *very* brutal, far more so than the books, then grimly determined to “get” Scaramanga (this doesn't last; shame, he comes across as rattled, it's genuine acting

and Moore's great), hilariously rude with his dismissal of Andrea as not being worth the cost of a bullet (and yet she doesn't notice and remains submissive because she's a woman and therefore, in Mankyl-land, thick) and then finally charming again. Whereas the rest of the film lollops around, this is oddly perhaps too quick, although it does tend to demonstrate that this new regeneration needs time to settle. It would come.

The flipside of this – at best awkward, at worst insulting – approach to women is that Andrea is a proper character with a proper story and it's rather tragic and melodramatic. Disturbing when you think about it, both men are *vile* to her and she's trapped in being attracted to such losers; it's a bleak point. Without doubt the scenes Maud Adams shares with either Christopher Lee or Roger Moore are the film's highpoints and, absent her, there's little heart or purpose to it. I suppose the balance to all this troubling victimhood is shoving us Britt Ekland who, on her first appearance, appears with ears sticking out from her blonde hair in a way that reminds one of Daniel Craig, or a mouse. Sticking her in a bikini is no real distraction from the patent truth that the character brings nothing to the film apart from some dreadful dialogue dreadfully delivered and she's only there as rescue-fodder and everything that happens – everything – could just as easily have happened without her involvement or interference; homaged later, in many hateful ways, by Jinx.

Back in that hotel room, though... I dunno. Perhaps I've liked it in the past because it does demonstrate acting, and had that overshadow what it is they are acting, which is horribly dodgy. Still, it's capable of provoking a reaction, a rarity for this film.

The other notable moment is of course the flipping of an ugly hatchback across a broken bridge. The stunt itself is desperately

necessary, the car chase being stunningly dull, with the only points of interest up to the spiral jump being how much petrol car showrooms put in their display models, and contemplating that a million-dollar hit on the person whose idea it was to put Sheriff Pepper in the car is tremendously good value for money. OK, so the doop-whistle “thing”. It’s not great, is it, but would some of the other Bond composers have done better? George Martin would have left it silent (probably best) but then that would have been true of most of the film so not a specific decision as such. Conti would have abandoned the whistle for a disco cowbell, no improvement. Arnold David would have – and you know it – done yet more James Bond theme; yes, David, we know, now put it away, there’s a good lad. I’d say Michael Kamen’s twangy Spanish guitar would have worked best.

Still, it remains a great Bond moment whatever it sounds like, just as Roger Moore remains a great Bond whatever he’s given to wear – additional nipple, green flares, grotesque “sports” jacket, kung-fu jim-jams, a very angry face, Britt Ekland, etc. The decision to have him impersonate a waxwork is unfortunate fodder for the naysayers but, again, he’s consistently watchable here and lively and uses the word “kinky” to devastating effect, although that’s an odd decision towards the end of the film to drop the Solex down his shirt rather than, say, put it in his pocket. I wonder what he does with the Solex? Bit useless for the British government to have it; dismal summer we’ve just had. We’ve probably lost it anyway or the Dench M traded it in for moonshine.

I recall that the Bond dummy did confuse me the first time I saw this. Scaramanga fires five shots, and four fingers fly. Wither the fifth shot? Ah yes, sent to SIS with “007” carved in the side, a little waxy willy. Golden bullet you say? How depressingly orthodox.

This 007th minute does exemplify something about the series by this point (a comment that clings desperately to the premise of this “experiment”); a capacity to be “a bit” drawn out if ideas are on the thin side. I must be giving off the impression I don’t like it. I am fond of it, but that’s because it offers itself up gamely for ridicule (perhaps too knowingly). I have to accept it could have been worse. Much worse. With Vol.1 being “Blaxploitation” – a phrase I have never understood, although were Blax in it and there could have been some ploitation, and whatever that is it’s an improvement on plantation – and Vol.2 being a hybrid Wild-West / Kung-Fu thing, what we have in an alternative universe is Kill Jim, the umpteenth film by Quentin Tarantino although given his fondness for the “N-word”¹⁾, it’s just as well he didn’t get his mitts on Live and Let Die; it could have all been very distressing.

Another thing that could do with being silent is the theme song. Oh no, it’s Lulu. Lulu. *Hide*. Think on that for a moment. Last time around, we had the Very Reverend McCartney, “pop” – and if he had his way, real – Royalty. Emitting Lulu into a world full of war and abuse and exploitation and disease, but still too nice to be punished with Application of Lulu, seems to be an unnervingly pointed and deliberate reduction of standards. McCartney to Lulu. Foie Gras to Shippam’s. Oxford to Cambridge. Dalton to Brosmon. Caterwauling her miserable way through leaden and hateful Carry-On innuendon’t (it’s not really a “song”) about a man with a metal penis lurking in doorways, an embarrassingly guitarded pørntrack row wailing away whilst moistened lovelies show us their pert lulus all dampened-up with Binder loveglug; yeah, wholesome family entertainment. Whilst instrumental versions of the... thing are better, that’s like saying being drunk is better than being eaten; each

¹⁾ “Translucent Self-Regard”. The N is silent. Wish he was.

is appalling in its own way although one is markedly much worse. Gruesome shrieking about who “he” will Boom Bang-a-Bang with his powerful weapon this time; one wonders what demographic this was aimed at, save for deaf self-abusers and the blissfully dead. Was Lulu the best they could do for “contemporary artist what does screeching”? Was Rod Hull indisposed? I find it hard to believe they couldn’t have improved it and hired a coked-up epileptic mendicant to scrape his overgrown fungal toenails down a blackboard. Those titles are also odd – they jump disconcertingly to the first scene which tends to suggest they were only ready and edited in at the last minute which is not a surprise as I suspect there was a bit of persuading that had to be done to encourage the young ladies to be as naked as they patently are. Coupled with the ditty about a bad man shooting off his expensive shagclag all over the place, it’s a bit mucky.

Nothing else of note actually happens, save that two schoolgirls beat off a lot of men in pyjamas. It is unclear what we are to make of this. The end.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF THE SPY WHO LOVED ME. JACQUES STEWART IS
IN THE NEXT ROOM, OR THIS VAIR ONE. BOO!



THE SPY WHO LOVED ME

SCIENCE FACT! #10

If you listen to the song “Nobody Does it Better”
in reverse, you really are wasting your life, y’know.
Go for a walk. You’re a disgrace. Just look at you.

Time for a running total.

On the basis that this misadventure was initially an exercise in establishing whether the 007th minute of each film exemplified “A Bond Film”, one may as well, on reaching 00-figures, “Apply. Observe. Conclude”, as a chemistry teacher of mine used to shout. Given what subsequently happened to him, he evidently interpreted the process as “Binoculars. Boys. Not just calling a register but also signing one”.

Accordingly, working through our nine 007th minutes so far, in order, where we get to is:

1. British interests are in dire peril; the stiff upper hair is wobbling. Send for the hero, a high-living gambler.
2. The opposition are a roster of sophisticated parallels, although more intellectually blessed than the hero.
3. Let's be bold and brash and a lickie bick cheeky...
4. ...and push it to the cusp of outrage, when we can.
5. Amidst the madness, we can inject moody solemnity for “depth” – if not realism.
6. Thunderous action in interesting locations, and wink at the audience to reassure that everyone knows it's pretend.
7. If in doubt, fall back on proven routines...
8. ...but don't be afraid to inject into them an element of the bizarre and unexpected now and again.
9. ...Um...

Hmm. What is the positive ingredient to extrapolate from the 007th minute of *The Man with the Golden Gun*?

THE 007TH MINUTE

9. *Ensure a bird is very dead before resting one's weapon there-upon?* Not convinced that's family viewing, although it's arguably evident in the way The Actor Pierge Brosmomb's Bond ostentatiously sniffnibbles murdered women. Applying his little shooter is only one step further.

9. *Do not listen to cackling power-crazed midgets?* Not even when they're disliking cock-fights and banging on about the gorgeousness of Rosamund Pike? Shame.

9. *Hang around filling time and wasting it in the process?* Too many examples to mention. No, no, come now Jimothy, one must be positive and clappy and blisswhacked and...

...ah.

9. Villains with perverse charisma and challenging personal attributes, be they physical or mental or both.

Obviously in evidence prior to *The Man with the Golden Gun*, but as none appear in their respective film's 007th minute, Scaramanga's brand of tracksuit-clad evil (influencing every youth in Britain) may as well stand testament for the lot. And, fair's fair, overchebbed vampire maniac and a hirsute French Gollum are "challenging" as "attributes". At least there's something in there to latch on to; but it's as obvious as Moore's nips-high action slacks betraying the side he dressed that by James Bond 9, the regular service interval had long passed, bits were dropping off and the accelerator wasn't working. Time to press that pedal, old lovey.

You can see why, though. *The Man with the Golden Gun* has *some* qualities but being consistently engaging across its running time of eleven turgid millennia it is not, save for Lulu unlocking the gates of Hell, both M and Scaramanga employing pointlessly mute function-

aries (devising the idea in one of their late night ‘phone calls) and Britt Ekland being pointlessly noisy when purposefully mute would have been preferable.

Not much happens and everyone’s very grumpy, James Bond especially, stomping around with a blot of gum stuck to his chest (no wonder we don’t see MooreBond topless again: it’s still there), going out of his way to hurt women, drown children and stab midgets with a splintered chairback, heroically, and sporting a look as if he’s just licked cat wee from a nettle / polished off the Phuyuck / enjoyed the refreshing “taste” of Global Product Partner Heineken (upon which, see first suggestion). His bid for oblivion by driving fast into a river didn’t work, although satisfaction can be gained by knowing that Sheriff Pepper is still in a Thai gaol, ancient and emaciated, dead behind the eyes, getting his cellmate’s Agitator thrice-nightly right up the Doomsday Machine. He doesn’t charge a million a shot: three moist cigarettes and a tear-streaked glimpse of daylight will do. His sentence lapsed years ago; he just prefers it to Louisiana.

The series definitely needed some oomph – some 00-mph. Bm-bm, although double-zero miles per hour is a fitter description of The Man with the Golden Gun than its successor. Two possible approaches. Firstly, wipe the lot out and start again, perhaps under the sea this time. The moral of The Spy Who Loved Me suggests that this is a terrible idea. The second approach: look back at what you have achieved and reflect on the distinctive elements of the series. Don’t deny them; recognise them, affirm them joyously; just don’t turn it into a smug binge in which James Bond surfs, twice. The Spy Who Loved Me’s reputation as a Greatest Hits trawl isn’t a dishonour – the word “great” is part of “Greatest”. As is the word “teats”.

That’s not to say that no previous film demonstrated characteristics beyond the one(s) I’m reinterpreting into its respective 007th minute

(with a little contrivance, granted, but I'm not sure it's that much). If we take those 9 propositions above as characteristic (which is one of the two purposes of this rubbish, the other being an opportunity to write the word "teats"), most of the films to date demonstrate the majority of them in some sort of combination. Dr No falls down on number 7, although I accept that's cheating. Even Diamonds are Forever nearly achieves some of them. I doubt it meets the first principle, largely because it has both Bond and Blofeld, on separate occasions, explicitly telling the audience that neither the gem smuggling nor the Blingy Death Kill Laser are any threat to Britain. This strikes one as either immensely confident, that by 1971 we would watch any rubbish (we would), or deeply cynical. Or confidently cynical. Or cynically confident. Or all of these – it's Diamonds are Forever and it's therefore a) impossible to define and b) impossible to argue that it's worthwhile bothering. You can replace the word "define" with "watch" if that gives you something jolly to do.

What is possible to argue is that the films thus far bunged our way by the 1970s struggle to manifest expectations set in, um, now. Hm. Internet-age hindsight, as appealing a condition as whatever now passes as the excuse for academic weakness. In my day the fashionable disease for parents to inflict upon their dullard offspring, in sedated denial of sprog being, God forbid, thick, was dyslexia, so prevalent that it became airborne around exam time. The modern equivalent's probably Ebola or rabies or, oh I dunno, death. Whatever it is, I hope it hurts. Still, there's a potential, if tortuous, analogy in so far as expectations go. In large families, the ninth child is habitually wheezy or a clergyperson or a bit disappointing in comparison to their older, dynamic, World-conquering (if bonkers) siblings, and tend to marry a Prussian loony and immediately die of consumption or complications brought on by juicy catarrh. There just to keep the dynasty going, a

spare, a life theme tuned by devastating whispers of “pleasant enough but not really up to it”. The Man with the Golden Gun.

Put more mustard in one’s custard – there are pills – and produce something worthy of the name.

Much has been written / spoken / communicated through the medium of dance about the complicated genesis of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, some of which you are entitled to believe if that’s a lifestyle choice you must make. Liparusloads of Saltzman and McClory strife that isn’t worth going into because it’s still probably being litigated, somewhere, and is also earthshatteringly dull. Mr Broccoli built a big shed, filled it with water during the worst drought Britain ever suffered (another *Spy / Quantum of Solace* connection beyond the Robert Sterling thing, and both being super), threw a man off a mountain, showed us Pyramids and supertankers and underwater cars and indestructible giants and then nuked two submarines, Ken Adam having felt-tipped the words “Harry” and “Kevin” on them (science fact!). This is all you need to know about the making of this film. I accept that there’s other stuff about Stromberg really being Blofeld, big clue being that he lives in a giant SPECTRE octopus and inflicts horrendous garb on his men (one can only weep at his submarine crew uniform) and, obviously, Stromberg is an anagram of Blofeld, if you change the letters. Regardless of all the ostensible difficulties in making it, they made it and made it tremendous. There are bits that don’t work, but that’s an improvement on trying to find bits that do.

Up to the 007th minute, we’ve been spoiled for incident; so much happens they can’t afford to show us all of it, a departure from last time out. New team – Hamilton and Mankiewicz demonstrating creative exhaustion in the previous film – pep things up. Arguably, Bond is a blander character from now on, but the sort of things *they*

had him do weren't nice. Credit where due, Manky could craft a smashing one-liner, but on the evidence of the cracking jokes in this film, it's not as if Christopher Wood thinks that erudite is a glue, either. Notably, the attitude towards women has changed. Whether it's *improved* says too much, but it does seem to have shifted into kindly, condescending tolerance as opposed to dismissive, lipcurled slapwhackage.

Critically, what happens up to and during the 007th minute is – at least in the XXX / Sergei “story arc”, oh God – followed through (reasonably logically) to the end. The plot of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, a bucket of joyous codswallop, hangs together (ish), another improvement, although many say that this is because it's used goods and the revolution is only a well- to anorexically- disguised reheat of *You Only Live Twice*. Well, all revolution requires evolution, otherwise it would just be “r” and played horribly feebly by John Cleese. Which you would not want. Misses the point – *The Spy Who Loved Me* is a facelift, a refresh not a reboot, retaining what worked (Roger Moore) and remoulding what didn't (James Bond). A bold statement in utter balderdash, the bravery is in going so Biggest, Best and Beyond, and why not reacquaint the audience with how grand and spectacular Bond can be? *You Only Live Twice* as a serving suggestion was a great pick – it's massive and confident and relentless and daft. An “anniversary” film based on the uncertain, inconsistent and flabby *Diamonds are Forever*, that would be a cretinous idea and... *oh*.

The “same but different” from the off: an unusual rendition of the Bond theme. An Extraordinary Rendition; it appears to have kidnapped a better version and flown it to Cuba with a bag on its head. Fortunately, the music improves for the rest of the film and at least we were distracted by the sight of Roger Moore's trizers exploiting

the return to widescreen in a majestically flappy way. Broad enough to count as a National Park, they have their own ecosystem and picnic area, and remain the only human garb visible from The Moon.

Prior to one of Britain's model submarines being subnapped, we saw a lot of noisy young men proclaiming "500 feet" too many times – could have been worse, could have been shouting AFRICAN CONFLICT DIAMONDS every seven seconds – which leaves the audience certain that a) they're at 500 feet. There is no b), unless this is Naval in jokery for something very badly sexual involving multiple millipedes and one's torpedo tube; ooh, up periscope. Hello sailor. Look, it's hard and long and full of seamen and I know I did that joke in the You Only Live Twice one, so it's appropriate that it's used again for The Spy Who Loved Me; see, everyone's doing it. A pretence of heterosexuality in the lewd pictures of naked young ladies on the walls of the "Mess" (one dreads to imagine the mess) is depth-charged by drinking tea (one of the gay drinks, along with Martini), smoking (with limited oxygen? Can't be right) and playing chess. British submariners play chess, do they? Can we state with confidence where the pieces have been? Never mind unkillable razor-toothed giants, this is the realm of fantasy. Still, better than the reality where they just go around [redacted: treasonable].

The Captain got flustered when everything went buzzy and the red light came on and he didn't know why that happened; it wasn't one of the "Captain's *Special Nights*". Equally strange was discovering that a practical joker's been at the periscope and pasted over the spyhole a picture of the open-mouthed space-rocket from that James Bond film. He'll tan that man's hide and no mistake. We left the Captain confused as he tried to remember which Bond film it was – the one with the car? – and annoyed at finding that his submarine is in Outer Space. Yet again! Tchoh!

George Baker – having recovered his voice from that inmate of HM Prison Ship Australia, restorative justice – we saw sitting in a ridiculously oversized and understaffed Ken Adam office, stretching behind him into a different timezone (1967, if the rest of this is a guide). Interesting that the conclusion reached is not that someone’s *nicked* Ranger, but that it’s been “lost”. After all, what could anyone else use such a deterrent for? Who else could possibly need to be out there “detering”? Oh sorry, forgot, it’s a massive weapon with 16 nuclear missiles on it. Hm. Better say “lost” than “pinched”, then. Can’t have panic. Might be a good time to review the refusal to develop that typewriter ATAC thingy. But it was *so* dull, wasn’t it?

Shown a photo of Moscow telling is it was MOSCOW and we learnt that the submarine Potemkin (har de har *har*) was also subducted. On first watch you’d think that Gogol (har de har de har *har har*; what next? Pushkin?) is referring to the British one we’ve been worrying about. Lordy, this one’s got so much content, they can’t show it all. A change from last time, with its lingering views over inconsequential, embittered nothingness.

All this subnappery is engaging but reflecting on the film raises doubts. Firstly, why the fuss about the tracking system? That just finds the submarines “by their wake” (yeah, *right*). It’s the system for disabling them by making their instruments Made by British Leyland that’s *surely* of more interest? No-one seems bothered about that device. Secondly, why does Stromberg take the American submarine? He’s got two, more than enough instruments of Armageddon for any growing buoy (hnff...). It’s not as if one’s “developed a fault”. Perhaps he watched the pre-credits and *also* thought he’d only napped one. Twit. Had he left well alone, Bond wouldn’t have stopped him acting out his scheme and then retiring underwater, although why he doesn’t go there and leave us alone is unclear. Destroying everyone

leads to a meltdown in demand for his oil; poor pension planning. Atlantis City doesn't look cheap; maintenance against "some damp" will cost. Perhaps he's high on that fishfood he nibbles and is actually turning into a goldfish, with their massive intellectual capacity and notoriously poor attention span of... thing. One wonders what he's going to do down there. At least Drax planned for nookie. It's not as if Stromberg can tend his allotment (not a euphemism) and listen to the cricket, is it? Didn't think it through. Can't even open a window.

THE DIARY OF KARL SIGISMUND DEREK STROMBERG.

Discovered floating off the coast of Corsica Sardinia.

25 JULY 1977. Popped Atlantis up to the surface to see how Armageddon's going. Armageddon outa here! They seem to be destroying each other very nicely. Gentle drift down to the seabed in quiet, relaxed satisfaction. Fish for tea. Yum! This is GREAT!

26 JULY 1977. Had caviar and oysters for breakfast!!! This would never have happened with other people around. Well, it's my world and I can do what I want. This is just fantabulosa. Had them for lunch as well! What a brilliant idea all that was. Mid-morning a British submarine came into view, probably trying to attack. It went all wobbly and broke down rather pathetically, drifting listlessly to the seabed. Odd; hadn't even pressed the SubDisruptor. It's just outside the dining room window. Need to get someone to tow it away; it's unsightly. Fish for tea; guppy steak with a roasted fishfood crust and a brine jus. De-Lish.

27 JULY 1977. Noticed that we're getting low on loo roll. Had a coded message from the captains of Strombergs 1 and 2. Appar-

ently the men are objecting to their orange and pink uniforms. Say they look “gay”. I agree, they do look gay, but then they complained that this isn’t what the word means any more. When they explained it I reminded them that a) they are sailors and methinks the ladies doth protest too much and b) everyone else on the planet will be bright orange and pink by now so it’s hardly singling them out, is it? Still, sounds like they’re ganging up on me again. Reminded them that I design all my own clothes, including my favourite natty silk purple tentshirt and kinky neckerchief. Had enough of their snivelling; it’s just that episode with the heliotrope crotchless boilersuits all over again!!! When they get back, will set Jaws on them. No more oysters or caviar left. Fish for tea. Could do with some vegetables.

28 JULY 1977. Jaws came round and started whining about how he’s run out of Brasso to soak his teeth in overnight. Never stops whining. Jaws is a pooh. Fish again.

29 JULY 1977. Saw a terrific documentary about fish on the tv last night and then Jaws went and spoiled it by reminding me there is no television any more and I was just staring out of the aquarium window! He’s just such a burden, and he’s started giving my jugular vein that funny look of his. Cheered up by sorting the fridge and getting rid of the half-used jars of tartare sauce and I found a Texan bar. Must ration it! Had a bit with this evening’s tea (guess what that was!!!). It was lush.

30 JULY 1977. JAWS HAS EATEN THE TEXAN BAR! Very angry. So selfish. He said he didn’t think I would mind. Well, I DO! As a punishment I sent him over to that crashed British submarine to see what he could salvage. Came back, dripping with blood (again! Another shirt ruined!) and smelling of cigarettes. He pretended it was the sailors who had been smoking,

but I told him that this was totally unbelievable and I'm not prepared to take his lies any more. He knows smoking makes his teeth rust, but I'm simply beyond caring. Worse, his plunder was a chess set (the pieces smell funny) and a jar of millipedes (no idea). Claimed the only cuisine aboard the British submarine were baked beans (which he knows I can't eat, they're murder on me spastic colon) and something called Marmite, which I tried and it was disgusting! Had to drink a pint of saltwater to take the nasty taste away. Very disappointed in him, told him this. Sent him to his room without any supper. Cheered myself up a bit by creating my own recipe – Fish Surprise! It's fish, to be honest.

31 JULY 1977. Jaws has left me. He got in the escape pod, just. Even after all that moaning when we designed it that it seemed suspiciously incapable of accommodating him! Oh, I shall miss him, but it's probably for the best. Plenty more fish in the sea. Bugger all else in the sea, frankly. Was going to make fishcakes and then I realised there aren't any potatoes left. Ever. Could murder a burger. Decided instead on humanity. Fool to meself. Fish again. Bit worried that it's all becoming "samey". Feeling bloated. Could do with some roughage.

1 AUGUST 1977. Stayed in bed. Twanged the webbing around my thumbs. Hope that Jaws returns and presents me with a bag of potatoes, much wine, some nice cheeses. Best really to pretend he hasn't left me, he's just gone to do the weekly big shop. Hope he remembers loo roll. Bit of a smell of damp emerging, and that's not just due to the lack of loo roll. Found a tin of stewing steak on the top shelf of the pantry. Couple of months past its use-by date but ate it anyway; need to balance the diet. Wonder what the outside world's like? May go up and have a look tomorrow.

2 AUGUST 1977. Found out what the outside world's like. Ouch. NOT good. Hee hee hee. Worse than all that, yesterday's decision on the stewing steak. The lack of loo roll is now a crisis. May have caused quite a bit of ocean pollution. Best stick to the fish from now on.

3 AUGUST 1977. Have only just realised I need to cancel all the direct debits! Unfortunately the internet hasn't been invented yet and I've destroyed any chance of it ever happening, so not totally sure how I am going to do this. Or do it underwater. [Later] Has dawned on me that everyone's dead anyway so it doesn't really matter! Amazing how global annihilation really cuts down on the red tape, taxation and government interference, and lets private enterprise flourish. I'd vote for anyone who really promoted this. Not that there is anyone. Fish pie for tea, although I had to imagine the potatoes. They were a bit underdone.

4 AUGUST 1977. I wonder why I never learned to swim?

5 AUGUST 1977. Looking back, is it really a whole year since Hugo D. came round and I showed him my model village and toy tanker and he started boasting about how he was going to do something very similar, just better and have loads of girls in there gagging for it, really hot for him, and set it in Outer Space and everyfink? I remember laughing when Hugo's mum smacked him on the legs and told him to stop showing off, and that just made him angrier. I wonder how he's getting on? Remember that utter filthy jezebel Jaws being all smiles and goo-goo eyes at Hugo. Bet they're shackled up together. Just picked at my fish tonight; seem to be losing my appetite.

6 AUGUST 1977. Wet patches are appearing in the ceiling and the bath's developed a leak. Have only got the one bucket. Bloody Ken Adam – designed it to look brilliant but it's really only chipboard and paper. Am very worried about it lasting. May not be well damp-proofed, although it appears that stopping up the leaks with Marmite does work! Stared at the aquarium for several hours. Time hung. That secretary's arm was still there. Found myself wondering what it would taste like. Jaws hasn't been in touch. Have worked out what the millipedes are for and it's very rude. Practised my signature for an hour but still find it difficult to hold a pen properly. Everyone's gone. Can't face another meal. Have run out of Cream Soda. Took Atlantis for a spin "up top", watched the dreary saga of murder and mayhem – oh – what's the bloody point? [DIARY ENDS]

Meanwhile, we learned that Agent XXX had a hairy Bach. Just going to let the potency of that one fester. Michael Billington doing a cracking impersonation of George Lazenby. Some fun had comparing Gogol's office with M's, which even has a wooden zimmer to hand. You knew *immediately* M ordered Bond to "pull out" where we were going to go. It's a good film, but I'd never claim it was a subtle one, and one has to bear in mind that much of it comes from the writer of Confessions of a Vivisectionist. Roger Moore was utterly Roger Moore in that scene with the Chalet Girl, kissing her by sucking the air from her lungs and promising to enlarge her "vocabulary". I've never heard it called that before, although that's probably me in bleak denial of after-school Latin vocab tests with [name redacted: unprovable beyond reasonable doubt].

Whilst Huthoney could not find the words, from her unenthused grimace she wasn't that impressed with the ones she did happen across, although it must be hard to smile when being asphyxiated.

The most shocking fact is that this appeared to be going on at 4 p.m.; surely he had some work to do? Ah, something came up (a joke last used ten minutes ago in Bond land) and it's time to behave like a proper secret agent, be inconspicuous and discreet and stealthy and therefore dress as a banana with a haemorrhoid strapped to one's back. And Tiptree Little Scarlet bootees. England may need you, but not dressed like that. Completely acceptable in Wales, however. Shed Hag done gone and betrayed him; still, he *was* suffocating her. In the absolutely first-rate novelisation of this film (which bucks the trend of any novelisation of anything being an inherently third-rate endeavour), she meets a stunningly gruesome end, so if she read that for spoilers it's not surprising she's got the huff.

Hordes of (= four) horrid Russians emerged and could we really tell it was ~~George Lazenby~~ Michael Billington? It wasn't obvious but I am told that on Blu-ray you can see back hair sprouting from the neck of his ski suit. Bond relaxedly skied along, unperturbed by the fabulously shoddy back projection, confident in the fact that he's James Bond and everyone else is rubbish. *Or are they?* Lead goon seems like a good skier, but that's probably because he's George Lazenby. Ooh; chase. Definitely more interesting than a couple of middle-aged men wandering around a warehouse and if you don't think that then I'd feel sorry for you, were you worth an emotion.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 THE SPY WHO LOVED ME

On Bond skis, through a crevasse, and the four pursuers split up. Even that is choreographed and slick and stylish, and what comes next is a magically exotic moment, Bond and George / Sergei / Big-foot sweeping through and around and up and down and the camera follows them and it's bloody tremendous. We've already had more action than in whole of the previous film and it can't be other than deliberate to put on such a show so early. Indicative of the

whole film – epic. Although, rather oddly, so vast is it that the actual plot – the accelerated destruction of the planet – seems, rather amazingly, to get lost (although this may be due to the motive being maddeningly inadequate). Certainly, something as wide and wild as this couldn't have anything other than global catastrophe at its heart and it is splendid and heartening (if insane) that it's the British who save the Earth.

That's a definite change in atmosphere from the past few films, when Britain's been looking shabby and frayed and not worth the energy of threatening, nor of preserving. If yer must, in reading the last sentence, replace the word "Britain" with "Bond series". The Union Flag is not the only thing proudly waved in our faces here. On Her Maj "sort-of" went down this I'm Backing Britain route but this is a move away from the Dr No idea of presenting Bond as something "other" than the nation he protects (and being exciting and engaging in being so "un-British"). This chap, dressed like Edam though he is, is one step away from being on the stamps. True, it's explicable by 1977 being the Silver Jubilee (and the Bonds of the Golden and Diamond Jubilees are no less "flaggy") but from here on we have running through the Bonds such a vein of curiously one-sided patriotism that it comes as a shock when Quantum of Solace decides to jigger it a bit.

If one looks at Goldfinger, even at The Man with the Golden Gun (if you really must and are experiencing low self-esteem), there's a definite air of Bond succeeding *despite* being British, that the Establishment figures are all as powerless and genteel as Colonel Smithers or hamstrung by their crummy uptight inadequacy like M or Q, hopeless and impotent (in as many senses of the word as you crave) in comparison to James Bond. From this film on, until possibly The Living Daylights but definitely Casino Royale, there's little percep-

tible criticism or questioning of the status quo. It's not helped by Bond himself becoming an Establishment old duffer by the mid-80s, preserving a complacent political hegemony by choice rather than as an offshoot of his misdemeanours.

An important (hmm) character in this step-change in attitude is the benevolent representation of careerist politician but *obvious* spy Frederick Gray, a "Minister of Defence" (there's no such role: first clue) for different administrations, the Callaghan and Thatcher governments (clue two). No-one seems to notice, it's all "Freddie" and drinks with the Russians and grinning like an idiot at Q's robot pervedog. Bond should treat this man with indifference if not actual contempt – Moore / Colthorpe, Connery / Colonel Smithers, Connery / Q, Connery / Everyone – come to mind. But instead it's Bond and his chums. It gets worse with the Brosnan films, but so much does. Doubtless, *The Spy Who Loved Me* sands down the rough edges the MooreBond had developed over the course of the previous two outings, but that results in a loss of friction. That capacity for direct insubordination replaced by being "cheeky"; basically One Of Us. Possibly the right decision at the time, but difficult to unpick or bring back under scrutiny without delusional accusations of promoting negative portrayals of Western power. Admittedly, *Quantum of Solace* isn't restrained either in its particular worldview, but had it happened straight after *Goldfinger* and its backhanded jabbing at the British Establishment, one suspects there would have been less bleat. But no, we have to sit through umpteen films now where Britain is such a world power that it can: borrow a Space Shuttle (why? I may have thought of a reason by the next "review", but don't bank on it); run its submarines with a ZX80; retake India and save your toaster from becoming a Communist. Hooray for us.

That's not to say there isn't subversion in this sub version (see what I did there? Good) of Bond, most notably setting up Q horribly to believe that Stromberg cannot be a villain because he's one of the richest people in the world. Yes, Q, it's the homeless and starving who have the resources to start a *nuclear war*, you clown. Stick to inexplicably turning up for no reason, there's a chap. At least it does throw in an amusing anti-capitalist vibe although that births the thought that despite all the flagwaving, what's happening is that Bond protects the Russians as much as he does the UK. It's not drinks with the CIA and the awarding of some US bauble at the end of A View to a Kill, is it? Ungrateful of them, on reflection.

Told you the music got better: a favourite part of the film here, the kicking-in of the Bond theme as a big yellow twerp sweeps down the glacier thing. It looks fantastic, sounds it too, using every last millimetre of the screen to put on a show, every last decibel to amplify the moment. Some odd choices aside – the rumpity-parp-broken-down-van cack as an example – the music is terrific throughout, making full use of the theme tune and some distinctive pieces when riding to Atlantis or being eaten whole by a big boat. Mr Hamlish, RIP, this is grade-A entertainment. Thank you.

By this point in the last one, Skeletor was looking frowny and hiding behind cardboard; yay. Oh ho, Q's given Bond harpoon-y bazooka-y ski sticks, has he? How fortunate that they're specifically required. Hmm. *What* a good guess, Q. Is this where the gadgets begin to become outlandish? Seems to have been some reining in of Q over the past few films, but this more than makes up for it, sadly. The Lotus is, of course, fantastic – and fantastical – and iconic and so indelibly The Spy Who Loved Me that whilst it may not be entirely waterproof it's impervious to criticism. Helps to nail it to the board marked "Very Fond" that we see it do everything it can do.

Certainly get value out of it – it's onscreen more than most of the cast. This full usage principle is not always the case. Problem – if not created here, then not “helped” – is that every car Bond gets into from hereon in we expect to do mad things beyond being a car and able to go forwards and into reverse (backwards). Here starts the slow decline towards the BMW Z3, which despite its “Stinger missiles” only finds a use as a hairdryer for The Actor Peerce Brssnnn's bouffant experiment. I suppose my main beef with the gadgets is that here we start the total rottenness of scenes most kindly labelled “Q's overstuffed mobile laboratory of cacky bolos”. Ahmed's tea party. Spiky camel seat thing. Springy chair man. Shooty hookah pipes. It's just hopeless rubbish. Minimise Q and the best he can come up with is irradiated dust. Give him a budget and he'll spend it on insidiously racist tat. See Moonraker. See Octopussy (if you think that's wise). Thank Christ he wasn't in Live and Let Die.

Explody heart. Bound to hurt. Repercussions there, and no mistake. When they come, it's one of Roger Moore's finest “serious” moments, cracking bit of script too. Never worked out why it takes three weeks to get from this bit in “Austria” to that scene, though. What are they doing during that time? This “pulled along by string at forty miles an hour” scene is an “important” (ahem) scene as far as the “story” goes and Barbara Bach... well, be nice, she's very pretty but there's not much dynamism there. The character's a fine and fun idea (XXX – oh, *really*) but the execution is limp. Doesn't have much fire in her belly (unlike her erstwhile lover, whose heart has just burst aflame). Falls too easily into Bond's arms at the end but, stuff it, he's James Bond (this appears to be the point) and by that stage we've had such a hoot it doesn't matter. Still, Lazenby's close-up here does indicate a desire by the film-makers to give the “girl” something to do other than hang around in a bikini. Barbara Bach hangs around in evening wear. A big difference.

Right, crazy back-flip hot-dog thing which we are, I assume, meant to believe is performed by Roger Moore. Call me a cynical old pooh-ears but I'm not *totally* sold. The more expansive the films become, the more – much more, Roger Moore – the need to fill them with massive stunts but the more – much more, Roger Moore – decrepit the lead gets, leading to the complete misrepresentation at the start of *A View to a Kill* about who is playing James Bond. Here and, let's be generous, in the next film, I suspend my disbelief. That's definitely Roger Moore riding the wet-bike. That's definitely Roger Moore getting a soaking at the end. That's definitely Roger Moore wearing a nasty brown and white striped shirt. That's definitely Roger Moore sucking all the air out of Fekkes's chum within a world-record fifteen seconds of meeting her (she's played by Faye Dunaway, in a dressing gown) and tipping Sandor off the roof and having a set-to with Jaws in the train. It's at risk of wearing thin, especially with the drive to "top the last one" (not difficult, going way above and B-E-Y-O-N-D), which will ultimately lead us to a quiche being baked by A Stuntman as Roger Moore as James Bond. It's not that he got too old for James Bond; he just got too old for the James Bond they wanted to show us.

OK, cool, he barges a goon and after such goonbarging, that would make two of them left? Oh, there they are, in cold pursuit. Oh no! Shrieky music! He's headed for the cliff edge!

Which he proceeds to...

...ski off?

...[*censored*].

Music stops. Heart stops. Falling, falling, falling and...

0.07.00

Frozen in freefall. Silence. See, y'don't need a penny whistle after all.

But that next bit, the payoff to this obscenely dangerous thing they had someone do, that statement of a clear and purposeful desire to go out and entertain us, that appears with 0.07 on the clock, yeah? You'd think someone planned that, wouldn't you? Extraordinary. And Nobody Does it Better (statutory reference). Splendid choon, funny titles, totally in the mood.

And before it became a smug thing to say... you know the rest. It's The. Spy. Who. Loved. Me, for frick's sake. From this point, it is relentless in its desire to keep us watching. Fine, it makes not one jot of sense and some performances are more amusing than they were probably intended to be, but sod it. One forgives it much because it's so good-natured and eager to please and you can't *possibly* feel shortchanged by it. Best car chase in the series. Then a Lotus becomes a submarine. Then there's a massive battle in a supertanker. Then two nuclear bombs go off and then a man eats a shark and then the Gay Men's Rugby Club Choir turn up. And then we get Moonraker. Fab.

Greatest Hits? Let's go back to those 9 characteristics.

British interests are in dire peril; the stiff upper hair is wobbling. Send for the hero, a high-living gambler. Yep, all there. There's not much "gambling" on show, but it's a bit of a risk skiing off a mountain; can go from high-living to squished-dying in a few seconds doing that.

The opposition are a roster of sophisticated parallels, although more intellectually blessed than the hero. Not convinced Jaws is that bright, really, save for the teeth, but Stromberg seems to be

a firm believer in fish being brain food although it is questionable whether everything's been thought through. Seems relaxed about things, more amused by Bond than enraged (and who wouldn't be?).

Let's be bold and brash and a lickle bick cheeky... Exhibit A: Union Flag parachute. You really don't need an Exhibit B.

...and push it to the cusp of outrage, when we can. Oh, alright. Exhibit B: Lotus. Exhibit C: Caroline Munro and everything that sails in her. Exhibit D: Keeping the British end up. Exhibit E: Webbed hands. Exhibit F: Delving into Egypt's treasures. Exhibit G: Man-eating-shark. Exhibit H: The funeral was at sea. Exhibit I: "...the Phaaaaaroooooh". Exhibit J: Is for Jaws. Exhibit K: All those feathers and he still can't fly. Exhibit L: Is for Liparus. Just look at it. Bloody hell. Exhibits M – Z: Every other single soddingly delicious second of it.

Amidst the madness, we can inject some moody solemnity for "depth" – if not realism. When you're on skis at four miles per hour, you don't always have time to notice the unspecial effects behind you. It plays better than it reads. "Wife killed..." That one reads better than it plays.

Thunderous action in interesting locations, and wink at the audience to reassure that everyone knows it's all pretend. Skiing. Parachuting. Pyramids etc. Egyptian builders. Underwater fight (surprisingly violent). Removing the fish. Lots happens and everything will be OK. It's all going to be OK. We're not going to be nuked because there's a randy middle-aged man in flares to look after us. Like a Scoutmaster.

If in doubt, fall back on some proven routines... Train fights, wacky cars, monorails with exactly the same layout, predatory ~~rockets~~ su-

pertankers, utterly transparent aliases, useless Americans and jaw-droppingly fatuous dialogue. All there.

...but don't be afraid to inject even into them an element of the bizarre and unexpected now and again. Jaws grinning for the first time (it's still creepy). Jaws going in for his hatebite. Jaws in the closet (don't). Jaws, basically.

Villains with perverse charisma and challenging attributes etc etc. Uh, *yeah*. There's a school of thought that Stromberg is dull and he is, granted, one of the more sedentary foes, but Curd Jürgens has a splendid doomy voice and even though he's given very silly lines, there's total conviction. Very violent death, too – shocking, really, Bond standing there, pumping bullets into him. Didn't get that in *Licence to Kill*, did yer, silly little film wanting to show us all its “violence” and “edginess” and it can't hold a candle, or a broken lighter, to blasting an old man in the groin several times, setting off an explosive charge in a man's ribcage or unleashing death by razored teeth. Can't help feeling there was a missed opportunity not to drop Stromberg into his own shark pool, also in refraining once more from using the “he was a bit fishy” line that you just know they were nnnn close to shoving at us. The webbed hands and the snacking on fishfood is, let's face it, weird. And then there's Jaws, who is obviously completely normal.

If it's the sort of party where one reminisces fondly, what then does the 007th minute of *The Spy Who Loved Me* bring to it, save for huge amounts of bottle to produce something so big? *10. Spectacle*. True, we've had that before, but not something as vast as this in its scope. Whereas the last one was midgety, this is a giant.

Show this to a friend who's never seen a Bond film if you want to prove that Bond is a worthwhile endeavour (although being friends with such a person isn't). This isn't "a" Bond film, exemplifying one of the tonal shifts that have many of them regarded as "one of the more serious ones" or "one of the more stupid ones" or "one of the obvious contractual obligation ones"; it is *the* Bond film, striding around the world mighty big and mighty tall and generally chewing its way through any old thing. There's something for everyone here. Everyone.

Bond 10. Out of 10.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF MOONRAKER. JACQUES STEWART HAS NEVER SEEN
A MAJOR TAKE A SHOWER BEFORE. WHAT RUMOURS?



MOONRAKER

SCIENCE FACT! #11

Everything that is shown in this film actually happened. We are not to blame for your complacent denial of the truth, content in consumerist delusion. In other news, Prince Harry is a giant lizard and Sweden only exists in the mind of a distempered badger. Viva Ecuador!

Roger Moore, eh?

The first one. Filmed in Jamaica, Bond investigating the death of British agents, an abundance of local colour to liven it up and make it so very terribly, veritably, exotic.

The second one. Bond and a meeting-his-match *dark side of Bond* killer circle around each other for ages whilst a cursory plot about an initially important but swiftly neglected and cheap-looking device plays out.

The third one. Go showier, bolder, aim for definitive, iconic imagery, up the gadgetry significantly and bung him into a tremendously amusing car.

The fourth one. The third one having turned out “quite well”, what the Hell, just hurl it into overdrive and do some strenuous envelope-pushing to spew out something dementedly pursuing an agenda of entertaining us.

But enough about the Sean Connery films.

Right, then. Moonraker. Hm. *This*.

Some like it. Some, let's be honest, don't, an understatement equivalent to proposing that Richard Nixon was a Big Old Scamp. Bond fandom, it's a girthsome church / broad mosque / voluptuous synagogue / fat pentangle, innit? It's the net income of seeking to appeal to every human being on Earth and not just a handful on a website moaning about some micron-thin piece of trivia as if it had any bearing on anything, or could influence those who go out of their way to try to entertain we ungrateful anonymous, unaccountable swine. "The" internet – it may have opened up the nature of communication for human beings but it hasn't changed the nature of communication *by* human beings, which is by and large absolute ferret testicles. A phrase that some may observe brings us back to Moonraker.

That's not to say that indulging in gushing out one's passion on such inconsequentials as The Dalton Films' Carpet Designs or The Watches of You Only Live Twice or The Windowframes of The Sean Connery Era isn't of some benefit, although the value's solely that if a "person" is hammering away about such rot, it means they're not walking the streets and it's safe for me to go outside into the fresh air and do some living. Having stated that, in a crassly hypocritical move, but a joke you saw coming (it's a "review" of bleedin' Moonraker, yeah? Totally appropriate), and having a captive – if not captivated – audience, my finely-wrought dream approaches its fulfilment: The Science Facts of Moonraker. Dot Co Dot YouKay.

You may have noticed that I've used the phrase throughout these dewdrops of rank wee to indicate Total Lie. It's a phrase that disturbs me; when banging on in his daffy way about Moonraker not

being Science Fiction, but Science Fact, did Bert Broccoli believe that he was producing a documentary? Assuming he did, for otherwise he's Broccolied to us and that lacks panache, then the following scientific truths deserve a Nobel Prize.

SCIENCE FACT 1: It is possible for a Space Shuttle to be of use to the British (further research required: current hypothesis is using it rain down fire on striking British Leyland "workers" or to clear the streets of unburied corpses). It's not abundantly clear why we would want one. We have TARDISEs; they're better.

SCIENCE FACT 2: It is possible for a Space Shuttle to launch from the back of a 747 and not itself be destroyed. Given that a few months back Endeavour was being wheeled through Los Angeles and some thin branches got in the way, Shuttles are fragile craft made out of consumptive maidens, cress and cobwebs. Still, Science Fact. Learn this. There's an exam later; although it's probably coursework so you can cheat or get your teacher to do it for you.

SCIENCE FACT 3: On the fortieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, making a film in which a powerful man wishes to gas everyone to death in pursuit of a policy of eugenic ideals is fine, as long as you have a bit with a gondola and a surprised pigeon. Saying that, all pigeons look surprised; I think of that one I once kicked into a restaurant window, pretty bloody surprised it was, although not so much as the diners drinking their broth. Still, giving us jazz-hands giants trying to fly does distract from the sinister truth that you've just made "James Bond 007 – versus Hitler! IN SPACE!" and intend to show this awesomely ghoulis concept every Christmas Day to impressionable children just after The Queen's told us how fab The Commonwealth is, even if all it seems to be is "dancing". Still, amazing what you can get away

with when you shove front-foreground Roger Moore and his *superb* tailoring.

SCIENCE FACT 4: Middle-aged British men know how to operate Space Shuttles. Presumably this was the reason for “borrowing” it; a training device for leering beblazered buffoons to practise weightless re-entry. Accelerating towards the Big Top marked “leering beblazered buffoon” myself, I cannot wait for my first go; the little coin-operated Noddy car outside Waitrose is getting to be a tight fit. Especially when I try re-entry. I think that’s what the slot’s for. I shall be *most* annoyed if the notion that every British man gets a spaceship at forty does not turn out to be Science Fact and shall question the veracity of Moonraker’s truths despite its initial credibility. Who directed it, Michael Moore?

SCIENCE FACT 5: Constructing an invisible space station is itself a process invisible. Evidently didn’t use British builders, then. That skip’s been on my neighbour’s drive for eleven days, horrid unsightly thing (the skip, not the neighbour (much)). Hugo Drax invented the invisible skip. Pushing him out of an airlock looks like a peremptory act. You didn’t have to kill him, James; all it would have taken was a big apology from Drax, the cheeky monkey, mitigated by the fact he wasn’t going to kill the potatoes unlike that dolt Stromberg and there would still have been lovely Labradors and hedgerows and dormice and wheat for everyone! – and we could just have set him up in a palazzo lab to invent cool stuff like invisible scaffolding and invisible completion deadlines. And invisible cars, God help us. Actually, kill him, do. Make it *hurt*.

SCIENCE FACT 6: The word Chang is pronounced “Charr”. Accordingly, one pronounces meringue “merarr”, boomerang “boomerarrrr” and gang bang “garrr barrr”, which may be the only way one can speak after such an experience.

SCIENCE FACT 7-UP: Is the only drink available on Planet Earth, save for Bollinger “69”. Beginning to see Drax’s point. Not that I would ever vote for him, y’understand, not saying that, not at all, but he seems to have things *organised*, the uniforms are sharp and I am sure he would have made the trains run on time. And the train guards would have been very beautiful unlike that one last night who looked like an undernourished Terrahawk and smelled of rotting asparagus and wet vagrant (a.k.a. Global Product Partner Heineken).

SCIENCE FACT 8: You can both hear and see lasers in “Outer Space” and the US has a whole division of Starship Troopers ready for Space Death Laser Battle. No wonder there’s a budget deficit. Still, if it’s in Moonraker, it’s Fact, Science Fact. In any other film, this would be soulcrushingly inane. Science Fact 8b is that the US government is once more displayed as abjectly stupid, so stunningly moronic that their infiltrator into Drax’s organisation has been there for months and discovered bugger all, when all it takes for the British (who are GREAT British, obv.) is to send in a cusp-of-decrepitude juvenile delinquent who needs eleven seconds and a spin on a Death Waltzer to establish that Drax bain’t up to no good. Given that CIA operative “Dr” Goodhead (Good. Head. Oh. God.) must have been hanging around whilst the “invisible building of the invisible space station” was going on, they’re a waste of Outer Space, these “Americans”, fit as Space Laser Cannon fodder but little else. Not even put on enquiry when six space shuttles take off from various places around the globe; there’s no suggestion that these are either invisible or impervious to radar, although I accept that these might not have been spotted because they’re four inches tall and filled with salt.

SCIENCE FACT 9: No-one in Rio does a stitch of work; they're lost in dance; perhaps they're trying to audition for The Commonwealth and have HMQE2 say naive things abite them. Or they're blitzed off their nips on 7-Up and trying to jiggerboo the sugardemon out.

SCIENCE FACT 10: You can kill a rubber snake (not a euphemism) with one little prick (this might be). Similarly, it's always a good idea to hit a man with metal teeth smack in the mouth, even though you can barely reach it and despite the fact you are wearing a dart gun (or are you? Oh, yes, you are. Thought you might have left that behind on, say, *Earth*). Additionally, when in a malfunctioning cable-car hundreds of feet above the ground, go outside. Not complete and utter bolos; Science Fact. Don't argue. It's documentary truth. It all happened.

SCIENCE FACT 11: A pretty young lady can render herself unacceptably freakish and hideously deformed by wearing glasses and sporting pigtails. Science Fact. Don't do it girls! You'll only end up with a big boy with balls of steel. On second thoughts... What is it that attracts Jaws to Dolly, given that she's patently gruesome (in a seventies Bondfilm way i.e. actually attractive but just made to look *daft*)? Is it the schoolgirlish hair? That raises some very dark thoughts about what fires up his retro-rocket.

Science, then. Science has brought us questionable things. The Atomic Bomb. ~~Dr Pepper~~ 7-Up. Polyester. Plastic fruit. Plastic surgery. Plastic Bertrand. Moonraker.

Moonraker, the film in which we are subjected to daftitudes such as the 007 camera, buying the Eiffel Tower, playing the piano without touching the keys, the Bondola, outraged fowl, Space Laser Death Battles and killing the villain by flicking one off the wrist. And Jaws and Dolly.

Moonraker, the film in which we are subjected to nasty violence such as an incinerated Jumbo, a woman torn apart by ravenous dogs, a man shredded by piano wire, a couple of innocents carelessly gassed to death by Bond – the only people gassed at all – and lots of bleak death – including the unfathomably excused mass-murder of beautiful young people – in the permanent winter of (um) Outer Space. And Jaws and Dolly.

Moonraker, the film that cannot make up its mind what it wants to be (other than outrageously entertaining; perhaps that's enough) and, after *The Spy Who Loved Me* steadied the sub, takes us back to the start of this decayed decade and the madcap tonal shifts of *Diamonds are Forever*, albeit on a vast budget and with a story that, by and large, makes “sense”. The other pattern that emerges is, of course, the “fourth film fing”, that by this time in a Bond's cycle (should he get that far), it veers into the bit in the Venn diagram that contains both “Bond film” and “Took Colossal Balls To Make It And Colossal Balls Is What They Made”. In (wildly) varying degrees of quality, Connery, Moore, Brssssnnn. Fond though I am of Dalton's Bond, with this pattern settled, his fourth would have been horrendous. One fears for what follows *Skyfall*; it risks being *Landfill*.

Curious business model. Consider Mr Ford and his motorised vehicles. The first car, fine, good, a success; *hooray*. Re-engineer and update for the second go; success again. Third time around, add a few new features for luxury, perhaps a seat this time; more success. Get to the fourth car and make it out of raspberry blanc-mange and badgers' lips and song, yeah, that's a really amazing idea, they'll buy anything now. Obviously it's not just the Bond films that (totally deliberately) wander into this: the fourth *Bourne*. The fourth *Lethal Weapon*. The fourth *Star Wars*. The fourth *Indiana Jones* (yikes). The Fourth Protocol. The Fourth Reich. Still, at

least (as opposed to any of those) Moonraker consistently entertains. I won't ask you to sit there believing that I think it's the best Moorera Bond (that's been and gone); but by Jaws' big bronze bollocks, it's my favourite. I am *immensely* fond of it. Whether that's because it's total balderdash or whether it's that every time I watch it, I am transported back to m'childhood, is hard to conclude. So I won't bother.

I am that child running from the Christmas dinner table to watch it. Every time I watch it. There's something immensely appealing about its relentless desire to be vast and stupid that it beckons me on like that pretty lady does to Uncle Rog. I know it's going to be bad for me but stuff it. Far more rewarding to tumble into the obvious trap than to resist temptation and wait for Licence to Kill to show up and administer its most shockingly violent act: tedium. There's a bit in the catastrophically overoptimistic pamphlet entitled "The Making of Licence to Kill" that is headed up "After Moonraker", as if Moonraker is something to be ashamed of rather than embraced, and which proceeds to be a *smidge snotty* about a film that made a billion times more money, is a a billion times as memorable and entertaining and a billion times as unpleasantly violent. I might have rounded up a bit, but I'm happy for my mathematics to be independently verified by the many millions who went to see Moonraker and had the temerity to enjoy it.

I don't think we are meant to derive anything more than entertainment from Moonraker and because it so evidently sets out to try to make us all happy (with a plot about gassing people), it doesn't need the insecurity of clinging onto "meaning" or "depth" or "ishoos" or "coherence". The more reduced down the Bonds became from total spectacle, the more uncertain the enterprise feels going forwards, losing the self-esteem built up in this film and its predecessor.

The “problem” emerging is that, although the films that follow have him do interesting things – speaking in tongues, becoming a psychotherapist, baking, joining the circus, joining the Taliban, trying paedophilia – what the enormous films of 1977 and 1979 achieved was masking the fact that Bond himself wasn’t interesting, a series of inevitable-as-an-unloved-season character tics in a delicious suit, but starting each film James Bond and ending each film James Bond with damn all progress in between. Throw a metal toosie-pegged giant or a Space Shuttle at us and we are so numbed by daftness that we are persuaded, overwhelmed against our critical instincts, into ignoring the core problem with the Bond series that is exposed over the course of the next twenty years. With less outrageousness to distract us, each subsequent film has to fall back on a pretence at character and suffers a crisis in delivering a confident vision of what it’s wanting Bond (both the man and the concept) to be. The failure in achieving anything credible is that they all fall into the trap of starting with the premise that he is James Bond; unfortunately this makes the character resistant to change (and those who support such a vision, equally resistant). The tinkering that goes on after *Moonraker* is counterproductive contrivance. This culminates, as it was tragically bound to, in a cataclysmic wigout in 2002 when it tried *everything*, evidently overworked and had a public and messy and pitiable breakdown. The worst thing about the James Bond films between and including 1981 and 2002, the thing that held them back, was James Bond. More – much more, Roger Moore – on this in due course.

Moonraker is the equivalent of standing in the street and holding up a shiny coin or pointing at the sky; see how many people follow, how many people look, distracting themselves for a moment from the mewling infants running around or the traffic bearing down on them, bringing oblivion.

Comfortably numb, what then does the preamble to the 007th minute give us? A parpy gunbarrel – the gunbarrel, it’s so very frickin’ important, innit, especially one like this, with squeaky brass and yeah, turn, shoot, yeah, *that*; yawn; I do wish they would muck about with it, it’s always the bloody same. A couple of beautiful Meddings fly into view but – oh no! – one of them is a) full of fuel (*brilliant*) and b) capable of being flown by extras from The Sweeney and c) nicked. Cue officialdom, M getting a phone call in that office full of books he’s never read and Mon-eypenny delivering the comment about “...last leg” and then we see a leg and...

...hang on (sorry; harr on), this is the same construction as the last film’s pre-titles, isn’t it? Even to the point where there will be treacherous minxery and freefalling and parachutes. Come to think of it, not that it’s an original thought, the whole sodding thing’s the same. Upgraded on spectacle and hardware – fie to your nuclear submarines; mere toys – and I see your unfriendly Russian agent chick and I raise you a more hostile American spybabe. Plot is The Spy... v1.2 – It’s Back! It’s Better! It’s Badder! And This Time It Won’t Kill Your Grapefruit! Bit of a facelift, some (beautiful) redesign, some additional cupholders, that’s what you get. Cheeky to try to pass it off as new. That may be part of the charm. Something Old (well, old-ish. Couple of scenes and Sir Rog looks a tadge knackered but he’s still pretty spry for a pretty spy, and anyway he’s Roger Moore, we’re not, so he can get away with it). Something New (not sure where this is; modernised versions of the usual tat is as good as it gets). Something Borrowed (not “some” thing. “Every” thing). Something Blue (and by that, Dr Wholly Deepthroat, and if it’s ‘69 you were expecting me, I mean *you*). Bearing in mind it looks like it cost a fortune, I suppose a saving had to be made somewhere, and no-one remembers

the plots of Bond films, do they? Sometimes not even while they're on. Sometimes not even while they're writing them.

Bond, bearded in excellent late-70s international jetset Cinzano and Bitter Lemon flight clobber – comfy action slacks, a beige polo neck and a blazer (look, children, *standards*) – got himself pushed out of a plane by... erm... Jaws. Why complain about the stupidity of that? This film has already told us that the British have a space programme, no-one seems to think that's ridiculous. Jaws inexplicably reappearing is no more cretinous. Tumble tumble tumble, and a lovely bit where Roger Moore (and it *is* Roger Moore, don't defecate on my childhood) adjusts his fall to dive down after the pilot; smashing. The idea is great – no parachute, grab parachute, use parachute. The Jaws stuff... bit much? Don't know why he wants to nibble Bond's ankle but then the film establishes that Jaws is a colossal sexual deviant, so perhaps not surprising. And then the whole bloody circus comes tumbling down around him. How apt.

Shirley Bassey sarrr the theme tune and is a smidge behind the beat when she starts (to my tin ear, anyway), but ultimately it gets going and it's pleasant and gentle but, along with the rest of the extremely special score, it gets lost in the lunacy. In space, no-one can hear your theme. There are some cracking bits of music flung at us, John Barry's efforts being worthier and more dignified than the film deserves although, copying *The Spy*... again, they decided that by the closing scene, there just hadn't been enough camp, so if the Young Men's Rugbuggery Club Choir isn't available, bring on Shirley Bassey doing Disco which, I am assured by a homosexual gentleman friend (my brother) is as gay a couple of minutes as you can have with your trizers on, other than finding oneself in a lift with [name deleted, although were I to tell you, you'd be amazed, but five minutes later claim it was obvious and you'd known all along].

We've been told it's Roger Moore as James Bond 007 – still not getting a SEAN CONNERY style credit; shame. Proportionately it's still *mostly* Sir Roger on screen, although from hereon in the sightings of him in his natural habitat become rare. We've also been promised that this is Ian Fleming's Moonraker. Well... no, it isn't, is it? OK, so the Nazi vibe is carried through, *ish*, Drax is connected to the British Establishment and had his plan been to fly a Shuttle into Buckingham Palace there may have been some overlap, although post September 2001 any such decision would now be deemed tasteless – it'd be like having Bond deal with explosions on the London Underground, erm... – whereas turning Earth into a big ball of Belsen is just *fine*. Anyway, let's not bleak it down, it's Moonraker, it's fun, it tells us to have fun, it tells us it has a sense of humour and has to keep on reminding us of this until it becomes sinisterly insistent about hammering the point home and we become heartily sick of it; a galactic Scouser.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 MOONRAKER

Moonraker stars Lois Chiles, apparently. An odd performance, spending the film annoyed that a smug sex-pest prat is getting in the way of her *tremendously* energetic investigation. The look of weary disdain when spying him through the Rio telescope is magnificent. Seriously though, lovey, you don't put a name like Dr Greatfelch in front of MooreBond and expect not to be leered at. What's more – much more, Roger Moore – interesting is Bond's initial reaction to Goodhead being a woman. Was he *expecting* a man, with a name like *that*? And where would we have been if so? Second in line at Shirley's Discotheque, just behind the concierge at the Rio hotel, a ludicrous mincing stereotype. I understand that encounter was toned down from an original draft:

INT: DAY: PINWOOD DE JANIERO. "AN" HOTEL.

BOND enters with CHARLES HAWTREY.

Please ensure future copies of script do not delete the word "with" in that sentence. It upset Cubby who was offended and declared it contrary to his making of family entertainment about gas genocide. For some reason BOND is dressed in a white suit. Apparently this is testament to the scouring detergent properties of Global Product Partner 7-Up.

HAWTREY / C-3PO

(Hands over key limply, eyeing BOND up whilst he does so. He likes the white suit. It reminds him of his time as cabin crew with Global Product Partner BRITISH AIRWAYS)

The President's Suite.

BOND

(As only Roger Moore can)

Is he?

I'm not sure how necessary it is to learn that Dr Bestlickylickyt-wennydorrah is in the CIA; nothing comes of this other than wondering if she's their least competent agent (fierce competition) and a fitfully amusing scene with her secret gadgetry (not that sort, despite her name) provided by the American Q. Great: ours is a racist, theirs is a sexist. The suggestion at the start of the film that she's in cahoots with Drax was never going to last – he doesn't seem interested in other human beings and evidently isn't sufficiently puerile to laugh at her name. Nothing much achieved by Dr Supersuck is dependent

on her being a secret agent and – ability to fly a Space Shuttle, wear stunningly godawful frocks and cope with her surname all considered – it's the least credible element of the character.

A woman made up of high-tech digital pocket calculator display is spinning around and zips out of frame and then reappears again; odd, but presumably intended to represent weightlessness. Did you know if you type the numbers 77345663 into a calculator and turn it upside down, it comes up as “Eggshell”? 37816173 is “Eligible”. The mind 5376608. Still, there she goes, cavorting about, what splendid 58008, a set of 538076 almost as charming as those of Dr 378806618.

55378.

Michael Lonsdale was Drax, and practically everything he's given to say is devastating; by far the most amusing Bond villain. Such script as there is seems spent entirely on means of making him hilarious, dry as the desert he's gone and chateaued a building into. Polite, too, never failing to introduce Bond to mute European totty always on the point of departing from his presence. Perhaps they don't get his jokes (they look dim). Not the most physical of villains, though, seems to do a lot of sitting down, and afflicted as seriously as any other badhat (and that hunting headgear of his is a *truly* bad hat) with the syndrome of bringing his villainy to Bond's attention. If he hadn't tried to kill Bond in the centrifuge, although we would be deprived of a moment of proper acting from Roger Moore, Drax's plan may have seen its way to fulfilment and I would be writing this on a space station. What with being perfect 'n' all. You lot, you may need gas masks. At least they will make you less unsightly, gas or no gas.

One wonders what it is Drax will get up to *himself* on his intergalactic inseminating factory. Going to be at least nine months before any progress can be made and I do hope at least one of those Shut-

tles was full of nappies and wetwipes and not just Frascati and oysters. Unclear whether Hugo's going to have his little kendo stick see any action – he doesn't seem that fond of people *per se* and he hasn't brought his dogs with him. He might just like to watch. There'll need to be a good laundry, too. I suppose they can all keep their energy up with Global Product Partner 7-Up, although it is meant as a back-up when the lethal nerve agent runs out. You're not meant to *drink* it. It is a strange plot; a dirty old man wants a gathering of young people to have a lot of sex, a golden generation of blow-dried mullets that all get blown up at the end (fnarr) and sucked off (....) into space without anyone thinking that's unfair on them. They didn't ask to be born beautiful; it's a curse, y'know. Well, *you* don't.

Woman! Stop your spinning! Granted, you might be lost in the 316008. Or too much 32008.

Richard Kiel returns. Legend has it that this was at the request of children, some with pigtails. Failing to spot that children demand any old rubbish on a five-second enraged whim that passes as soon as another distraction comes along – I want more Lego / I want a puppy / I want to be let out of this cellar – Eon succumbed to this and, charming man though Mr Kiel is and game for anything on the basis of this drivel, it's an error. Included for comedy value, one knows full well that no harm will come to either Jaws or Bond and therefore the tiresome encounters they lumber through are cartoon-level threat at best. Still seems to hang around with short, fat, bald men; bit odd. He seems confused. In fairness, there are a couple of strong Jaws moments amidst all the flappy-wavey child-molesty nonce sense. Standing stock still, watching, in the middle of the Mardi Gras as others cavort around him, out of their tiny minds and tinier dresses on Global Product Partner 7-Up, is a nice little beat, even if he is dressed as a purple and green dog / rabbit / thing, a John Wayne Gacy with

dementedly expensive cosmetic dentistry. The other point of value is during Drax's Space Station speech about perfection and order in the heavens and being kind to the shrubbery and there's a moment when the expression on Mr Kiel's face is so sublimely "Umm...you *what?*" that it almost compensates for the other slop to which he has to subject his dignity. Quite where Jaws and Dolly end up is a mystery: my bet is they crashed at Roswell and were categorised as hideous alien freaks – Dolly's Predator dreadlocks are a giveaway – and for the good of humanity, dissected at hideously painful length and with blunt, rusty scissors. Jaws' tungsten teeth and testicles were re-engineered into the underwiring for The Actor Purccce Brznn's bra.

Now there's an eye peering through a hole and this is patently a direct homage to this film being initially intended as For Your Eyes Only. Star Wars coming along and eating up lots of *lovely* dollars is, on reflection, an entirely justifiable reason to make Moneyraker instead – can't think of an artistic one – and to leap aboard the Starship Bandwagon and present us with an alternative to Mr Lucas' stultifyingly under-educated race war allegory with something much safer, a stultifyingly under-educated race war allegory...um....

...and Corrine Clery as Bond's little chum (first name: pedigree). One has witnessed, with headshaking pity, debate upon the Commanderbond.net fora whether, in her dialogue about never learning to read, this is a Science Fact and therefore Jimmy Savile Bond is taking advantage of an educationally subnormal inadequate. What with Dolly and Jaws, there's a lot of it about (difficult to say which way it falls in that doomed coupling). Nope, it's a *joke*. The same persons tend to believe that this Mr Silva stroking Bond's thigh and Bond responding with dismissive ennui makes Bond bisexual or wearing clown makeup means he's joined the Circus and that's a le Carre reference, that is, Science Fact, and Bond banging on about toasters in A View to a Kill means that he owns such

a dreary device. Oh, pity the rest of us and unleash the lethal nerve gas. The Corrine Dufour episode tells us that Drax is a tremendous employer (just *look* at her bedroom and his equipping her with magic shoes that can turn into boots) although the disciplinary procedure requires consultation if it's going to be considered objectively fair.

Also along for the ride are Emily Bolton, whose character might as well be called HubbaHubba because she serves little other purpose and stands as a monument to Brazil's fine export trade of beautiful wooden objects. Geoffrey Keen is on good form as patently treacherous "Minister" of Defence "Fred" Gray, wants the Space Shuttle all for himself, doesn't he, probably cooked up this whole plan with Drax when playing Bridge, didn't he, wants Bond off the case, doesn't he? The whiff of corruption just stenchs out of this guy; why did no-one spot it? Has a similar reaction to Max Zorin. Seriously, no wonder the public think poorly of politicians with this sort of devious weasel around. Toshiro Suga gave us his reading of the pivotal role of Charr and I can only assume he wasn't referred to as Chang when they realised one morning that he's not remotely Chinese. Psychopathic Asian henchman; completely original concept. Fun fight with all that glass, though. Bit of a midger, on the whole, and one wonders whether he would have made it through the Portal of Perfect that Drax had up his tunic sleeve. Bond being largely responsible for the deaths of Charr (lickle) and Corrine (illiterate) seems to save Drax the trouble of gassing them anyway. If only Bond had got round to Cavendish (makes appalling cucumber sandwiches; leaves the rind on. How uncouth. Highly suspect "home made" mayonnaise, too).

Lois Maxwell turns up, does the usual, goes away again.

Irka Bochenko – accepting the challenging role of "Blonde Beauty" and Nicholas Arbez as "Drax's Boy" (not even going to think about that one) get higher billing than Bernard Lee, a shame given that this

was his last film. Departs with dignity intact though. At the other end of the dignity scale, it's Desmond Llewelyn and his moving caravan of indigenous rubbish. Obviously the Q scene is awful and the Bondola is pathetic, but this sort of guff aside, the gadgets *are* reasonably good this time. I do like the speedboat and the chase is entertaining, if perversely slowed down by our last rendition to date of the 007 theme played at 12 rpm. The wrist gun's a neat idea, even if Bond doesn't wear it for most of the film and then suddenly, fortuitously, heartbreakingly, does. Still, it's not as if Drax is immune to this good fortune of having an appropriate device turn up amazingly presciently – his shuttle is, after all, fitted with a laser. That's terrifically good luck, isn't it? Where would we be had it not? Dead, I guess.

Blanche Ravalec has had sufficient indignity placed on her over the years that it's best not to dwell, save to observe that this is not an ugly woman in any way shape or form. Can't say I go a bundle for pigtails but it's a science fact that Britney Spears would never have been successful without Dolly from Moonraker. So there's yet another thing to thank her for. "Thanks". Anne Lonnberg gave us "Museum Guide" and she's not like any museum guide I've ever encountered; about half the weight and twice the beauty and undoubtedly properly deodorised. Colonel Scott – Colonel von Scott – was brought to us by Michael Marshall, for which one can only express gratitude, we would have been lost for expendable Americans without him, and Jean Pierre Castaldi and Leila Shenna as pilot and hostess of the private jet get higher billing than Walter Gotell who I accept is only in it for about three seconds in his Communist pyjamas but given that General Gogol is Bond's boss, it's a scandal.

Ah, the Planet Earth. One of the best planets, in my view. That and Mongo; a slightly unfortunate choice of name. No wonder they're so hostile.

Ernest Day and John Glen directed the second unit and there's some splendid stuff. The explosions in the Amazon chase look especially – arguably, unnecessarily – dangerous. The script was edited by Vernon Harris, although edited down from *what* is a mystery; unclear what was too stupid to make it in. It's telling, the differing attitudes of the generations of the Broccoli family, to the writing of these films. Vern here is editing a script by the writer of the hilarious Confessions of a Probable Rapist. These days they're the work of persons laden with worthiness and *such* angst. Whether they're any more *fun*, is moot. Production manager Jean-Pierre Spiri-Mercanton has a magnificent name as does, in a more restrained manner, his pal Terence Churcher. One of these persons is not British; which? Quite a production to manage: France, Pinewood, Venice, somewhere over America, Brazil, Outer Space (where the infrastructure is sorely lacking). How on Earth – and not on Earth – it came together given that they went to most of these hostile alien environments (France), is an immense achievement. We do take Moonraker for granted, don't we? Thought about for a moment, the schedule must have been as ludicrous as the rest of it.

Uh-oh, spinny digi-babe is back, wondered where she'd popped off to, but she can't stay still, can she, and off she goes again. Cavorting around like that, she needs to be careful she doesn't fall down a 3704. Replaced by an engaging silhouette of a comely young maiden diving through some pink rushing clouds and I'll pause the DVD at this point, but only to note the names. Honest. Art Directors Max Douy and Charles Bishop made the thing look magnificent – it just drips wealth and excess, this one, even if it is all cardboard – and Set Director Peter Howitt gave us plenty to gawp at although it is a curious audition piece for his subsequent role as Joey Boswell in the execrable "Bread". 2nd Unit cameraman Jacques Renoir – presum-

ably one of the family – helps make everything look luscious and glossy and the visual and optical effects works of Paul Wilson and Robin Browne stand proud testament to doing it for real and not a vast amount of money. True, the back projection (especially in the cable car sequence) is ghastly, but the Outer Space stuff remains tip top, many years on. Its faults many, but looking rubbish is not one that can be fairly levelled at Moonraker.

John Grover was the Assembly Editor and I still don't know what one of those is but on the basis it gets a credit, it is obviously something that has to happen otherwise all the rest of it goes wrong. Didn't manage to edit out the Bondola; perhaps he wasn't watching that bit (can't blame him). Notably, when the Bondola starts up, the camera GOES ALL SHAKY, IT IS A DESECRATION AND I CANNOT SEE WHAT IS GOING ON, OH IT'S STOPPED SHAKING SO, GOOD, I CAN NOW SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING.... OH DEAR....MAKE THE CAMERA SHAKE AGAIN; DO IT. Michel Cheyko seems to have directed the assistants well and Bob Simmons is back "arranging" the action sequences. Harrr on, coupla films ago these were "stunts" and now we're back to the more sedate description of "action sequence". Still, I suppose that most of what does happen is protracted – there aren't many one-off moments, they all tend to blend into a longer (sometimes drawn out) series of events. Probably the right description after all. Production Controller and Production Accountant Reginald A. Barkshire and Brian Bailey, both amongst the loveliest of accountants, deserve their prominent credit: keeping the spending in check on this one, albeit not perhaps the most patently glamorous of tasks, must have been a head-scratcher. Great book-keeping, guys! The rumour that they're the pair in the pre-credits that repossess the Space Shuttle as a write-off against Corporation tax is probably true.

Lots of locations to manage, so we had Frank Ernst for Brazil, Philippe Modave for Italy and John Comfort for the USA although we aren't told who location managed Outer Space which seems unfair as I bet it presented some unique challenges such as the risk of sudden decompressed asphyxiation, although anyone kissed by Roger Moore would experience much the same. Unit Manager (UK) Chris Kenny's affliction of losing his surname is compensated by Unit Manager (France) Robert Saussier's amusingly national-stereotypical one.

Divey woman ploughing along in British Airways livery; product placement even finding its way into the titles. It's sweet, isn't it, Moonraker's approach to subtle mentions of its Global Product Partners; if there's no way of contriving them into the plot, just drive past a massive billboard with the logo on it. That'll do. Oddly charming; far more appealing than sitting on a train and talking *entirely naturally* about a grotty OMEGA. Not sure any of it makes me want to actually taste 7-Up, but then I don't want one of those horrid watches either. I am fully aware of my own mortality and have no desire to accelerate it by using either product.

Sort of appropriately, as we glide peacefully towards 0.07, we're told about Visual Effects Supervisor Derek Meddings and Visual Effects Art Director Peter Lamont. I mean, *just look at it*. You'll never see another Bond film like this – possibly a relief to many, but a sadness to a substantially less thick few – and the various things we're told about how difficult and delicate the special effects became just make one admire all the more the work that went into it. Never having been totally sold on Mr Meddings's work to this point – there's something residually Thunderbirdsy about the poppy fields and Scaramanga's island, although the supertanker is jolly good – here he surpasses himself and, even many years on,

betters the efforts of “persons” sitting at a computer who type the models out or whatever they do. I’m sure that’s more efficient, but it’s not craft, is it? *Moonraker* is a work of hard-carved artistic splendour, and I’m not referring to Emily Bolton being made out of mahogany again. It is a thing of beauty, *Moonraker*, like Denise Richards or one of those Philippe Starck lemon squeezers: on a practical level, bleedin’ useless and more than a little annoying; but just look at it. *Magic*.

0.07.00

For many, the “Where other Bonds end, this one begins” stuff is more of a dire warning of excessive stupidity to come than a promise of a damn good time, although it does appear that the passing of each year becomes kinder to *Moonraker*.

Certainly there seems to be a rump of opinion that would ask one to judge it on its desire only to entertain and, on that basis, it’s hard to see how it could be considered “one of the bad ones”. It’s easy to go into it with an expectation of ironically enjoyable awfulness, and trot out the tired “so bad it’s good” stuff, but there’s a momentum and charm and honesty to it that pings at the heart every time. It’s not brilliant “in spite of”; it’s brilliant “*because of*”, because of its determination to make us enjoy it and generally succeeding. Weirdly, given its scale and potentially alienating absurdity, I find it a happy place to be, the watching of *Moonraker*. Other Bonds – almost every other Bond – may be more plausible, few are so divorced from their source material and the majority are more exciting, but there is, and oddly for such a rampantly cynical commercial enterprise, a heart here that many of the following films lack. This may represent the last time they could spin it out. The next half dozen films look a bit desperate to put all this behind them. Why?

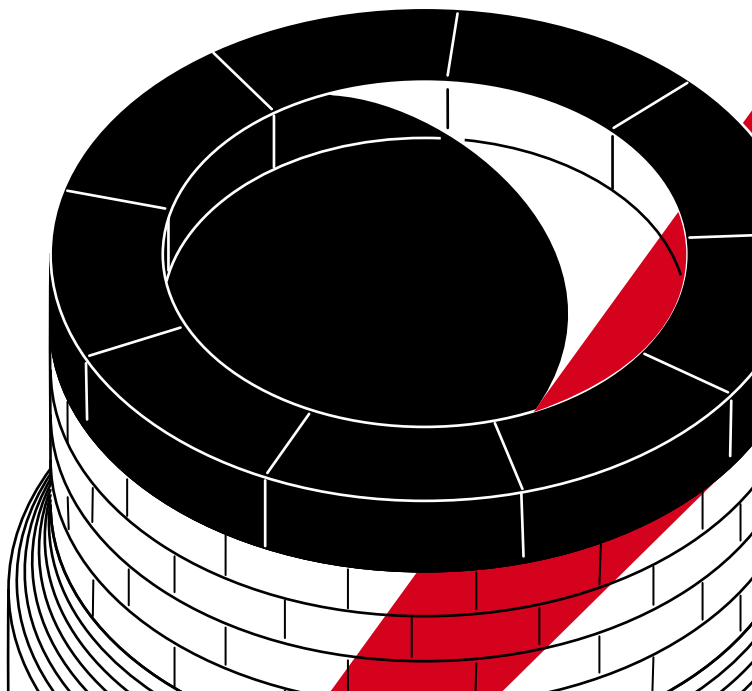
Perhaps my enthusiasm for it is due to a deftly brilliant lead performance, or a cast all of whom seem to be in on the joke or a script that – at times – *sings*, or the overpoweringly confident volume of it. Indeed, we won't see its like again – it costs stupid money to be this stupid – and that's a sadness. Obviously, I may be transposing my childhood glee at being allowed to watch it past my bedtime onto a two hour advert of tastelessness and incoherent excess, but I'm not sure that's totally the source of my fondness for it. It's pretty good if you allow it to be, y'know.

What follows the 007th minute defies rational explanation but embraces emotional connection. Without it, the Bond series would be the poorer – one could lose *The World is Not Enough* and it would be the merest of scratches, but this stands for many things. For many years, even apparently in the eyes of the people who actually made it, it served as a warning never to go there again (they ignored this) and as an internal whipping boy of all that was BAD BOND. Big enough to look after itself though *Moonraker* is, that's a dreadful injustice and it does seem now to be undergoing rehabilitation (although this is what one does for criminals: *Moonraker* committed no crime, save a desire to be loved).

It does now appear to be an artistic turning point in the series and, given the number of films to date, pretty much represents the big showy number bringing the curtain down at end of the first half. Whether its spurning was a wise move comes under scrutiny in the Bond films of the 1980s which are, of course, universally, better than *Moonraker*.

Oh, *Science Fact*.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF FOR YOUR EYES ONLY. JACQUES STEWART HAS
SEEN YOUR SMILE IN A THOUSAND DREAMS. CREEPY.



FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

SCIENCE FACT! #12

As clearly demonstrated by the ATAC system, a moistened laptop will actually work perfectly. It largely depends what one moistens it with. One suspects you may already know this.

Go on then, make your outlandish Bond if you must. It helps disguise the onset of both decrepitude and breasts for your leading man. Cram it to overbursting with the leftovers that you never thought you would get away with, unleash it and then have a crisis of conscience / money and trouble yourself with worrying about the direction to take it next once you realise that you've overdone it and exhausted the concept of, and patience of the audience for, "Bond Films". You decide to make some films that incidentally happen to be "Bond Films". Great success and critical acclaim await.

No, sorry, that's the Barbara Broccoli way.

If you're her father, you plough on turning out Bond Films every couple of years because that's mysteriously The Law, progressively less spectacular ones until you can't afford to give Timothy Dalton a proper haircut, or story, and the series stalls. Mediocre returns and critical indifference await. I don't know about the studio politik of the 1980s, because that would render me a fatuous dullard and "the" Internet has enough of those, and of course it's on record that 1989-1995 coincided with yet more litigation, Bond attracting as many lawyers as he does bullets. Yet so often is that dispute wheeled out as the explanation for the lack of production activity that one wonders if it's a convenient ruse for denying that, starting with *For Your Eyes Only*, Bond was horribly complacently driving itself into the ground, coasting along in neutral with the odd blip on the accelerator, gathering some cash but running out of road, fuel and audience captivation in equal measures. Studio and creative bankruptcy going hand in hand. After eleven films, churn out any old dross, slap on a gunbarrel to make it A. Bond. Film to draw the core punters in, and get away with it. Making it look effortless (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, *Moonraker*) is different to making it without effort.

This isn't to say that parts of the Bonds of the 1980s aren't appealing but they're just another five Bond Films to get through. Despite pretence in each at trying new stuff (*For Your Eyes Only* – "seriousness"; *Octopussy* – "turbo-racism"; *A View to a Kill* – "quiche"; *The Living Daylights* – "an hour of mesmeric brilliance followed by an hour of the usual tat" and *Licence to Kill* – "shameful cowardice"), they deviate little from the previous eleven. Even the ostensibly "radical" *Licence to Kill* is teat-suckingly dependent on being A. Bond. Film, with all the decades of reheated canker that comes with that, and totally to its disadvantage.

For Your Eyes Only is very little progress from Moonraker.

If it's progress they wanted. It seems to be the case that "they" were trying to convince us – if not themselves – that it was a dramatic step change from the previous film, that daft and harmless circus in which a woman is ripped apart by Dobermans. The claims that it's a more adult Bond arise from its rich vein of paedophilia rather than thematic seriousness. It's still more smiley than it is Smiley and any retrenching from Moonraker's more *creative* moments is only because they cost money, rather than the result of any artistic decision to make it tougher, no matter how many times we are told this. Given that this film had less spent on it, on a pound-per-preposterousness basis, it's a much more inane film than Moonraker could ever be. All "serious" means is managing our expectations that this has less Space Laser Death Carnage and more padded blousons; it's not Space Shuttles and nuclear subs, it's a ZX81. It's blowing up the Lotus because that's Bad Silly Bond, but it's having the world saved by a horrid screeching bird, played by Janet Brown. The "serious" action often pointed to, Bond kicking Locque's car away, is tempered by the fact that in the last four Hopelessly Rubbish Turn One's Back On Them films, he's threatened to kill a girl just after sex, slapped a woman and threatened to break her arm, slapped a fat bald man from a roof and thrown a martial arts stereotype into some piano wire. It represents nothing new, just absence of lasers. And joy.

What's the message? We spent less but that doesn't mean you have to, oh audience with your lovely money. At heart, this colossally cynical little film is as stupid as the previous one but whereas Moonraker dances gleefully, begarbed in little, proudly wagging its craziness in our faces with such energy that's it's hard not to jiggerboo along with it, For Your Eyes Only dishonestly hides its

dead-behind-the-eyes sameoldsameold Bond Film stupidity of soul in “themes of revenge” and “Cold War realpolitik” and “unremitting guff about both”. This is a more “damaging” film to the longevity of the series than *Moonraker*. No-one in their right minds would outdo *Moonraker* (albeit in 2002 they tried and accordingly demonstrated “absence of right mind”); where they could have gone after a plot to gas everyone from a space brothel is open to debate: blow up Uranus? Fnarr. But then no-one would contemplate that *Moonraker* was meant to be taken seriously. This thing wants to be, so desperately *wants to be*, and is more ridiculous for it, because instead of the Baumgartneresque plummet back from the stratosphere that its (inflicted) reputation would suggest, its pretence at realism is hilariously incompetent. *Moonraker* one laughs with; this one, it’s laugh *at*.

In being a reasonable success and thereby setting a style for the moribund decade of smug they’ll-watch-any-old-thing-if-it’s-got-a-gunbarrel, *For Your Eyes Only* does stand for something, albeit not an admirable development. We may have reached with this, the twelfth film, the first *unnecessary* one. What would we miss, were it to meet with a “little accident”? Its 007th minute may help me work that out, because I’m stumped, to be “honest”.

Prior to reaching the 007th minute, its confused nature and lack of certainty in vision is played before us for our “enjoyment”. Jazzed the gunbarrel up a bit – I do like the tune here, also Roger Moore’s resplendent troos – but when it comes to it, it’s still the same thing again. Bit of ostensible seriousness with MooreBond laying flowers on another man’s wife’s grave, although I assume we’re meant to appreciate that he is the same Bond bereaved at the end of OHMSS and therefore not “The Other Fella” but *that* Fella and a) where did his accent go? and b) no nasty comments

about the acting quality, please. Indeed, in a total reverse of the Lazenby method, his being good at drama and headbashingly poor at the jokes, again Moore's deftness of touch does much to merit (if not justify) the creation of this film and yet his handling of the more (laughably described as) dramatic stuff is *frail*. Not to suggest he couldn't do it – the Andrea Anders episode (whatever its morality) and the confrontation with Anya in the hotel are good, convincing stuff, but here, lecturing Melina about digging two graves and not killing Kristatos with a bolt to the brain, he comes across as stiffly paternal. Given the age gap, that's understandable. One could be generous and suggest Roger Moore is playing it as James Bond knowingly being a self-hating hypocrite when he starts banging on about the demerits of revenge, hence the awkward delivery of such material and, as I don't like being rude about Sir Roger Moore because he is a better man than I will ever be, I will be that generous. It's the least I can do. Still, given that revenge is meant to be a "theme", the handling is duff and stilted.

And confused. No, Melina, taking a crossbow to an underwhelming crook is not the way, and remember those two graves I droned on about? Revenge is BAD. Learn this, young ones in the audience. REVENGE IS NAUGHTY and it will eat your soul and kill your mummy and melt all your Lego. Just *don't*. Oh, hang on, dumping a cripple down a chimney and / or booting a Mercedes to its doom and / or piking a man (not a euphemism) through a stained glass window (...could be a euphemism), these show that REVENGE IS GREAT. You just have to do it in a more spectacular way than firing an arrow; you need stuntmen and / or special effects teams on hand. Revenge is good if it's show-offy and expensive? An unusual message. Strange film.

I suppose Moore staring at the gravestone is meant to front up this idea of revenge eating away at one but it doesn't look like anything's been eating away at Rog since we last saw him, attempting re-entry; quite the opposite. Not just the knitwear that's chunky in this film, is it? Four Pork Pies Only. Yet to reach Connery's level of whale-and-hearty but I think it's trying to tell us that, amongst its inconsistent attributes, revenge does make you hit the biccies. There's no weightlessness in *this* film. Additionally, he's a) very blond, so in the hair colour, girth, mysterious allure and avuncular buffoonery he may as well be played by Boris Johnson and b) he looks, like most of the cast, absolutely knackered. He's only three seconds in; all the skiing and swimming and climbing and acting is yet to come. No wonder Melina is stand-offish for most of the film: she knows it would be a mistake to bed him as he might fall asleep or, worse, die. She also doesn't trust herself not to keep going, if he does. She is, y'know, damaged. We've already got paedophilia in here, why not necrophilia? If you don't think that's an appropriate theme for a Bond story, read Carte Blanche (although that's not an appropriate excuse for a Bond story).

Tracy Bond's buried in England, a country with which she had no connection and simply because her husband of four minutes, a Scottish Australian Englishman, thinks this is justified. Moving swiftly on from continuity holing itself below the waterline as effectively as any dredged-up mine, Bond mounts a chopper whilst a priest watches. Hmm. Oh look, Blofeld. Of course it's Blofeld and of course it's a massive spoiler McClorywards to a) kill him off and b) make him look ridiculous. Stuff Dr Evil; this sort of thing meant that the days of the supervillain were numbered. Presumably wounded after the Diamonds are Forever oil rig cataclysm and having to spend days at sea bobbing up and down on a small buoy (...urr), here he

comes with his Wheelchair of Death. Using a wheelchair myself I'm not sure the depiction is progressive and, given that it's Blofeld's undoing, a sweet message to blurt out there – James Bond is better than people in wheelchairs, everyone (remember: “realistic” “hard-edged” “gritty” film?) – although I have reconciled myself to it by acknowledging that a) given the abuse meted out by MooreBond to women, those of the international beige persuasion, dwarves, giants, Egyptian builders and, what the hell, more women, it was physical disability's “turn” and b) I have never had a middle-aged man spear me roughly up the chair with his chopper (a buoy can dream). Nor do I like cats. Vermin. If a cat comes near me, I'll do what I do with Jelly Babies and bite its spine out. Therefore, I have learned to assume that it's not an attack on my physical state. An attack on my mental state, yes. Listen to the direlogue. It's not badinage. It's crap-inage.

So pilot gets fried (albeit not toasted enough to stop him flying the thing in subsequent shots) and we fly remote control. We produce Bond Films on remote control, so this is an appropriately cynical metaphor; give us your money, there was a gunbarrel and everyfink, Q's coming up, you all *love* Q and his ker-azy gadgets, yeah? Cackly madness ensue (the cat's got his claws in his nadgers), as does brave but beyond-believing-it's-Roger-Moore-now stuntwork and Moore delivers splendid “oh *do* shut up” expressions that rescue this silly sequence. That's it, scoop him up, cat flees (why I don't like them: disloyal little runts. With flees) and we get the baffling offer to buy Bond a delicatessen, in stainless steel (no less). Why on Earth would Bond want one? It may admittedly be time to redo the kitchen – the dribbly espresso machine's past its warranty, for a start – but, y'know, *uh*? Is Blofeld offering to buy him a *shop*? Are these two bachelors going to open a boutique olive emporium (in stainless steel) somewhere in

The Cotswolds and pretend that they're brothers to ward away gossip and spiteful children? "Very good friends" James and Ernst – he dropped an e. You'd have to drop an e to make sense of it.

Not giving the audience enough time to look at each other in bemusement and ask whether they heard what they thought they just heard or whether something disconcerting has been spliced in by Tyler Durden, we chugchug on to realising Bond's wearing a horrid co-respondent shirt – the clothes in this film are most nasty – and dumping Blofeld down an industrial chimney. The law would interpret that as an implicit rejection of your offer, Ern, being instead a counter-offer of "No, I do not want your weird...thing; what I suggest instead is *die*" – and just as Blofeld "gets off" (everyone gets their jollies somehow) and screams Mr Boooooonnnnnnnnnndddddd we hit

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

Titles pretty much right on the second, and here's Sheena Easton writhing her way up Roger Moore's body. Sheena Easton was born in 1959. This James Bond was born in 1927 (a track record for "this sort of thing" – we've just been told his wife was fifteen years younger than him. Hmm). There's more – much more, Roger Moore – of this to come. Notably, writhy Sheena is the youngest of Bond's prey but you couldn't tell: she doesn't have pigtails and the way she's molesting him *would* confuse him. But she was sending out these signals, officer, really she was. And singing about freeing her fantasy and colliding passions. What am I meant to do? It was only a friendly grope, honest. What do you mean, "have I ever worked for Radio 1"?

In comparison, Baby Doll (splendid joke, how tasteful) born in 1958 and Melina "The 'tache" Havelock (1957) are terrible old hags and fair game. If one believes that Moore is playing a man

in his mid-forties, the age-gap thing might not be so troubling but you have to get over the substantial hurdle of believing that Bond is anything other than 54 in looks, weight, manner and dress. Pretty good for 54, I'm unlikely to be in that shape by then, but for 44 he's wrecked.

Albert R. Broccoli is doing the presenting again and this time he's presenting unto us Roger Moore as Ian Fleming's James Bond 007. Last whirl around the gift-that-never-stops-giving moneyglut, it was Roger Moore as James Bond 007 in Ian Fleming's *Moonraker*, which plenty of people paid for, but few really bought (although there are more notes from that novel in there than the spaced-out stuff suggests). Strange, given its reasonably faithful adherence to *For Your Eyes Only* and *Risico*, that they try to convince us that Roger Moore was playing Fleming's Bond. If anything, in the "return to Fleming", that's the least likely of the film's many unfulfilled claims. He does deliver some of the more memorable lines from both stories, but Fleming's Bond he isn't. Fleming's *For Your Eyes Only* Bond demonstrated challenge to the authority of a personally conflicted M and more irritation than kindness to Judy Havelock. The *Risico* Bond is a closer to Moore's portrayal, swanning about Venice and whatnot, but the brutal chase through the Lido minefield would have been beyond him by now. Whether Fleming's Bond would have treated Bibi any differently could be very bleak territory, although it's probable that he would just have been brutally rude, put her in her juvenile place and then ignored her. The Dalton and Craig Bonds wouldn't have bought her an iced lolitapop, they would have administered a headbutt, or strangled her with her own hair. Can't help feeling that would have been worth watching.

The mashing together of the two stories works OK, although unexplained is why Kristatos hangs around waiting for Bond to

retrieve the ATAC for him when he has enough resource to do this himself. I accept that he may not know the combination for the wire-cut and therefore has to wait for someone to turn up, but it's a presumption that the British will therefore bother to recover the device if the wires are booby-trapped, given that it's made of metal and is underwater in crushing-pressure (but unaffected by this, oddly). Just lucky that they do, then. Further mystery lies in why Bond is the only agent the British send after the device, given that they know where the boat sank. Everyone waits around for him to stop prattling about in Cortina and bother to get on with things. Further further mystery in why Kristatos spends so much time trying to kill Bond when he's the only one who can retrieve the device and... I give up.

Unless, of course, the cost-cutting has hit here and 007 is the only British agent left. One wonders where the budget's gone although one look at Q's cellar of crummy rubbish and it's not hard to work out. Clue to The Treasury – don't spend it on giving Q the opportunity for umbrellas and racism.

I suppose there's something new in having the singer appear in the titles (although rumour has it – a rumour I'm starting – that Tom Jones is one of the naked women in the Thunderball titles). We've gone from Shirley Bassey to Sheena Easton, a statement of economics and breadth of scale more than an artistic one, although the song's pleasant if wet (no pun intended) and the title sequence itself is insipid – save for the patently naked woman at the end – its little bubbles created by Maurice Binder breaking wind into a bucket of his tears. Legend has it that to ensure Ms Easton remained still for the close up on her lips, Mr Binder nailgunned her feet to the floor and shoved a girder up her. This is acceptable in the pursuit of art. It also happens to be untrue.

This film stars Carole Bouquet and it's a distracted performance. I accept that the character has had its parents killed by a "Cuban hit-man" but this she visited upon them by cadging a lift with Gonzales in the first place; something I've never understood. Perhaps she wanted moustache grooming tips. Dark character beats in acquiring herself a replacement father pretty quickly, moving into really disturbing areas with a mutual disrobing at the end, and it's best not to think about *The Crying Game*. The ending is out-of-character given the serious trauma she has gone through, including shaving for the first time; it may have been better to have her and Bond end as friends rather than let 007 peek his turtle's head from its shell, with little chemistry nor mutual attraction up to that point. It has to happen, because it's A. Bond. Film, but it's not convincing. I appreciate it is meant to distract us from concluding that without a naked Melina swimming around moistened relics ("insert" Roger Moore joke... here), Bond's only conquest would have been Countess Lisl, which is forgettable even while it's happening.

Topol's in it too and that sly wink he gives at the end when pouring his nuts into Baby Doll's hands; what are we to make of this? Deeply sinister, poor girl's just being handed round a ring of middle-aged men, a complicit lesbian tagging along, waiting for her to get back into the purple leotard. Family entertainment. Other than this, not that it should be ignored, the performance has charm but he's so evidently a good sort that any suspense about the shocking twist about the villain is evaporated the moment Topol appears. He does liven up what was in danger of becoming a flat escapade and the first encounter with Bond on the boat is the best scene in the film (not much competition; only the keelhauling runs it close). He isn't in the film much but appears on time whenever there's serious lag. Shame that one is never convinced that it's anyone other than Topol, though.

Right, well, Lynn-Holly Johnson in a role best summed up by “I’m sorry, I must have misheard you, I thought you said – God forbid – that what the Bond series needs, even after the suspect Jaws / Dolly thing, is underage sex comedy? Oh, you did. *Rrrrrright.*” Right, so Melina – barely a year older – is fine, then? Where do you draw the line? Above her lip, in black marker pen?

Good judgment call; *really* doesn’t make your rapidly ageing lead look any older, does it? I suppose it shows how much times have changed that even buying her an ice cream these days would be met with suspicion, illiterate placards and a wicker man. Does make one wonder about all the silhouetted nudes on show in titles such as these; is that to protect their identity? Does the character of Bibi Dahl do anything apart from annoy? And what, pray, is the point of the scene in which a woman playing a pigtailed teenage girl bounces up and down on a trampoline in a leotard, other than aiming at a very specific audience that I have no desire to share a cinema / town / country with? G’on, chuck her off the mountain. No? Shame. It could have saved her from her inevitable sex-slave fate, smacked up to the eyeballs and pretending to be a “Countess”, openly imprisoned in a beach house. This can be the only explanation for a) Countess Lisl’s sorry existence and b) her rather, how to put this, “dozy” delivery. Still, you can take the girl out of Liverpool but you can’t take Liverpool out of the girl. Even if she gives off the vibe that most of Liverpool has been in her at one time or another.

Suspicion is that both Melina and Bibi were cast when Bert Broccoli was in the throes of looking for a younger Bond and then Roger Moore turned up again, only for the art and never for the money, and it was too late to find marginally older women. Perhaps that was a clever ruse on his part. True, they tried their best to convince us that

Melina was a mature woman by having her grow a waxy moustache but Bibi was beyond rescue. Maybe times have progressed and this was funny and innocent in 1981. Maybe.

“You can see so much in me, so much in me that’s new”. That’s a fib and you know it, Sheena. Nothing new here. I appreciate you’re in pain but you’re not helping yourself.

And Julian Glover, accompanied by Maurice doing a big let-off of his ripest flatulence. Sleazy rather than villainous – although the (fun) keel-hauling allows him to demonstrate malicious glee and a good opportunity for boohissery – the character doesn’t seem high on the list of fan or public favourites, both collectives tending to go for broader strokes in Bond Baddies. That said, he has a single-minded motive and winds up looking grubby and pathetic – which I guess is the intention of having a wheeler-dealer chancer “realistic” villain rather than someone out to destroy the planet. Still, the death feud between Kristatos and Columbo could have been upped towards “convincing” by actually having their characters *meet*. I know they don’t meet in Fleming’s story either but that’s a weakness there too. It’s not as if everything Fleming wrote was super, otherwise Bond 24 will be “Koreans Smell Of Zoo”. I’m fond of Kristatos, Glover’s performance is amusingly shifty, even if he’s blessed with the worst early-80s middle-aged leisurewear imaginable. Awful taste in wine, too.

Ooh, a camp bit of Bill Conti piano. Ta-ding! The score, hmmm. Bits of it work, a lot of it is chipper, but its fondness for massive synthesised melodramatics tires one. Still, it does help the overextended chase sequences along. One could otherwise draw bleak conclusions about how padded out the film is. Notably, the mountain climbing sequence is silent and whilst this is doubtless meant to add suspense on a “more – much more, Roger Moore – is less” basis, silence does

allow the sequence to go on forever. More cowbell, and Bond's hammering the pitons into place wouldn't have been discovered. That would, admittedly, have deprived us of the splendid fall stunt but the net effect of that – a highlight though it is – is that he's got to climb that sodding mountain *all over again*. Yawn.

Cassandra Harris. To die young is obviously not material for flippancy and that must have been horrible. Rest in Peace. It appears she was directed (and I blame the director – OK on action, hopeless on acting) to shove at us a performance of such reinforced concrete it's amazing that beach buggy wasn't a write-off. The character has to exist, not least because it's sort-of drawn from Risico, and the scene about "Manchester? Close; Liverpool" demonstrates Moore-Bond at his most relaxed and charming and downright *nice*. Additionally gives Bond a half-time shag when we were getting worried about his strike-rate given that the only women on display up to that point are spectacularly younger than him or probably lesbian or more interested in buying crossbows than razors, or all three. Still coming to the conclusion that the character is more Columbo's sex-prisoner than lover. I'm just trying to make the film darker and interesting and not the "parrot saves Britain, oh look a 2CV – how droll" rot that it is.

Jill Bennett is an interesting name to see in a Bond and is symptomatic of something that For Your Eyes Only onwards does add to the films; established-name dramatic actors turning up, to take one by surprise as to why they're lowering themselves (save to get money to eat). Louis Jourdan. Steven Berkoff. Christopher Walken. Timothy Dalton. Not to say the likes of Christopher Lee, Donald Pleasance and Telly Savalas are total no-marks, far from it, but even in a tiny role such as this – she has five lines – we get Jill Bennett? Adds greater dignity and gravitas than the role of "A Lady With

Shares In Birkenstock” would require. Perhaps she’s there to deliver a performance and not have to rely on a first-time director to provide guidance when he’s more interested in pigeons. Tim Piggott-Smith suddenly turning up in *Quantum of Solace* is another example. “And Judi Dench, as M”. The phenomenon is spoiled by GoldenEye which has a cast straight out of a 1990s ITV drama – Sean Bean! Michael Kitchen! Samantha Bond! Robbie Coltrane! Minnie Driver! – with a special American guest star – is it William Devane? No. Shane Rimmer? No. It’s Peerse Brosnnon. Oh him, yes, I think I’ve heard of him... um, who is he again?

Michael Gothard doesn’t say anything and is kicked off a cliff which, albeit satisfying, doesn’t a character make. I suppose the idea was that he would be more sinister – beyond those octagonal specs – as mute, although what it actually does is make him forgettable even though he’s responsible for dastardly acts and remains beyond redemption right up to the end. At least he’s the source of the only amusing Q joke in a decade – the banana nose; despite myself I find this funny – and allows us to gasp in nostalgia at that white and green computer paper that makes *For Your Eyes Only* look as modern as scurvy. Jack Hedley – another odd person to turn up – gets his character all shot up, cue absurdly melodramatic Continess and a close-up on Ms Bouquet’s lovely eyes that, unfortunately, on the Blu-Ray, clearly shows her moustache billowing into shot. Walter Gotell, as the actual villain, gets short shrift with very minor billing, but at least he gets a ride in a helicopter into Greece, which looks warmer than that photo of Moscow that they’ve gone and used *yet* again. The business about “that’s détente Comrade” is a neat resolution but why Bond didn’t just destroy the ~~Lektor~~ ATAC when underwater in the St Georges and save us the trouble of a wacky parrot, a couple of days watching mountain climbing – which isn’t a spectator sport, is

it? – and a truly horrendous Q scene, was a missed opportunity. Bit of an idiot. Still, getting old, so the mind's beginning to go.

Bit of blue / orange thing traditional – if not ever-present – in the Bonds and – crikey – there's a *very* naked girl jumping about in a Bindery spume; I have never noticed this before, usually because I fast forward through these titles; the song's all shopping arcadey and this rushing water makes me want to “do weeing”. I never felt this, till I looked at you. Indeed not. Titles, song and viewer experience rolled into one, there.

James Villiers turns up as the Chief of Staff because “M's on leave” (is it just me or is there a noticeable reaction by Roger Moore to this?) and the character was already stupid and unfriendly without the ghastly “Sir Havelock” reference, which is scandalous. Why people whine that Quantum of Solace was a deviation in its depiction of those with power being corrupt and indolent when you have this character, defeats me. Perhaps because the Craig film was less than subtle about it when For Your Eyes Only demonstrates incompetence, laziness and stupidity as a more endemic thing and such distasteful behaviours as the bedrock of the Intelligence establishment. In Quantum of Solace, most of the corruption is exposed and dealt with: here, it remains in charge. Chilling.

No depiction of incompetence would be complete without the Llewelyn Q, largely kept on home soil to avoid an international incident, kept in a dungeon of crappy grot and women called Karen / Sharon / Don't care. Doubtless frustrated, he breaks free late in the day to perform his statutory act of racism by dressing up as... erm... a Greek Orthodox priest (just writing that makes me ill) and engaging in the most redundant scene in any Bond, for the sake of local colour, a Gwilson cameo and a “I have sinned / Putting it mildly” “joke”. Pointless, save to exhibit the late Mr Llewelyn's (putting

it “nicely”) overearnest style – “HeaVEN KNOWS! to which one KrisTATos took THE A-tac!”. Bond knows he can find out about St Cyril’s via Topolumbo. Why is it Q who turns up at the church and why dress up? Had it been a mosque, would they have done the same? How can this be justified in this “serious”, “gritty” film? The long, boring and stupid slope of “everyone likes Q, let’s have him do stuff” – sodding off and never coming back not on the agenda – that leads us to the horror that is Licence to Kill, it starts here.

John Moreno’s Luigi is an idiot who may as well have “I am dead meat” carved into his neck to save someone slitting it. True, we see a bit of blood here which evidently makes this the most shockingly violent and hard thriller ever, rather than the lumbering collection of underwhelming eventitude that it is otherwise deceiving us into believing it is. Geoffrey Keen’s Friedrich von Gray is still in role, leaving one to wonder what he has to do to get fired. On his watch, a nuclear submarine has been stolen and comes atoseconds close to being an instrument of Armageddon; a Space Shuttle is nicked and every human being is nearly gassed to death. Now, one of our typewriters is missing! Admittedly nowhere near as interesting, but it still indicates lax ministerial oversight of his department’s stationery resources. Most chillingly of all, he’s changed party allegiance and yet retained the position of “Minister” of Defence. What hold does he have over people? What do the blackmail photos show? It had better not be under-aged athletes; there’s enough of that going on already. Why he’s always grumpy with Bond when 007 saves his corrupt and snivelling hide every couple of years is terribly unfair. If I were 007, I would hand “Gray” over to my masters, the KGB, and let them probe him with white-hot pinking shears. Still, if his replacements are Dick Barton and that nice man from Waiting for God, he must

feel safe. Another six years at least in the job; Gregory Beam's got nothing on the nerve of this guy.

Everyone looks about ten years older than when we last saw them, and beaten-up. Lois Maxwell's Moneypenny is played by Quentin Crisp. Civil servant she may be; naked we do not want, thank you. Nicely written little scene between them but some lines are beneath her dignity, given that she appears to be Bond's gran. Women of this age don't behave like that, unless she's from Liverpool as well. Beginning to disturb what a Bond / Moneypenny coupling would be like by now. MooreBond would suck her teeth out and they'd get entwined in each other's wrinkles and have to be prised free with a lubricant of Ovaltine and Steradent.

John Wyman's character of Whatever, according to World-expert Bibi Dahl, is "not interested in girls". This means either that he's interested in women, sets him aside from the other male characters, the duhhty old bastards, or by being a blond bemuscle Adonis Rocky Horror-type who hangs around the yachts of Greek gentlemen in only his swimmers, he's a young man who is helpful to sailors navigating the windward passage. Uncertainty about how to treat the character either has him as a malicious threat – his perverse sniping at a trapped Bond is a tense little sequence – or a clown – his unusual decision to throw a motorbike and collapsing in a heap when trying to stand on his skis are both undermining. But he probably likes undermining. As t'were.

The second unit direction and photography was by Arthur Wooster and he comes across as a nice chap but... It's hard to put one's finger on it, or fairly lay responsibility on the shoulders of one individual, but from this film onwards through the decade, the films are blandly shot, aren't they? Some of the stuff here is nice – Cortina and Corfu look appealing, in a middle-aged holiday away from the

kids way – but there’s nothing inventive about the visuals to match up to *Moonraker*, *The Spy Who Loved Me* or even, say, *Live and Let Die*. Maybe it’s just me, but with *For Your Eyes Only* we start the notion that we *go* places but we don’t *show* places. The Man with the Golden Gun does little of strength beyond giving us the benefit of its locations; here, there’s plenty going on but it could happen anywhere, really. We go to Cortina just because it’s ages (four years) since we had skiing; Locque could have been “anywhere, really”. OK, so we don’t have Mayan temples and Outer Space and that’s A Good Thing, Official, but are these interesting replacements? Additionally, huge amounts seem to be overlit soft-focus – the scene in the back of the Rolls between Bond and Lisl suggests the lens was steamed up despite the forced banter’s deathly chill. That may be flattering to one’s star but questionable in providing anything engaging to look at. The crisp, slick look of the past couple of films seems to have gone, with a reduction in the style of the presentation as a result.

Underwater, Aerial and Ski photography by Messrs. Giddings, Devis and Bogner respectively and there’s nothing offensive about their efforts but equally so there’s nothing inventive about the look of them either. Some ideas that come through in the sequences – the ability to talk underwater, the lunatic (and fatally dangerous) bobsleigh stunt – are diverting enhancements of previous incidents but are at risk of going on too long. The ski sequence seems planned with the phrase “...and then this happens... and then *this* happens... and then *this* happens... and then *this* happens...and it’s still not over because then *this* happens...and there’s some *more*... and more... much Moore...Roger Moore. Oh, no, it’s a stuntman in a woolly hat”. Throwing all this action at us suggests that the message was “some of the others only have underwater bits or only have skiing

bits; this one's got the lot!" True, but does that make it twice as, or *half as*, good?

The bob chase sequence, with truly awful visual effects, tends to ram home the point that there's no way in any dimension of hell that this is Roger Moore doing this. As he stands up straight against dirty back projection and waves cheekily at the riders of the sleigh, he also finally waves goodbye to any pretence that it's him. From now on, it's harder to spot Roger Moore as James Bond than trying to see where it's someone else. Accept this and Octopussy and A View to a Kill become better and a Spot the Moore drinking game. They both need something to help them along, as do I.

There's a woman crouching down; is she going to pooh? Woman! Do NOT pooh! I think she's going to pooh, y'know. Ah, another lady has run into view and appears to shoot her up the bottom. An extreme reaction to an emergency pooh, but unless it's a metaphor for rapid ageing and the onset of incontinence, a justifiable one.

Here's something odd: the production supervisor was Bob Simmons. I thought he did stunts *stroke* action sequences? Is this cost-cutting doubling-up of roles? Has this occurred elsewhere in the film? Does Carole Bouquet exist or is Melina actually played by Topol, with a bushier moustache? Is that Geoffrey Keen in a purple leotard jumping up and down and wanna-ing to win a gold medal? (I hope so; it makes the Bibi character less uncomfortable viewing knowing that she's played by a squat fat middle aged man, in blonde pigtails. Tula is not alone). Oh no, my mistake – stunty Robert is a Simmons without a D. Different bloke. What japes "on set" mixing the two up; they must have had grand fun. If only that had translated into the final product. The production managers were Mara Blasetti, Phil Kohler and Aspa Lambrou and, as ever, these things must have been a hell of a job to sort out and ensure

they happened although there remains a whiff of “why bother?” about this one.

Significantly, as we reach the end of the 007th minute, the production’s accountant Douglas Noakes gets a credit and although it’s still a Bond film because the gunbarrel Tells Us It Is, And That’s Enough, it does feel scaled back in ambition and scope. But, I’m sure “they” would argue they prepared us for that by telling us that this was “the plan”. Yes, but they also told us there would be changes and seriousness and all we got was the same type of churned-out production line tick-box rubber-stamped package, just less expensively done.

0.07.00

A change of director more than a change of direction, *For Your Eyes Only* is most notable for what it doesn’t do than for what it does. It isn’t any radical change from *Moonraker* – this is a film in which Britain is saved by a parrot and there’s a hil-ar-i-ous chase in a 2CV – and is a misfire when it comes to doing serious – because it just isn’t capable of being serious enough – and daft – because it isn’t daft enough either.

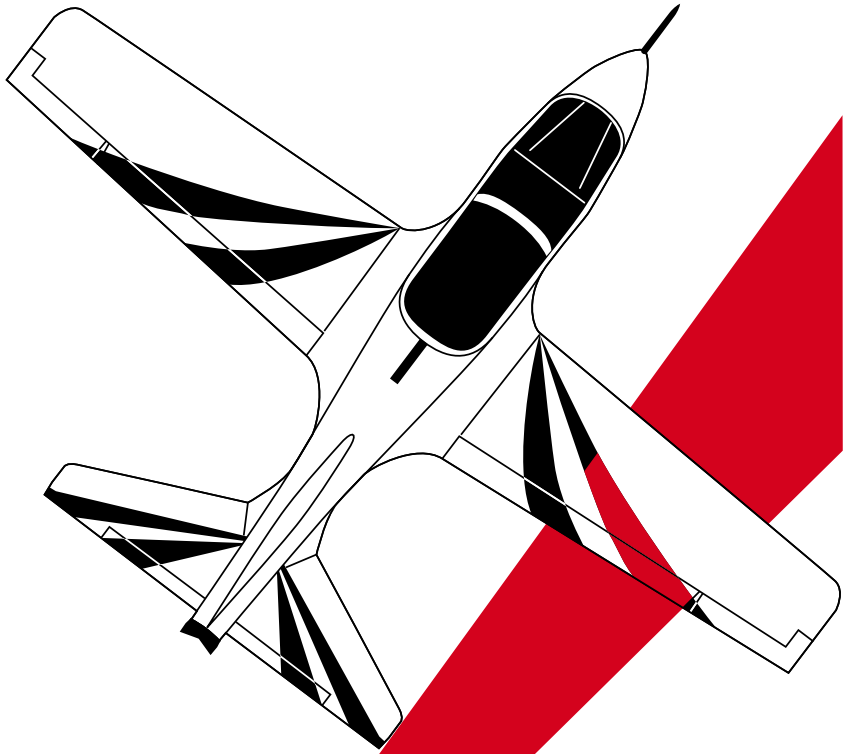
Generously, one could view it as an experiment, to see what the audience liked (expensive way of finding out) to then push that audience “like” in the next one as the defining characteristic of where James Bond should go – although the results of the experiment seem to conflict as *Octopussy* is both more serious in its serious parts and more stupid in its many stupid parts than this one. Undernourished and shy in all departments, *For Your Eyes Only* does seem lost for its purpose, milling about, wanting to be liked but without sufficient strength of character to shine in any way. Even with what follows – the repeat references to the might of the Greek police (are there any

THE 007TH MINUTE

left?), statuesque transsexuals and bald fat half-naked men “doing disco dancing” arthritically to a filthy “song” – are blips of interest rather than anything memorable *per se*. It’s not a bad film – there’s nothing actively poor about it and it’s professional and generally zips about OK (*ish*) – but when it comes to it, it’s just “one of” the Bond Films and is left to merge into the public consciousness without presenting anything significant. It doesn’t do what it ostensibly set out to do and therefore it’s just “there”.

What it does successfully show – depending on your definition of success – is that there wasn’t the vision to scrap the whole bloody thing and start again. That would have to wait. Too long.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
OCTOPUSSY. JACQUES STEWART IS DIVING EQUIPMENT
FOR SALVAGE WORK AT DEPTHS OF MORE THAN 3 FEET.



OCTOPUSSY

SCIENCE FACT! #13

When entering the UK and the Customs Officer opens your bag and starts asking you questions, in relation to each item simply respond "That's my little Octopussy". This is a secret code and you will be waved through with a smile, not clubbed to death. Not that at all. Go on - *do it*.

(Adopts Patrick Macnee voice)

It is the summer of 1983, the summer of the Jedi and the unbelievable opportunity – taken up at length by your correspondent (“hi”) – for childish playground taunting in calling a corpulent chum a Big Fat Jabba. You can probably tell where this joke’s going, so I’ll save you the inexpert fumbling and get straight to the money shot of “grossly overweight, leering at bikinied beauties through oily seepage, a crusty, ancient and wrinkled blob who at one point dresses up as a clown and stops a bomb going off”.

I seem to have drained the spuds too quickly there. I’m sorry. If you’re submitting yourself to the girth of these 007th minutes you’ll know that’s never happened before; honest. If only Octopussy were that swift but no, it tries to pleasure us with multiple climaxes, neglecting to realise that all we want is a kip and to be left alone. Oh, Octopussy, put it away. Just stop. Please stop. I’ve a busy day tomorrow and I don’t want you bothering me like a Labrador giving the dining table a listless seeing-to, dribbling gently from moist jowls, eking it out painfully when it would be kinder to administer a double-tap with a clawhammer to the back of the head and hurl it into a midnighted estuary. We both know we’re too old for this and I can see the self-loathing in your eyes as you summon up The Gush. All I wanted was a sweet distraction for an hour or two. Tops. I never expected to do the things (oh God, the *things*) we’ve done. Things you now want to do again. You’ll end up a dried-out of husk of sex-pestiness. Who at one point dresses up as a clown and stops a bomb going off.

THE 007TH MINUTE

(Adopts Patrick Macnee voice again.
Adopts it, but will tire of it and
abandon it in a hedge in a year's time)

It is the summer of 1983, the summer of two Bond films, both of them contained within Octopussy. I'm not reviewing Never Say Never Again (he lied). A capacity for contrived abuse I may have but that does such a superb job of humiliating itself I wouldn't have an angle. It's beneath my contempt. That's enough attention already. Goodbye. Until, er... the next 007th minute.

(Adopts Patrick Macnee voice for a
third time, thus exposing critical
failings in Social Services policy)

It is the summer of 1983, a significant year in Bond, not just the 21st anniversary, which spiked a Horlicks of a film with viagra or whatever the 1983 equivalent was (a cocktail of Quattro – a green fizzpop so unnatural it dissolved its own can – and a packet of Zubes), and certainly not for the massdebate over which set of millionaires was going to win the game of exploiting money out of an audience now entombed in a decayed series. No, 1983 is the year springboarding the genesis of the seminal, book-of-the-year Catching Bullets by Mark O'Connell which, if you haven't yet read, stop subjecting your intellect to this infantile rubbish and read that instead, it's a considerably more buxom venture, an immensely pleasurable act of slipping on your Bondom with pride and wagging it about for all to see.

Deduction means I saw Octopussy in the same Guildford cinema as Mark O'Connell – and on that basis, there's a chance it could have been on the same day, which would be amusing. I would have been the child sitting with the mother spending the film hoarsely

whispering “Who’s that actor?” and “What did she just say?” and “I don’t think this is suitable; that well-combed man keeps saying “Octopooosy” which in English means Eight-Headed Pink-Lipped Custard-Sucker.” I fib; only two of those expressions would be ones my mother uses. She knows *full well* who the actors are. Many of Mark’s experiences from that point on (more than I care to admit, at least to the wife) I’ve shared. Save for one.

He likes Octopussy.

I must have too, once, otherwise I wouldn’t be here, typing away a semi-anonymous life hollowly abusing the far-better-than-mine acting talents of The Actor Piers Bronsong and, as moderator of a fan site, trying to convince people that just because they bought a book or a film, they don’t actually *own* the images in it and, after they’ve pretended to apologise, passing their IP addresses to the copyright holders anyway. I suppose if I hadn’t, somewhere deep down, found enjoyment in Octoyippeebong I would be elsewhere on the internet being grumpy in Dempsey & Makepeace fora or moderating BringBackBergerac.com. (While I’m at it, bring back Bergerac. Lots of ghastriness from the 1980s seem distressingly fashionable again – class war, Cunservative governments, football racism, Jimmy Savile – so why not this? Its time is now. So do it. Yes, *you*. Get on with it. *Come on*. Urr, not there).

If you don’t like me (imagine the “care” I invest in that – needs a Supersize Hadron Collider to find it), know this – you can blame Octoladywrinkle for *me*, too. It bears the burden of many sins, chief amongst them a disregard for sense, logic or respecting its audience as more than ten years old and gawping at the bazongas whilst embracing type-2 diabetes via toffee Poppets and cream soda. Bits I like (summed up in the two words Steven and Berkoff) but it’s just “bits”, and not terribly many. Very hard to love, twin films, of themselves

ugly and now conjoined at the skull, halving the brain, and also at the hips and stunningly hideous and unstable, unsure whether to be cretinously stupid and flap amusingly for our freakshow pleasure (exhibit A: everything that happens in India) or *incredibly suddenly* lurching into the wall marked “actual plot you didn’t see coming” (exhibit B: the inventive but “coming from a better film” Germany), and, fancy that, we’re back to “coming” again. Oh, Octosquishmitten, Stop. It. A depressingly ill-conceived hybrid of Carry On Up the Khyber and Threads, it’s easy to abuse it as an All Time Low. To be “fair”, it isn’t. Worse – much worse, Roger Worse – was to “come”.

“Seriously”, would it be tolerated if it didn’t have a gunbarrel? Save for giving our salaries another run-through of the deadweight of artisitic Tourette’s that the series had become by now, oh let’s see what they have Q do, *oh let’s*, is there any reason for this film to happen? I appreciate that criticising part of a series for being part of a series is as redundant as Kamal Khan is to anything that happens in the film itself, but even the undernourished For Your Eyes Only followed through its peculiar tale of a European paedo ring squabbling about a damp laptop, in an undemanding and plain manner. Octopuddinghatch is a mess, and suggests that “they” thought they could get away with any old tat as long as it looked and behaved and smelt like A. Bond. Film.

Still, people went to see it so I suppose that’s super and a total justification. This isn’t a criticism of “them”, it’s a criticism of “people”. Look at them. *Look* at “people”. Ugly lumps of easily-deceived dross amounting to no more than a statistic in a hospital’s record of “cause of death”. Ugh at them. Give them a gunbarrel and they’ll buy anything, heh heh heh, and we make lots of lovely money out of their desire to find out whether this one’s any better than the last,

and we can cynically exploit that curiosity for at least another 19 years. Dress murderous middle-aged sexual predator James Bond – last seen consorting with borderline underage girls – in a clown suit and unleash him into a tent full of kids? No; Look. At. The. Gunbarrel. That's there to distract you, you clod. You're meant to gaze upon that fondly and it helps you ignore the money wasted showing you India for no reason or wondering why Louis Jourdan is the first motiveless Bond villain or what the hell Vijay Amritraj thinks he's up to (it ain't acting), other than getting cast in Octofiddlecove because his name sounds like Vagina.

Shamelessly, Octopurplepeoplemaker doesn't do anything to smooth over the joins. The melding of Risico and the titular (fnarr) short story in *For Your Eyes Only* is inoffensive. This just smashes two ideas together and can't be bothered lowering itself to apply glue; the incidents on show indicate that Octothepropertyofalady has sniffed it all up. It's a reasonable conclusion (it's me; my level of reason is not high) that the writing process involved persons who didn't meet to discuss whether their separate bits would fit. George Macdonald Fraser's hilarious (for deeply wrong reasons) autobiography *The Light's on at Signpost* does go into detail about the writing of *Octoclownshoe*, and it's to be appreciated as it's rare that we get insight other than what is Eoned at us. A word of caution on the book: he does bang on about how the Blair government was responsible for everything wrong in Britain after 1654 and they started the Great Fire of London and they're death lizards (it's some time since I read it). Still, it's more enlightened than much of what comes out of the Isle of Man, its residents believing that homosexuals are made of firefighters; there can be no other reason for making the wicker men burn so well. Any Flashman parallel in this film of *Here Comes The Empire To Smash Johnny Foreigner* is trite but then it's Octo-

cunservative and it deserves little else. Roger Moore, twenty years younger, would have been a spectacular Flashman. Shame. Ultimately the India stuff is unnecessary – no need to be there other than “we can be”. Probably magnificent tax breaks kicking about (yeah, thrilling) and whilst the film shows lovely parts of the one place they went to, guff all goes on that is germane to what’s ultimately meant to be happening.

The bomb stuff is sound – the final tickdown is a terrific scene – but too late to rescue 90 minutes of casting about for something to do. On “casting” – look at the segue on that, what a beauty – a quick (Octorocketpocket style “quick” i.e. slow) word about the cast, largely because it’s clear that the 007th minute doesn’t promise the titles this time. Specifically, Louis Jourdan and “Steve” Berkoff (I bet no-one dares call him *Steve*).

What is Kamal Khan for, other than giving us a more front-of-house villain than Orlov and an alternative to the (potential) idea that Octobrosnan herself is the villain and Bond has to kill her (not very Uncle Roger-like, that)? You cast Louis Jourdan and waste him? An insult to the man. Probably a mate of Cubby Broccoli’s and that’ll do (80s Bond – “that’ll do” is the effort required / demonstrated). What *does* Kamal gain by Orlov’s plan? There’ll be no time for jewellery smuggling when WW3 gets going, and the smuggling is going along just fine anyway. Just a fence for stolen goods, but little else. I don’t get what he’s doing it for. Perhaps if the plot were the nuclear threat between India and Pakistan there may have been purpose to him but, other than hanging around Pinewood to wave his loaded dice (fnarr) in front of buffoonish stereotypes, all he provides are dull incidents of mild peril in India and, once everything’s back in Europe, he’s extraneous. Too late to rewrite it, but an explicit notion (beyond a comedy face when the car won’t start) that he realises

he's got his campily GEMS!-filled stuffed sheep's head involved in a plot *way* out of its depth and tries to get out of it *might* have added to the character. Instead, for the last hour, he hangs about waiting for Bond to kill him, which Bond does, boringly. Remove Kamal Khan from Octolapland and little that goes towards such plot as there pretends to be, is lost. Waste of space, and talent.

On the other hand...

Steven Berkoff. Bloody hell. His scene in the Adamesque Kremlin War Room is the absolute highlight of Octocodcanal. Such a shame that he's not in the film more, although a risk that he'd have chewed his way through the screen. An overpowering performance, brilliantly diverting one from double-taking camels, Q-Bore and liquid crystal zoomy breasts. Look at him flinging his arms about and getting hysterical and shrieking about "Czechoslovakia"; magic. Total entertainment; fantastically demented.

In the face-off with Moore on the train, there is only one winner. Roger Moore's so relaxed – the word is "embalmed" – that the angry act doesn't convince and Berkoff just sits there, calmly, content that even his facial wart is a billion times more sinister than Moore's. When Orlov dies, the film expires with him; the bombtick aside, the momentum evaporates and we trudge through train stuff, cirrrrrcussss ssstuffff is it over yet nooo oh here comes Innnnnndia surely it's over nowww nnnno here's a horse chase surely that's it nnnno here's some aeroplane I really wanna sleep now, stoppp it, stoppp it Octogravyboat, stop nuzzling me like that, surely you can't be ready to climax yet again, please leave me alone, I need to sleeeeeepppp...

Orlov doesn't get the attention he deserves, because he's only in it for glimpses of bonkersdom. Even his errors are brilliant – smashing the genuine egg adds to the mania (although it would give a charac-

ter less dense or better written than Kamal Khan pause to wonder whether Orlov's that bothered about the GEMS!). Steven Berkoff is our lost Blofeld. He would have been incredible. You know it. He's critical here; without him, Octotinkleflower is a two hour dirty – filthy – bomb made from the most lethal “-ium” element of all. Tedium.

Joining the “action” at the 007th minute, what's been splayed for our delictation so far to part us from our money in exchange for lukewarm stimuli? Bland title card for United Artists this time. I wonder if they ran out of money yet again? Turned the lion into cutlets. So Bond infiltrates a warmongering 1980s dictatorship – North London – and delivers a spoilerific review of Octolipsbetweenthehips with his description of Colonel Toro. Too self-knowing for my liking, but confident / hugely smug that they don't need others to pass judgment, they can do it themselves. Who needs critics? Gunbarrel “plus” undemanding plebs “timesed by” dollars “equals” happiness. Looking portly here, Rog shuffles about, gets caught, does amusing leering and climbs into an aeroplane that is fired from a horse's bottom as a jet-fuelled suppository. We have moved “some way” since Professor Dent, have we not? Oh, to have been at the meeting when such a hilarious idea was agreed! Oh, to have been armed.

Then “they” fire a phallus at him and this chases him everywhere, trying to explode into him like a horny gym teacher on a field trip and – oho! – James Bond's got an idea...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 OCTODEPOSITORY (not the “Kremlin Art” type. Unless the Romanov Star is a Vajazzle. It could be; looks like one).

Here comes the jet. It takes a few viewings to see that it's an optical effect aiming at us. Doubtless on the blu-ray it looks amateurish but – I may have given off a vibe – I won't buying Octofrontbum

on any new / slightly failed format. Not when there's food, clothing, the gas bill, wine and school fees to pay for (or, in order of increasing expense, clothing, food, wine, school fees and the gas bill). Lots of rushing by "Argentinians" or "Cubans" or whatever they are (Welsh?) although the people standing directly behind Colonel Toro don't seem bothered that they have an adult-toy shaped object heading with force right into their entrance. That's it lads, shut the rear doors – a euphemism? – because that's a good way to stop an explosion.

Whoosh, and past a clever foreground miniature the 'plane flies; neat trick, repeated at the other end (didn't shut the doors in time, did they?). Hard to fault the 80s Bonds on craftsmanship – Octotunamelt looks lush, expansive and expensive – although back projection remains an issue. An unfortunate truth pokes its head through: aside from much that involves James Bond, Octogrowler is OK. Presentation values are immense, India looks smashing even if nothing happens there and the stuntwork with this teeny tiny jetty wetty is perfectly sound. However, the story – the James Bond bit – and the close-ups in the action sequences – the Roger Moore's James Bond bit – are both in the Arena of the Ungood. Case in point here. It's evident, sadly, that for many shots of Bond sitting in the 'plane, it's on the ground (tree-level gives it away, horribly) and he's being gently rocked, into post-prandial slumber. He'll be fine after his nap. The camera moves more – much more, Roger Moore – than the 'plane. I'm not delusional enough to believe that they would strap a younger actor into the tiny jet deathtrap and had him fly for real, but this sort of cackhanded thing isn't helping to suspend disbelief that it's gone elderly. It's an amusing sequence overall, but spoiled by having to show us James Bond participating in it. That's a tadge counterproductive, surely?

C'mon Rodge, ride that pole. Despite what I've just observed, it does appear that "they" did stick a stiff-'un right up Moore's fuselage and drive him through the hanger at about, ooh, a fifth of the speed at which the 'plane entered. Still, I wouldn't do that, so another tip of the hat, of many, to Sir Roger Moore. I may as well take the hat off altogether, and leave it off. Unless I'm mistaken, this is the last time we set Bond's headgear in Moneypenny's front office, unless the virtual reality lousiness at the end of *Die Another Day* is the same euphemism.

I know Mr Glen's on record about his pride at hiding the erection (um) behind young men running about (um) but c'mon John, we can see it, we know it's there and it's fun that we can. Wouldn't be a 80s Bond without being "a bit crap". Given the repeated climaxes, he's not so much director as fluffer, Mr Glen's handling of actors has improved, although that's because he's not directing children. No-one gives a duff performance but – with one notable exception – there's no life. Louis Jourdan is at a loose end, the Magda character hangs about without bothering to explain herself, Maud Adams is pretty – albeit custodian of some woeful dialogue. They are indeed two of a kind; he's been known to hang out with young athletic girls, too.

It's nice to see MooreBond picking on someone nearer (if not *that* close) to his age this time and as for Sir Roger himself, it's a larf, innit? Moments of splendour – the "double-sixes" is lovely – and daffy mischief – the auction is strongly Moore – with bursts of unconvincing tension but it's looking undemanding and although Moore is always watchable, Bond himself is beginning to run on empty. Same old, same older. Veering into boring, so cover that up by Bond flying out of an equine pooh-chute. Wisely deciding that child molestation was a beat too far, for Octocockpit they've turned Bond into a vacuum who turns up, stops other people's plans and then gets a

snog. What he does has become who he is; admirably existential but does betray running out of ideas for the character. Repairing this by giving him savoury baking skills proves questionable.

Whoosh, and past a clever foreground miniature etc. Bond looks around, on the ground driving around a helicopter as he does so, bit odd. Colonel Toro, this is where you get yours, with a missile that ignites before it hits anything. Tchoh! Argentinian / Cuban / Welsh / Egyptian builders! KABLOEEY. My stars, that's a big explosion; flings bits right out of the back projection. Curious reaction to the inferno – the horseriders stop and the crowd of old English people stare, but instead of doing what I would do were there a massive exploding building close by – i.e. gawp, then flee – they watch Bond's little 'plane instead. The horses aren't bothered by the massive crimson fireball (phrase copyright John Gardner, every one of his Bonds) but then they keep aircraft up their backsides, so it takes a lot to startle them. Science Fact! – the airships of *A View to a Kill* were transported by horse, secreted up the anus, and then defecated out. Science Fact! – so was the script.

Bond's victory roll, shooting turbowhiteness everywhere, is spoiled by the immediate revelation that Sir Roger Moore is still on the ground and we *must* have been watching someone else. Still, benefit of looking at him is that we get a special Roger Moore frown as the out of fuel joke lights up. How the tank is empty when the jet hasn't moved is a mystery, but he's probably been revving it at the lights. Oh no! If you're caught this side of the border you'll be captured and dunked in icy water, although knowing your charm, it won't be water, it'll be Martini.

Blimey, he's flown very low over that weedy border, which is showing off because the manner of its guarding suggests he could just have strolled up, pointed at an interesting tree – a plastic palm,

perhaps – and then nipped around the barrier. That said, it would have involved movement; as seen from the landing here, it must have been in the contract that the camera moved for him instead.

Being less churlish, it's a neat joke to drive up to the filling station with one final spurt of explodywhite, although given the later Bond / Madga dialogue about "refilling", one wonders what it *is* that Bond is inviting the only man on Earth older than him to do to the 'plane. Bringing forth the saxophone, for it is the 1980s my darlings, the titles start with the image of Bond aptly getting clap, and we hit...

0.07.00

On Octoclunge goes, disconnected old rubbish, flatly filmed, under-edited and overlit, an experience that serves little purpose other than exposing how production line it had become. It's fine as A. Bond. Film, it has a gunbarrel, it must therefore be one, but thirteen in and Octovag doesn't make a convincing case to plough on. The lead character is abandoned in favour of incident and there's a robotic listlessness about it. This renders the imposition of a late, unlikely spurt of furious pumping after 90 minutes of dozy foreplay a hell of an inconvenience, you were just dropping off, and delivers serious uncertainty about whether it's ever going to end or carry on all bloody night leaving you sore and feeling used.

As I've suggested, Octoyumyum's not wholly without merit but it's fumbling fits and starts rather than a deep emotional experience.

It's not you, Octolala, it's me. If we're going to have this amicable split, it's only fair that I let you know how much I respect you. I like your Moneypenny (not a euphemism; she appears in better nick than last time out) and your Smallbone (plainly *is* a euphemism, but that's why I like her). Your M is a fitting replacement, one of your villains

is one of the best and your plot, when it turns up three-quarters through (I suppose delayed reaction is kinky) is fairly exciting.

In fairness, you also ought to know some home truths, my little Octotickletunnel. Q is woefully racist, but you knew that and still you made me watch him having trouble keeping it up. I feel sullied. Bond even joins in, with colossally inappropriate stuff about “keeping people in curry”, which is very dodgy. I accept that you’re a “caper” style Bond, but by “caper” what I’m referring to is one of those indigestible green bogeys in a jar at the back of the fridge, developing furmould. Your conversation was meaningless and the men you had doing the stunts were evidently three stone lighter than the man you had saying the wurdz. Some of the things you tried have been done before and why you insist on inviting that louse Frederick Gray around for drinks I have no idea. Never liked him and now he’s chummying up to the Russians. I mean, I know he’s your friend but seriously, can’t you see the signals? He’s probably letting the KGB read them. I accept that you livened things up towards the end of our encounter but to be honest, I wanted you to stop.

I’m sorry Octopussy – and excuse that vulgarity, but like you I’ve run out of ideas – but I can’t love you enough to be more than nodding acquaintances. I do want to waste a waking moment and believe me, I do want to sleep. Now put that thing away and grab some shut-eye. Early start tomorrow – I have to learn how to get mixed up with a man who says never. It may mean big trouble. It may mean the end of my marriage. Something to look forward to, then. G’night.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
A VIEW TO A KILL. JACQUES STEWART IS IN SO STRONG
AND SO DEEP, IT CHAFES. PASS THE GERMOLENE.



NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN

SHCIENCE FACT!

Never shaying Never Again is shound advishe.
However, always shay "Yesh pleashe!" to absholute
bottylloadsh of cash (cashsh?) for desheperate,
deshecrating, meritless cynicism.

– INTERMISSION –

The safety curtain drops, so you can shuffle off for some gratuitous sex and violence, Perhaps find something refreshing to suck on, or even buy a drink. Good opportunity to have a wee-wee, too.

Once back in your seat, masticating listlessly ‘pon a King Cone (lucky you), here’s a game to play to kill time whilst the projectionist is having a pooh. Try to reconstruct in your “mind” what you’ve just watched. An example accidentally plucked from the air, *I know not why*, cast your mind back to Thunderball and all that sailed in it. So much happened that you’ll only get it half right. This is not a purposeless endeavour: some persons produce films by this method. Albeit “unofficially”.

Officialdom, then.

Comes with a pejorative aura, that word. The unthinking, unaccountable, impersonal machine grinding away at joy. Drab routine squashing individuality in confirming the status quo, underimaginative and by-the-book, a steady course towards grey conformity and the bland.

There's an official James Bond series, for example.

Not sure what made it official, beyond longevity. Eon had particular intellectual property rights to a commodity and someone else had different ones to the same thing (exciting, this). Both could claim to be official in their own way, just as both could claim to have invented the spoon or be called Phil. It's not as if the Broccoli product was an authorised emanation of the state. Just as well; it would have been a tyrannical regime that unleashed Octopussy on its downtrodden populace. Regardless, the North KorEons must have had a nasty turn when Never Say Never Again anchored just off their waters, manned by vengeful Celts ready to fire poorly-superimposed missiles right up their Danjaqsies.

Insofar as this film isn't "official", it's not actually illegal nor a pirate knock-off you picked up at the market along with the kids' Christmas presents (how thoughtful, Mr Jim; the children will be so thrilled). More engaging if t'were; some danger about it, at least. It just happens to be shoved at us by persons entitled to do so who weren't the usual persons entitled to do so, but their pursuit of our cash in return for emitting lazy entertainment in the name of *art* money is *curiously* identical. Fancy that.

I suppose that the ire of the Broccolis was raised by the risk that this film would be perceived as one of theirs and its qualities – or lack of them – would undermine the reception granted to their output. This stance, of course, hides the other risk – that it would turn out better and expose the complacent, artless toxicity of their effluent.

Hindsight dictates that they needn't have worried; very rarely is Never Say Never Again mentioned without its independent status tagged around its ankle, and as for its "artistic" threat, Eon demonstrated that they were competent at undermining their product all by

themselves. It's not as if Kevin McClory made *Licence to Kill*, is it? Give the excreta Tarzan-yelled out at us by the "official" series during the 1980s, arguing to preserve artistic credibility can't have been sincere. I suspect it was about threat to the income stream; about which, boo bloody hoo.

Still, I said I would never do this one. *Never say...*

Those who persisted with the 007th minutes on the website may have noted that in this form, I've removed some excess verbiage. Not enough, I expect, but there were many *verys* and *reallys* and *totallys* the pieces could live without. The purged and persecuted words haven't disappeared; they've found shelter describing an equally redundant film that comes with a reputation of being *really, really, really, totally, totally, totally, really, really, really, quite, quite, quite, a bit, a bit, a bit, a bit, fnarr, really, really, very, very, very, very, utterly, utterly, utterly, really, really, really, very, very, very, very, very, totally, totally, totally, utterly, utterly, utterly* crap.

Really.

Birthered in bitterness, rage and jealousy, engineered not for art nor to better mankind but out of greed, peevishness and petulance, the sham-bolically opportunistic and grumpy ~~Jacques Stewart~~ *Never Say Never Again* may ultimately be no more cynical than most films, and provided employment to those who made it and entertainment for a couple of undemanding hours, but it remains tangibly *vindictive*, even thirty years on. I'm not interested in the litigation – and I hope it doesn't become interested in me – nor is this taking Eon's side. Their 1980s output – as a "collection" – can't credibly be called better overall. In complacently drifting towards the grave, they're arguably a greater insult. In "fairness", more weevil than evil, *Never Say Never Again* is a solid match for that decade's blighted crop from the Broccoli Farm.

Someone else could make a Bond film that was a credible peer for the prevailing standard.

This is not a compliment.

Much more (insanely) complimentary is the blurb on the DVD case (£2.99, all mediocre petrol stations, along with a selection of pre-bagged porn: more Christmas shopping solutions). Apparently, *Never Say Never Again* is “Inventive, imaginative, tension-filled fun!”, albeit this view is unattributed to anyone who could confess responsibility for those words, or knowledge of their meaning.

INVENTIVE.

Inventive? Until the current trend for reheating everything, surely this egregious enterprise stood perceived as one of the most well-known remakes ever spewed? I write *perceived* because technically (and factually) there’s an argument that all this McClory fellow was doing was exploiting a literary resource to which he had rights, and making a film of it. In isolation, what of it? On that basis, it’s not a remake, it’s simply a “make”. Fairy nuff.

However, it’s not as if over the years, or at the time, much effort was exerted to distance itself from the label of “Thunderball remake”. I don’t recall great objection to this convenient nickname, at least from the McClory / Schwartzman faction. Nor does much seem to have been done to strip the film of the scar tissue weighing down the Eon series by that point – obligatory Q and Moneypenny cack, boring locations, women way too young for the lead and pacing “issues”. All the parsley tea in the world won’t cure that.

Surely this film’s makers could have distanced themselves from Eon’s moribund idle drivel, at least as an artistic statement? Other than for (ahem) “financial reasons” why would anyone want

whoops-accidentally-on-purpose association with the likes of For Your Eyes Only and Octopussy? I suppose it means someone else has done the hard work establishing your stock characters already, although it's questionable how much effort had been expended by Eon doing that, at least since 1969. Moneypenny, Q etc. through the 1970s and 1980s – not so much *characters* as depressing check-list *incidents*, appearing with the tedious inevitability of an unloved season.

Unless they thought that this was all a Bond film could be? It had the opportunity to stand out. Why make it exactly the same? If one takes at face value (BIG if) that this is something new and has nothing whatsoever in common with the Eon series, what a *massively uncanny* coincidence that the end product, um, does. I wonder what they were thinking of?

\$.

To see something so similar to one's contemporaneous output must have enraged the Eonistas and one can feel for them on that. Most annoying. What a parasitic effort it is. Then one's sympathies veer the other way, into wondering why Eon thought the tired banalities that Q and Moneypenny etc had become by the time of Octopussy, were worth keeping to themselves? Not as if they're anything to be proud of. Major opportunity to let someone take all that rancid cack off your hands and start again, liberated. Opportunity lost. Two bald men fighting over a comb springs to mind. Or one bald man and a red-headed stand-in.

It may have been some solace to the Brocs that the rival Bond was no better; the flipside of that is that their product was just as poor. Never Say Never Again slots into place very well as a 80s Bond. Not better, not much worse, equally meretricious. As a ten-year-

old watching both that year, I paid no heed to, nor understood, the grisly squabbling of elderly businessmen out to exploit me (at least, not *these* ones); just thought we were getting two Bonds that year. Didn't see any great difference.

Still don't.

IMAGINATIVE.

See above.

How imaginative is it to take the core of a story – hijacking weapons and issuing a threat, which could be done in a number of ways – but dress it in the same dross as the “official” series, absent the ambiguous benefit of ongoing actor continuity? Ultimately providing little to undo the flaccid momentum of the Eon series, it has some legacy in inviting us to consider Bond's aptitude for the job – Skyfall's tacit nod – and made Eon thereafter dementedly determined to monopolise rubbish and prove that they could remake their own output *even worse* by creating their own giggling man-child billionaire psycho-villain and goldfingering us all up the chutney with A View to a Kill. I suppose that counts as a “win”?

It's not imaginative; it's Thunderball with the spectacle removed and a sky blue Ford Mustang replaced by a sky blue Ford Cortina; a questionable substitution, but an apt visual summary of the divergence of, and gulf in, class. Still, it offers up amusement in that, save for The Spy Who Loved Me establishing that films only live twice, we haven't had such a solid opportunity to play compare and contrast before (and, one hopes, “Never Again”, hoho). You might have noticed that I greatly admire Thunderball and therefore this won't be a fair fight. With that big old “noticing” face of yours on, notice *this*: don't care.

THUNDERBALL VS. NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN

Connery vs. Connery. Perhaps unfair: in Thunderball he was only 35 and the world's biggest film star, and not called upon to act, more to *exude*. He certainly remains a presence in this later film, he's in better shape in 1983 than he was in 1971, thinner anyway, albeit perhaps *too* thin around the face at times. There's a few shots in Palmyra when Largo is slobbering over Kim Basinger, good call, where Connery appears elderly and emaciated, as ancient as the ruins around him, looking like he's forgotten to put his lower dentures in.

He might have been exhausted trying to keep the mess hanging together; an awful lot rests on him. One gains the impression that the support structures within Eon's productions are less dependent on one man in a thin wig. He *had* to convince not only as James Bond but also as the James Bond he was (albeit older) otherwise the film was doomed. On the basis that there weren't even queues around a breeze block for his other films of the time, no-one was going to be interested in something where Connery gave us anything other than what we expected. Largely succeeded: he does a lot of fighting and throwing piss in people's faces, and that's exactly how he left things with Saltzman and Broccoli back in 1967.

Connery vs. Moore. More – much more, Roger Old – the point. But then Uncle Rog isn't in Thunderball, so it falls outside the game. In passing, pang of pain to write it, but Roger and out. Octopussy, for all its train-jumping and plane-humping, doesn't convince that it's Sir Roger doing any of it. Without doubt they wouldn't have risked killing the main (only) reason to watch Ne'er Say... by putting Sean Connery in the line of fire, but the joins between him and his little helpers are more carefully smoothed over, save for the Lippe fight where the stuntman is *teeny*. Connery has the advantage that underwater you cannot tell who is whom, but that's a mixed blessing as

it makes the action even more impenetrable than many claim it is in Thunderball. Hard to say who wins this one: they're both *far* too old for this, y'know. Neither does anything to desecrate their legacies but, equally, neither brings character novelty. Does either film need to exist? Oh yeah; \$. Our \$.

M vs. M. Bernard Lee drily dismissive and in charge, or Edward Fox shrieking away, a look on his face as if he's just been anus-fed an underripe lemon, or contemplated the horror of his next line. Hilariously mobile features, as if 007's not the only one trying out new teeth. Terribly offputting, really. Connery looks ready to smack him one, a mood not lightened by Ronald Pickup's emasculating offscreen giggle when Bond's accused of losing his edge. Admittedly, this time they used the book's rationale for sending Bond to the clinic (it might have undermined the louche sexbombery going on in 1965 to suggest he was past it even then). Still, in "not overacting appallingly", it's an easy win for Thunderball.

Largo vs. Largo. Both are winning performances in their own ways; where Celi's seethes and sneers, broodingly menacing, Brandauer's is manic and dribbling and unhinged; a genuine score-draw, the younger interloper *possibly* edging it with the slitty-throat stuff and his rampant demeanour of whimsical, mischievous jealousy, the little imp. Not totally clear why Largo wants to blow up Washington D.C. – can't help feeling that'll destabilise his capitalist endeavours "slightly" – or whether his heart's in the plan, but it's not as if the motives of every Eon villain could be labelled credible or coherent. The concept of Never Say Never Again needs a big personality to compete with Connery's overwhelming presence – pretty much works. Occasionally – but not often; the film only justifies occasional thought, like wondering whether Athlete's Foot is sentient – occasionally I've wondered, beyond trying to create a tension that the

editing and the music succeed in removing, whether, in swimming away with an armed nuke from the Obvious Set of Allah, Largo is trying to commit suicide. He's bonkers enough. That would add some shade / interest to proceedings. Probably isn't that, then.

Blofeld vs. Blofeld. Dr Claw or Santa Claus? What a *shocking* waste of Max von Sydow; if he'd given us his Ming the Merciless, it could have amused. It looks like they had him for half a morning and ignored him. Amusing – and doubtless an enraging – decision to keep the cat. I suppose it means McClory & Co could rely on the audience awareness that Blofeld finds happiness in a warming pussy rather than attempt anything characterful beyond “inappropriately avuncular”. Doom Voice to Eggshell Skull to Bruiser McBronx to Liberace to ... this? One crazy mixed-up kid. Cat had better look out – on this evidence he used its predecessor's pelt for his beard. Serves it right for abandoning him to be skewered right up the chair by a helicopter. Bound to cause tears, that, and not just of Allah, although when it happened, doubtless a deity was invoked. Noisily. That lair of his: looks like they just hired the smaller conference room of an understaffed hotel on a provincial ringroad, the Windermere Suite “of Death”. Awful.

Domino vs. Domino. Often considered Kim Basinger underrated as an actress, and albeit she's not given much here, she's no worse than much of the Eon run. Still, she's not the real McCoy. Very pretty, the correct hair colour and less passive a participant than the 1965 model – her killing Largo is one of the better filmed bits – but there's just something about Claudine Auger that appeals, and not just how she inhabits a bikini. Such a lost soul. Basinger's character is no less a prisoner – the throat-cutting stuff makes this explicit, whereas the “kept woman” idea of Thunderball has it more insidious, more sinister. It's the Auger Domino's reluctance, submissive depression

even, that draws out the resigned sadness of the character. Basinger's Domino doesn't seem cut up about her brother, hence the *double* surprise of her turning up at the climactic fight: struck me she wasn't that bothered. Thunderball is a perversely moody film, for all its bombast. The music helps. NSNA plays out on a superficial light-adventure level throughout. The music hinders.

Hijacking of the Vulcan vs. Taking the missiles. The false eye business is clever although surely the heroin addiction would damage it more than a quick smoke? Petachi seems very well scrubbed and clean for someone riding the horse unless, like Bond, he does so into the sea. Is the computer scanning for traces of the eye's owner being a smackhead? Raises challenging thoughts about the incumbent President although, given who it was, not a surprise. As necessary seat-fidget exposition, it feels sharper than the extended Thunderball sequence – the music's very nasty, though – but, on the flipside, in Thunderball they bothered to make a model 'plane rather than rely on some ropey effects where no-one notices two nuclear missiles flying over their heads; either a satire on everyday life in Thatcher's Britain, or monumentally scabby production values.

Moneypenny vs. Moneypenny. By the time of Thunderball, still charming. By the time of Never Say Never Again, not so. A breathy wide-eyed simpleton, to be homaged by the "official" series with Caroline Bliss's "reading". Still, she does work for an abdicated monarch with a citrus fruit jammed up his colon, so perhaps I should be more sympathetic. Another performance giving the game away: that it was more significant that the film *existed* to rattle someone else's cage than to trouble one's self with the qualities of what went on behind one's own bars. No-one seemed bothered about that.

Q vs. "Algernon" (one of those trying-too-hard comedy names: see also "Small-Fawcett" (he's got a small faucet everyone! That means

tiny willy! Ahahahahaha)). Thunderball Q is teetering on the edge of over-involvement and under-tolerance, although fortunately isn't in it too long. This Algernon has amusing lines but doesn't take things in any noticeably different direction. We'd have been foolish to expect anything else, really. Pfft.

Paula vs. Nicole. Another Thunderball mood piece – Paula's suicide is *terribly* sombre, even the bad guys feel sorry for her – versus whatever it is that happens to Nicole. For jumpshock value it works but I've never understood the mechanics – drowned in a waterbed is my best guess, although another possibility is death by underwriting. By dint of both screentime and charisma, Thunderball's sacrificial lamb takes the rosette. Perhaps that should be a wreath.

Beach confrontation vs. "Your brother's dead: keep dancing". Both spiffy moments for Connery, equally melodramatic in their own way. On reflection, the tango one's *terribly* silly, but is about as stylish as NSNA gets, so I'll dare venture that as a highlight. With one highly notable flaw, the casino scene in the later film is its most entertaining sequence, from Bond's arrival (and departure) with the cigar holder, through a pretty solid manifestation of the Bloody Mary joke from the book, the tango and Fatima Blush overacting her way down the stairs. NSNA comes to life at this point, which is just as well as so much of it is blandly filmed, or at excessive length for thin content. On which...

The best casino scene in the series vs. Cheapo-Tron Bore-a-Thon. Oh, guess. Two adult males wiggling their joysticks about and getting sweaty and energetic in their struggle to dominate each other. Hmm. I may have misjudged it. Ah, no: *haven't*. The eternal struggle for domination of the world continues, and you're not kidding in calling it "eternal". On and on and *on* it goes, pingy blarts and electro-crap. "Look what we can do with special effects these days!".

Yes, I looked. Didn't need to know. *Thanks*. Sparkly-eyed hooting loon requires you to give floor space to his innocently-named killing game; casino management, what *are* you up to? Foolish question: you installed Space Invaders everywhere so yer judgment is patently awful. Meanwhile, back in 1965, Connery wins another hand so very casually and Adolfo Celi simmers like Stromboli. Art.

Wheiter vs. Darker. Hmm. Have mixed feelings about this. *What* is the significance of a) his first appearance as a threatening figure and b) the dialogue about Leiter claiming to have used something of Algernon's, I forget what, it blowing up in his face, and Connery giving the man a *very* studied look? Perhaps I'm oversensitive to a *bizarre* suggestion that a charring explosion is the reason for this blond-haired Texan's international beigeism. It might only be accidental that he's initially depicted as sinister (I accept this is how he is introduced in Dr No; hanging around airports, shiftily). I suspect I'm reading too much into both. Call it an attempt to add a dynamic where, for it is Felix Leiter, there is still none. At least he's not fetching Bond's shoes. The Eonesque advanced view of world peoples is directed instead to North Africans, who are either gap-toothed thugs or oasis-dwelling peasantry; after all, it's only their / our / their / no – OUR oil we must protect by stopping the bomb going off, not these expendable no-marks.

Underwater bits vs. Underwater bits. Fine, Never Say Never Again has less of its running time underwater, a point in its favour for some. However, the attack by (a-*hem*) a radio-controlled shark is irritating timewasting, whereas everything that happens underwater in Thunderball, even if it could happen more quickly for those with such busy lives to lead, has to happen. One of the final battles explodes in blue / orange expansive loveliness; the other looks like it was filmed in a drained canal. I'm sure I spotted a shopping trolley.

I do hope that hairy thing floating by was a loose hairpiece not, say, a “special Christmas kitten”.

Pinder vs. Small-Fawcett. Never Say Nigel Again.

Ostensible plot dynamic vs. Ostensible plot dynamic. Finding a photographic stamp for Nassau on the back of a photo of a dead man and a *vair* pretty girl is thin as a plot point for Thunderball, even by the standards of Bond. In comparison, NSNA’s reading of the same idea is dangerously underweight and in need of an intervention. Although he probably would recognise Petachi having played Peeping Jim, Bond discovers the particular connection to *Largo* by suddenly thinking of checking under a mattress. He’s probably looking for porn. Thin? Anorexic.

Thinner still is this: even if what leads Bond to Nassau is no more watertight (ho!) as a clue, in Thunderball at least there’s a point to going. *Largo lives* there, it’s within the range of the ‘plane and ultimately that’s exactly where the bombs are, because that’s where the bombs need to be. Here, there’s actually *no point whatsoever* for visiting The Bahamas. The missiles patently never flew that far. On the timings and (ugly) visuals of the bomb-napping bit, they come down in the English Channel, or at most off the west of France. Although it’s stated (very briefly) that *Largo* is domiciled in Nassau, so was Auric Goldfinger and we end up in a field in Buckinghamshire with him. It’s not as if *Largo* has any sort of home in The Bahamas – he spends his time wholly in the Med. It’s just *filler*, and the story, such as it bothers to be, goes nowhere until we reach the South of France, other than giving Fatima Blush illogical and attention-seeking opportunities to try to Kill! Bond!

Unless – and this is something of a stretch on the rack (sorry, *wrong* film) – knowing that 007 trawls wards feeling for grotmags,

she deliberately left the matchbook there so he would follow that lead thousands of miles away from where the bombs are and... no, it doesn't make sense, does it? Hole-y Plot, Batman. I suspect the unbrief sojourn to Nassau has much to do with the whereabouts of the producers' homes and the offices of the completion bond – sorry, completion *Bond* – institutions that the end credits identify as the owners of the copyright. Just when you thought there was no further appalling outrage that banks could pull. The Broccolis have independence and resource: *Never Say Never Again* is a film demonstrating all the panache, artistic craft and visual imagination one would expect of accountants. Great.

Count Lippe vs. Lippe. Neither film gets one of Fleming's daftest caricatures "right", probably for the best. The chap in *Thunderball* is more creepy than flamboyant and, fair enough, one wouldn't be casting Pat Roach for anything other than beating someone up, but at least he *does* something. Comes across as a right old count. A win for *Never Say Never Again*! Oh, the plucky youngster. Rhymes with plucky, anyway.

Fiona Volpe vs. Fatima Blush. Surrounded by actors of the Best Supporting kind, Ms Carrera seems unintimidated and steals the film – help yourself, love – but it *is* pantomime villainy, isn't it? Half expect everything she utters to be accompanied by *Boooo... SSSsssss* (an improvement on the score). The deleted scene where she unleashed flying monkeys to hurl poisoned apples at undernourished orphans was deemed too bland. Dialogue not so much spoken as cackled, she does breathe life into the proceedings and, whilst getting a tremendous send-off, as she blows up so does any momentum the film had. In comparison, Fiona comes across as a rounded *character* – conniving and measured yet wild and psychotic underneath. Fatty is just one note throughout, albeit that note is played at eleven. She's exhausting.

She just could be the woman to take me, and make me Never Watch Beyond The Bit She's Killed Again. I could make exactly – *exactly* – the same observations about Xenia Onatopp and probably will / did.

Music: Thunderball. Song: Thunderball. Looking like a billion dollars rather than quickly filmed on ugly, dull sets: Thunderball.

We have a winner. Youth is no guarantee of innovation. Forget about long range plans, for a rival series anyway: whilst it might have been nice to have seen Connery back as Bond, the only *pleasant* reason for this film to exist, the contemporaneous evolution of home video meant we could all shortly watch as much of him in his prime as we wanted. The USP was gone. We have to leave him there, sipping orange squash and making the bathwater go bubbly, putting his hair out to stud and his every whim tended to by an athletic woman half his age. There are worse fates. Goodbye, Meester Bond.

TENSION-FILLED...

Nah.

...FUN!

Actually...

There *are* amusing lines in here – but they could have been delivered in *any* story; none of them come associated with the plot and therefore create the impression of being smart things thought of years in advance and just waiting for an opportunity to be said. Both films have wit: Thunderball's is sparser but that might be because a lot of it is underwater. Never Say Never Again, however, tries also to be *funny* – the abject handling of which is the most spectacular thing about it.

Up to the 007th minute, we've had the film – or at least this DVD –

released by Orion, so another parallel: James Bond in the hands of a financially precarious studio. There's no gunbarrel! A blessed relief, but it must mean that a film without a starting cliché and in which Bond is considered past it can't be A Bond Film at all. There we were thinking *Skyfall happened*; must have all been hypnotised (potatoes are lovely; such beguiling eyes). The *credited* writer is the man behind both *The Parallax View* and the *Batman* television series (that's "range"), with this much closer to one than to the other. Guess. Augurs terribly well, doesn't it? Conversely, the film's directed by a chap whose previous effort involved a wizened puppet spouting gibberish in a nonsensical dialect; not feeling much "range" there, to be honest. Lots of upfront with Connery's face in full show, looking Craig-esque with those bulldog wrinkles. They're not afraid to hide the star's age, nor make (mild) play of it, but equally determined to show him still active with this one-man commando assault and zoomy spy Frisbee – *want* one – that distracts the guards because they're played by eager Labradors.

Curiously – albeit homaged with *Licence to Kill* – the singer doesn't warrant a mention in the opening titles, so we don't know yet who to blame. Equally curiously, the song itself in relation to the title. I always understood the emphasis of the phrase to be never saying "never again", hence the credit given to Mrs Connery for coining it. The song, however, with its advice to get mixed up with / to get in bed with / to clear the shed with a man who says never, seems to my ear to favour never saying "never", again. I'm not suggesting that you listen to it to find out. It turns out that this theme was sung by Lani Hall, married to the man who produced it. Mrs Connery. Mrs Alpert. Was it some sort of obligation that everyone's wife got involved? Entering into the spirit of the occasion, the next sentence is written by Mrs Jim.

Iefwqpfg'h'pjk'dsfkj I'dwfhllhkf FDS;Kdsajffdsa.

Hello again – Mrs Jim just mashed my face into the keyboard. Said she'd been waiting years for someone to do that. She just could be the woman to reach me and teach me to Never Interrupt Her Again. Especially when she's

Asldjhfguso / sag jtrutqoybwelaf8a9f6sdnagahgd90ew uyg

Ow.

Meanwhile, back at the film (if we must), the Foxy M / Duke of Windsor watched a rough cut of the film and predicted the critical reaction by looking underimpressed, although that might just be the lemon shifting about. Hang on, Your Majesty! It gets better! Well, no it doesn't really. Odd that it's revealed as a training exercise – the strangulation and headbutting didn't look like playtime to me: a cheat? Unless the British Government of the day practised on live targets, their own SPECTRE-island. One way of dealing with the homeless / miners / Labour voters / teachers / Argies. Tacit political statement by the film that James Bond is only a licensed enforcer for disposing of people a transient political elite don't like? It wouldn't dare.

A harsh visual style made it look filmed in a cold, abandoned state-ly home, and more than likely the same building used for Shrublands and for SPECTRE's campy chintzy non-lair. If one wasn't paying attention / was drunk / both (me), easy to assume that the first fifteen minutes, after the opening bore game, take place in one house. Pretty hard to make out anything distinctive in any location, but more on that shortly. "Not too shabby". "You should have studied the plot more carefully". It's a brave Bond film – official or otherwise – that thinks it can get away with lines like that.

It can't.

“Have you got an assignment, James?” Yes, it’s to get out of this with my dignity intact, if not yoursh. Oooooohhhhhh, do be careful. Still, the “eliminate all free radicals” joke remains pretty sound and the chemistry in *this* scene’s already been successfully wiped out, for a start.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN

Bingy-bong music plays and whilst in its gentler moments the score isn’t particularly offensive, the attempts at action music are very nasty, discordant and sound poorly recorded, as if played in a barrel many fathoms down. Distracting rather than enhancing; really not a fan.

As some extremely fortunate extras escape from the film through the medium of jogging, an ancient old crock sidles up to Shrublands, in his car. Is it “nice” to see the Bentley? I accept it’s from the books but at that point the car was only, say, thirty years old. Here it’s sixty and is it seriously likely, in 1983, anyone would drive that? In the modern Eons, the DB5 serves much the same “classic car” purpose. Seems to happen only for the joke in comparing it to Connery himself, which is the same one I used a moment ago, so I should stop whining.

“My word, they don’t make them like this any more”. Let’s assume for the sake of (starting an) argument that this is a barbed comment on the quality of the Eon films, given that they don’t have Sean Connery in them “any more”. Yes; your grubby little film is so much better, isn’t it?

The observations about “pretty good shape” do hold good for Sean Connery, albeit his hirsute moobs have a longer screentime than Ronald Pickup, which is a scandal. This is his wig farm, the younglings growing free in an undulating and organic environment before being ruthlessly harvested and stapled to his head.

Every office in Great Britain has massive oil paintings hanging in it. Science Fact.

As for our “being the judge” of whether Bond is still in pretty good shape – they are really walking into this, aren’t they? Blah blah blah health food spiritual enlightenment meditation blah. Although I’m quite fond of parsley tea. Mrs Jim says it’s parsley tea. Now I mention it, not sure it’s meant to be *purple*. Wonder why she never drinks hers? Whatever, it beats coffee made from (here it comes) cress.

Not much is happening. This is not an observation unique to the seventh minute, unfortunately.

Sweet little nurse; terrible little actress though. A foreshadowing of the joke about chucking a beaker of piss in someone’s face. Foreshadowing the rest of the film, then.

Ah, here comes the Wicked Witch, demanding box 2724, rudely but then she is quite naughty. Science Fact! 2 July 1924 was precisely the middle day in that year, 182 days before it and 182 after it. That might be true. C’mon, it’s *interesting*. It’s also (arguably) a few months before James Bond was born. It’s also the number of hairpieces that tragically had to be put down during the making of this film, noble creatures all. It’s also, I dunno, Kevin McClory’s PIN number or something. Go on, try it.

0.07.00

What follows is Thunderball, in horribly cheap looking sets and poorly staged locations (if you weren’t *told* it was The Bahamas, could you have guessed?). Hopeless for this film to try to match up to Ken Adam, but even when set against its contemporaries in the early-80s Bonds, one comes to realise that Peter Lamont and his

colleagues produced work of unimpeachable *quality*. What's acted out in his designs may be duff, but that's not his problem: the care and craft on show honour their films, and elevate them above otherwise questionable merits. Octopussy, whatever its faults, looks *special*. Never Say Never Again is dowdy, rushed and glum. It's not the worst thing I've ever seen – I've been to Orlando – but it's on the list, "charting" between watching a caesarean section, and Dieppe.

These pieces initially sought to establish whether one could draw exemplars for the ingredients of the Bond series from one minute alone. What conclusions could one reach, from "study" of its seventh minute, for this putative rival series of old Thunderballs? There's not much point in doing it without a fit Sean Connery and even then it's a lot of hairy old tits? Seems about right. It came to nothing, of course, and never will, given the deal reached in late 2013 with the McClory estate. Whether this means that Eon can now use Blofeld is more a question of artistic merit (don't) rather than litigation (can't).

Don't.

In overall impression, another thought springs to mind. In its bland mid-80s depiction of an aging, avuncular one-man commando Bond dressed throughout in horrid sports-casual clothes, an underwritten female lead, clear overtones of a film series it would claim it said it wanted nothing to do with, veering plot shifts that make no sense in retrospect, a semi-detached and poorly developed SPECTRE, lack of interest in engaging us with the local colour of its locations, muddled motives for its villain and a climax that is hard to follow or engage with, as an adaptation of Ian Fleming's Thunderball, Never Say Never Again falls well short. As an adaptation of *John Gardner's* Thunderball, however, it's bang on.

The Battle of the Bonds, eh?

... in Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love – they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.

And 1983 produced Octopussy and Never Say Never Again. I suspect that might undermine the point and potency of that Third Man quote, “a bit”. Seems to be firmly a case of the Jurassic Parks, though. Can one remake Thunderball? Yes, if you extract enough DNA and make a dinosaur the star. However, should one remake Thunderball?

No.

Never Again.

The intermission is over. Act II commences. Classic dramatic structure dictates that things now begin to go very wrong for our hero with some dark and upsetting episodes, until he reflects on his misdeeds, learns his lesson, changes his ways and marches on to a triumphant conclusion.

Sounds about right.

JAMES BOND WOULDN'T RETURN IN ANOTHER
INSIPID REMAKE OF THUNDERBALL, THANKFULLY.
JACQUES STEWART WALKS IN A ROOM; A WOMAN
CAN FEEL THE HEAT. AND CHEW THE SMELL.



A VIEW TO A KILL

SCIENCE FACT! #14

If Max Zorin's plan had worked and huge areas outside San Francisco were submerged, we might have been denied those Star Wars prequels. Hmm. Bit torn there, tbh.

Unusually for A. Bond. Film, we start with a disclaimer.

Neither the name A View to a Kill nor any other euphemism or prolix self-indulgence in this piffle is meant to portray a credible review or an acceptable film.

I recently took a holiday and wrote this to you – you, specifically (get your hair cut and ‘phone your mother, she worries, although I couldn’t care less) – from my saver citibreak in an alternative universe. It has more cheese, warm unsalty seas, plentiful honeybees, cheap school fees, money grows on trees, every child says please and no dog has any fleas. ‘Tis bliss, even if everyone – *everyone* – is called Geoff. Admittedly, the journey through the wormhole – the Octowormhole (*fnarr*; can’t believe I missed that one last time; must be losing my grope) – is two hours of misery and pointlessness. Oddly apt.

In this parallel dimension, the Bond films of the 1980s don’t exploit our patience-tested forgiveness for their cynical habit of emitting lukewarm thrills every couple of years. Instead of unleashing their pliant stooges, the producers hired award-winning film-makers to produce *actual* films containing proper characters and diverting plots that don’t just get by on the lazy premise that it’s A. Bond. Film, it’s got a dinner jacket and a gunbarrel, it’ll do, hand over the money you scum, yes *of course* this one is different, it has airships. That makes it sufficiently different. Different enough for your money, anyway, you pathetically-grateful-that-we-made-another-one dunderhead. What do you want, effort? Fur cough. Money. NOW.

I acknowledge that taking care to spew out something with qualities other than the moth-eaten cloak of Bond Film routine is a ridiculous idea, but stick with it. At least until 2006.

Anyway, having spent a day scooting around this same-but-not reality via my personal greengage-powered jetpack, hell of a job avoiding the flying wolves, and their pooh, I settled down in a cinema in which persons were silent, did not clap and did not smell – I am obliged to accept this as fantasy – to watch the critically acclaimed, Palme d’Or bothering, *A View to a Kill*: un film de Ken Loach.

WARNING! Girthsome spoilers ahead!

Filmed on location in the bleak Trent Valley and in grimy hand-held monochrome shakycam, on a budget of eleven pounds (in sympathy with the monthly income of sweatshopped Guatemalans), it’s experimentally in negative (which saves on neon paint, clever budgetary control). There was nothing positive about life in 1980s Thatcher’s Britain, with its cultural highpoints of *Five Star*, *Battle of the Planets* and *Jim’ll Fix It*. Ken Loach’s seminal (fnarr) *A View to a Kill* (yes, it’s from a hunting song and yes, hunting’s for rich-filth and yes, it’s IRONY, stroke your hypocrisy in satisfaction) is the harrowing tale of decrepit paedophile “The Commander” a.k.a. psychopathic delusional moth-eared alcoholic “Jimmy”, played not by Roger Moore (as a UNICEF ambassador it’s unlikely he would agree to be in it; equally unlikely, though, that he would be cast) but by, hmm, I think it was Denholm Elliott. It was hard to tell under all the scabs. And the balaclava.

Jimmy’s tragedy is booze-triggered dementia that makes him believe that he was associated with a right-wing secret conspiracy to protect Britain’s toasters from being neutralised by a Death Bomb from Space; a searingly powerful indictment of NHS care funding un-

der Thatcher that such a person roams the streets or pilots an iceberg. The tone is set by the pre-credits sequence, an unsettling depiction of degradation in which disgraced Scout Master Jimmy shuffles around Nuneaton, steals chips from an unburied corpse – the man’s starving, the state pension’s a pittance, blame the Tories – and is chased by a vigilante gang of Eastern Europeans who want to hurt him for no better reason than passing distraction from their own rain-soaked grind. Evading his fate as a local-press battered pensioner, *Nonce Were Mugged For Chips And Fifty Pee*, Jimmy finds refuge in the public lavatories and therein exploits an underage homeless person for his verucca-tongued gratification. Chilling stuff. It’s not his fault; capitalism made him this way, the abused becomes the abuser, hammer-and-sickled home by the song, brought unto us by Billy Bragg and an atonal pan pipe kolkhoz, with its powerful refrain:

James Bond, coming atcha / Blame Thatcher

James Bond, bit fat, yeah? / Blame That-Yer

Moribund cradle snatcher / Blame Thatcher

Total lack of social mores / Blame the Tories

Shocking rheumatism / Blame monetarism

He’s gone and baked a quiche / Smash the nouveau riche

Urr, he’s kissing ‘er / Blame Kissinger

What’s happened to his mole? / Three million on the dole

Ancient bedwetter / And Reagan’s no better

Has he no shame? / Maggie’s to blame.

Challenging stuff, shouted tunelessly over photocopies of British armaments contracts with despotic regimes (Belgium), although oddly these are reproduced in day-glo green and pink. Ah, t’was the age.

The plot gets going when “The Commander” joins his “ring”, a motely bunch of suspect and dankly moist men including Mr Kew – a redundant fool with no purpose to serve – and Fred Grey, corrupt (no other kind) local councillor, a Stakhanovite Traitor to the Revolution so riddled with capitalism that he will not believe that anyone wealthy can be evil. Birch him. Flay from him the ruddypink hide grown flabby on the toil of the workers. Gut him and use his intestines as sausages for the children of the poor. Then punch him in the face. The group is led by “M” (“Molester”). These men are bound together by the need to preserve terrible secrets, and to share prescriptions.

Establishing that the chips Jimmy stole are not local to Nuneaton (too much potato, insufficient syringe), the threat to this failed hell-hole of a region’s Fish & Chip shops becomes clear. Suspicion falls – because he’s foreign, inescapable xenophobia, blame Thatcher – on immigrant fast-food magnate (a burger van in a layby) Max Zorin, played by Special Guest Star Christopher Strauli in a Thatcher wig; it’s subtle. Zorin owns a string of (mostly) four-legged greyhounds, kept in debased conditions, and operates out of a transport caff on the A5. The Commander’s doubts about Zorin are raised when he goes to the Tamworth dog track and watches Zorin’s three-legged favourite – Pegaleg – win easily. Jimmy’s suspicions, and not just his suspicions, are aroused by noticing Zorin’s henchperson – May Day Workers’ Holiday Burn The Banks – an exploited illegal immigrant and transgender drugs mule who knows no better, capitalism has just made her / him / ...erm... that way. As well as pharmaceutical trials that she / he / ...erm... underwent in the need for money. Look at what corporations have made us do to ourselves. Just look. Look and go “hmm”. This film makes you think, and not just “aren’t its politics tediously sixth-form?”

Having started to investigate Zorin's dogs – in a bad way that burns the concept of animal husbandry into the innocent minds of all – steady, Pegaleg; steady, *steady* – Jimmy encounters May Day Up The Revolution Heads On Spikes when for no reason other than knowing no better due to The System she / he / ...they? murder(s) Jimmy's mendicant chum with whom he was sharing a can of Special Brew, and then basejumps off Lichfield Cathedral. A devastating critique of the corruption of religion, and the poor abused woman / man / person / thing was looking for escape from sinewy sex-slavery, needle-dependency and suppression by a state institutionally racist / sexist / Butterkist. Or she was trying to catch a wolf.

Accompanied by an elderly "friend", Jimmy (undercover as Sair Jahames Fortherington FipsyFopsy Privileged O'ldwhoopsie, they're all called this, they ARE), prowls around Zorin's portakabin, trying to avoid the alarm system being triggered by their ankle tags. After a grimly loveless encounter with May Day Parade Your Nukes Now in Zorin's portaloos, Jimmy is discovered and is dumped into a potato sack weighed down with two emaciated greyhounds and hurled into the Shropshire Union canal. He escapes, but *how* is too horrible to say.

The plot shifts artlessly (a critique of capitalist demand for narrative coherence) to Nottinghamshire where, after a souldestroying fumble with a Russian prostitute out of her mind on insouciantly gravelly smack cut with dog poison (keeps the flying wolf population down), Jimmy establishes that Zorin's plot, supported by corrupt local government (told you), is to take over all of Retford's chip shops by triggering a bomb in an abandoned coal mine. Filmed at the height of the Miners' Strike, it is a hugely clever – feel the clever – criticism of Thatcherite policy on the basis that if the noble mine-workers had their jobs, the mine would not be abandoned and the rapacious infliction of capitalism would have failed. Obviolutely.

Jimmy finds himself tragically inevitably drawn, dangerously inappropriately, to a teenage boy, the future-denied, Thatcher-puts-the-crapheap-into-scrapheap grandson of a mineworker Stevie (from Sutton (Coldfield)), who he fails to seduce with two bottles of Buckfast and a Dairylea sandwich. Ultimately, with Stevie's help (he's thick; product of an underfunded state education system deliberately made inadequate to oppress the thoughts of the proletariat) Jimmy foils Zorin's plot to devastate the West Coast Main Line with a fight atop a rusted pithead wheel – *oh*, the metaphors, oh. Zorin falls to his death when he grabs Jimmy's "dignity" bag which bursts, causing him to slip (grey slip-on leather shoes will never catch on). Jimmy is believed / hoped dead. A bitter twist when Fred Grey is shown sharing a pint of Taboo with the local union rep and the owner of Chernobyl Fried Wolf on the Hinckley Road; snouts in the trough, the lot of them. The final scene cruelly disturbs, as Mr Kew reveals his nature as a wizened Peeping Tom, watching Jimmy and Stevie... umm... that's not the soap. Dear God, how degrading, although with its fascination with the shape of boys' buttocks, how very Fleming. The final credits show Conservative Central Office burning as the liberated population of Britain dances into the fire, because they have no other options left. The fire doesn't last long for There Is No Coal. Then the police come in and, cackling wildly, club everyone to death like mewling sealpups. Blame Thatcher.

A criticism of the oppression foisted upon ordinary honest folk by vile multinational fast food outlets and the policies that let them do it, the film's brave / most pretentious decision to have Jimmy smash himself in the face with the rough end of a pineapple every thirty seconds (hence the scabs and balaclava) is indicative of something and an indictment of, y'know, *stuff*.

Those permitted access to this alternative world know that, alongside never drinking the water (consider what the wolves do in it), *A View to a Kill* was such a success amongst persons with beards and Breton jerseys and, oh dear, students, that it triggered world socialist revolution, resulting in universal healthcare, a potato for almost every family and a black President, I think (I'm not registered to vote there; haven't really looked into it). Even though there's no income tax, there is a levy on being simplysupermah-Vellous so I can only go there on a visitor visa otherwise I get clobbered for the cash. For those of you who will never be allowed in, due to your adventurous faces and experimental spelling, an immigration policy that seems workable and just, the James Bond series, until an unwise reboot, was a byword for popular culture with distinctly inarticulate artistry. Inspired by *A View to a Kill*, Roman Polanski asked to do one: they didn't let him. However Don Siegel's brainburstingly harsh *You Only Live Twice* And That's Twice Too Much, Punk, Werner Herzog's *Moonraker* Via The Medium Of Cress and Bob Fosse's poetical, delivered-entirely-in-choral-couplets homage to Welsh druidical song – *Llive and Llet Dai* – are highlights (albeit Michael Apted's "deliberately" (yeah, right) appalling *The World is Not Enough* is abject; can't always get it right). Shame they went and changed it in the mid-2000s by promoting John Bloke from within to "direct" (a.k.a. shove tired tat about a bit), thereafter coasting along to indifference with indistinct lazy guff. Currently on hiatus due to litigation over the television rights to the recent films; whoever loses has to show them.

Y'know that feeling when you return from holiday and it's a bumpy landing back down to Earth? (Hint: if riding a wolf through a dimension portal, it could happen, always tip them 20 Dinar, otherwise they get "gnaw-y"). That feeling when you anticipate that

your email inbox is full of Nigerians and that the child you entrusted with the others' welfare has sold its siblings in exchange for disappointingly unfatal heroin; *that* feeling. That's my feeling, knowing now how splendid *A View to a Kill* could be, on returning to this grisly dimension and faced with the inalienable fact that this world's version... isn't. It may be unfair to compare a film that couldn't happen (above) with one that shouldn't have happened (below) but if you've persisted with this "review", you can't be demanding fairness, justice or even sense, so what the Hell.

I am very *fond* of *A View to a Kill*, although given how I'm going to lay waste to the next ten minutes of your life kicking its stick away, you may wonder whether that's true. I am fond of what it represents. Seduced into Bond, but abused, by Octohamclam, *A View to a Kill* was my "first". Not the first Bond I saw, but the first I *waited* to see, anticipating release, desperate to touch it, stroke it, undress it. I was 12. Forgive me. You never forget your first time, and experience dictates it's never the same from then on, the excitement building and, even if horrendously anticlimactic – which it was, it's *A View to a Kill* – as I enter my dotage it's still capable of raising a rueful smile, if little else. A lesson in inflating my expectations to blimp-like proportions and then blowing them out of the sky. Still, the shiver of anticipation it still creates, imprisoned in the cosiness of associated memories despite knowing the misery to come, means I cannot dislike the film as much as its jawdroppingly meagre qualities deserve, in much the same way as I cannot dislike [name (household) redacted]. I was 16. Forgive him. Additionally, in lowering my expectations for Bond, it meant that the (fitfully) glorious *The Living Daylights* exceeded them, so I should thank *A View to a Kill* for allowing that to happen. More on that one later; we've got to gnaw gummily through this nonsense first.

Prior to the 007th minute, the nature of the enterprise clairifies. Picking a wintry scene for a pre-credits stunt not because it's novel but because the lead can remain wrapped up and we can't see the join between "actor" and the stuntmen as obviously as in other scenes, it's a deception that only works so far, that "so far" being the moment *Roger Moore invents snowboarding*. Maybe that's a signal to whippersnappers, that even if someone is more GoldenAge than GoldenEye, they can still rock on-daddio, listen it's (not) The Beach Boys, they're "happening" aren't they, they're in the Hit Parade, and we have Duran Duran coming up, yes, look at the groovy on us, it's got a good beat, although you can't make out the words in these modern songs, can you? Whatever happened to Matt Monro? I liked him. Lovely diction. Pass the Werther's Originals. And the Ralgex.

As a parent there is no finer game than to wind up one's offspring by (feigning) interest in their youthful enthusiasms and, much more humiliating, participating in an embarrassing way and thus sully these transient fads forever, requiring them to fall back on hateful pastimes such as talking anything other than grunts or reading or spelling or going outside for exercise. A house littered with Ex-Boxes and Wees rendered shaming and hotplate-untouchable by my having a go on them (and usually winning – how gratifyingly enraged the mites get when that happens). This is the point of *A View to a Kill*. Middle-aged power playing the young person's game, winding them up something rotten and then winning, easily. Admittedly I have yet to throw one of the kids off a bridge but if taller twin doesn't tidy his room by 5 p.m., it's going to happen. A quick drowning in the Thames will sort him out.

Until he pops into Q's Iceberg of Lurve, appointed by, well, the 1980s and piloted by a breathy Miss World – same series in which an

already dying Professor Dent has his spine sado-shattered by Bond's bullet? – and subjects the girl to five confined-space days of his De-mentor's Kiss, and no evident toilet, Roger Moore is James Bond 007 for eleven seconds. Touch and go whether he's onscreen more as the dummy in *The Man with the Golden Gun*; indeed, suspect scalpelling rendering him a smidge waxy raises the suspicion that "they" got the mannequin out of storage and jiggled it in front of the camera and nailgunned it to the skidoo to suggest "alive". Sufficiently convincing, they tried the same trick with the Tanya Roberts doll, with less success.

Ignoring that the pre-credits is a cynical attempt to disguise – but ironically, expose – the age of the lead, the stunts are jolly; the snowboarding is clever – how it's engineered into happening is amusing – and the scoot across the lake is tremendous. I also know that as a 12 year-old I laughed at the cover version that wantonly undermines all this good stuff, but then a) 12 year-olds are rubbish at critical faculty, especially 12 year-old Jims who have dragged along parents who have read the reviews and are sitting there wondering which is more concerning, that they've wasted money on this rot or that they have bred a cretin, and b) as penance for my crime, I shall take the Loach approach and administer the harsher parts of a citrus fruit to my heartstoppingly beautiful face. It'll distract me from witnessing a stuntman blow up a model helicopter with a firework.

As the poor, helpless girl with the charming overhead rack is trapped for a working week in a beige submersible with a man old enough to be her grandmother – those aren't ski boots, they're surgical clogs – so leathery she could make a *terrible* error and sit on him – in his dreams – the song strikes up and Albert R. Broccoli presents Roger Moore. A lie; he's barely in it.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 A VIEW TO A KILL

Setting the tone, we have 007 presented as neon-dripped teats. A View to a Kill in a nutshell, the film providing its own review. The young lady jiggles abite a bit. I'm assuming someone thought this was funny, spraying day-glo gunk over mummylumps, and that someone is a half-wit. Is it referencing Zorin's pair of big blimps? We are told that the film features Ian Fleming's James Bond 007 and the 007th minute itself doesn't tell us who's playing him, entirely appropriate as it's fifteen people, one of whom might be Roger Moore (albeit he doesn't look like Roger any Moore), all of whom have fluorescent hair in sympathy with this girl's plight.

The role "Singer" is played, not well, by Simon The Good and in time with the "singing" we get the title played out, which is fun. I do miss that sort of thing; didn't happen in the last one even though the word Ssskyfaww is used a lot, handy guidance for those hard of thinking. A View to a Kill is a splendid song – albeit utter nonsense – its instrumental versions super, and it's an improvement over the last one's adult jazz snore, adult in that it's the sort of thing played in Rotterdam sex bivouacs (I know this). Something that has always amused me about the "pop video" is when it shows May Day Redistribute Wealth jumping off the Eiffel Tower, the platform visible in the film itself has been removed. Most curious, although not as curious as the fact that this song is plainly called "Dance into the Fire" and works fine like that, should have had the courage of their convictions, although were Roger Moore to dance into the fire one suspects the face would melt. Shrewd to involve Duran Duran for the publicity angle amongst the young audience – something to draw them in given that were this Bond down wiv da kids, he wouldn't be able to get up. I wonder who chose them? Can't imagine Mr Broccoli dancing New Romantically to the Duran Duran back catalogue,

clad in ruffled shirt, a silver leotard and cerise leggings but I have lied and *can* imagine it, have imagined it, and must retire for a few moments of gentleman's private special-time.

Hello again. That's better. Right, here's a diamond gun thing firing a neon bullet and it's clear that Maurice's idea is to put the Eon into nEon and maim us with colour. As ever with things that are bang-up-to-date, the date they're bang-up-to passes, leaving them stranded on the shores of hilarious naff. I like these titles a lot but they do smack of "look, younglings, we have bright and distracting things! No, ignore the pensioners and the whiff of a series in decay, look at the colours, they're youthful and modern, you like that sort of thing, and listen to these ker-azy beats. *Now. Give. Us. Your. Money.*" No lessons learned from this, given that a subsequent effort will have James Bond – dwell on that for a mo-mo: James Bond – surf. *Twice.*

Here comes a young lady in woad and trying to wrap up warm. View the chill, indeed. Put some clothes on, love – various bits are bright blue. You'll catch your death. Talking of things that are frozen stiff, here's Tanya Roberts, giving us our generation's definitive reading of the role of Stacey Sutton, geologist (passing interest in rock-hard fossils; rock-hard fossils have a passing interest in her too, if the last scene is a clue). She comes in for a bit of abuse, and it is a foul and weak performance doing little to disabuse the popular (usually wrong) perception of the acting by many Bond ladies, but are you that surprised? It's Tanya frickin' Roberts, not Diana frickin' Rigg. Can't be dismissive as one suspects she's exhaustingly trying her best; she sounds out of breath the whole time. Far more aggravating are folks who are otherwise probably sound actors turning up and not showing their best. Chap called Brosnan springs to mind. The fragility of Ms Roberts' performance is not helped by a

script that renders her “character” a nincompoop – tearing up the \$5 million cheque is the act of an imbecile, but she might be out of her tiny mind on eggy-looking quiche, so fair enough – and the “direction”.

Unconvinced he’s an actor’s director, this Mr Glen, save for pigeons and pussies. The casting tactics of the 1980s dawn on one with the likes of Ms Roberts and previous encounters with Mesdames Bouquet and Johnson, young Mr Amritraj, and Ms Soto yet to come. Having, let’s say, “strong” personae of the Glovers, Topols, Berkoffs, Macnees, Walkens, Krabbes and Davi-s of this world, and a lead whose style is set, Mr Glen seems to let them get on with their “thing” and not interfere. Not that I am advocating interfering with Ms Roberts but this “hands-off” approach doesn’t serve his “less impactful” cast members well. They appear abandoned to fend for themselves whilst John gets on with explosions. They could have benefited from a bit of a help. I’m probably being unfair and it’s only an impression rather than asserted as a truth but there is *such* a gulf in performance quality in each of the Glen films that my conclusion is that he didn’t bother his actors much. Perhaps that’s how what has become an underwhelming series by this stage could attract the likes of Christopher Walken; a promise to be left alone to do Walkening. If I have things wrong and Mr Glen did try hard to coax something acceptable out of Ms Roberts, I apologise, although query whether it is better to have tried yet failed so horribly.

Young miss dances about to keep warm, making an old man *very* happy. She has neon snowflakes across her airships and I think we’re meant to see them unless it’s a wardrobe malfunction. Now someone’s trying to shoot the words “Grace Jones”, bit unfair, with a big red gun firing Stormtrooperesque blasts and, just like a Stormtrooper, missing. I rather like Grace Jones – like her even more since

her wonderful hula-hooping insanity for Her Maj at the Golden Jubilee, a defining moment of one's life – and although the character's change of allegiance towards the end is fatuous and her reaction to being near-drowned is hopelessly PG-13, there's certainly a "presence" going on. Utterly oversold as a menace, though – she kills three middle-aged men, that's it. Something that seems to work people up is the bedding of Bond; I'm amazed she didn't snap the poor old sod. A much-needed injection of "interesting" into a bland affair and even if you're not keen on her, never unwatchable. I'm not sure the film could cope without her.

Dancey lady is trying to cover her eyes at this point. Can't blame her.

Ah, Patrick Macnee. Well, he seems nice but I'm not sure that the Tibbett character adds much except an opportunity for Moore and Macnee to muck about in a pretty bit of France. What larks to have John Steed as James Bond's lackey. What larks. WHAT LARKS. Ungallant it may be, but surely a bit old and fat to have "fights"? Admittedly, he makes Roger Moore look lithe so that explains it. Killing Tibbett was indeed a mistake; after that, everyone else Bond encounters is considerably younger than him and it gets ghoulish. Still, the boringly underwhelming horse-racing story is done by that point (and never mentioned again) so before the transatlantic flight it was sensible to discard the excess baggage. I know it's a standard Bond tick to have Bond start investigating one thing – jewellery smuggling / disappearance of nuclear submarine / theft of aquatic typewriter / defection of Russian general – and it to turn into something else – invading Germany / starting a war / erm... theft of aquatic typewriter / something with opium (maybe) – but at least with Octootterpocket there's *some* (if not much) tying of the lesser villainy to the grand plan. Here, we dump one thing and move onto

the other, crunchingly. Perhaps, and I may have suggested before, they couldn't be bothered.

A markswoman wobbles into view, unsteadily, and she's got a bad case of the fluorescent acne there. I can understand her tremble, as the words "Christopher Walken" have appeared and she's very nervous he's going to do something *barking*. James Bond defeats capitalist scheming of ranting special guest star Christopher Walken in a Thatcher wig; subtle. Less subtle – not that the hairdo is understated – is the rest of the performance from this erstwhile Best Supporting Actor, mad cackles and giggles and starey eyes and violent moodswings and dressing up as a London policeman and... no. Shame he had to nick his scheme from Goldfinger, although it is a better plot than having one's blast-impervious microchips – another abandoned idea – survive the setting off of a stolen EMP and thereby killing all the toasters that haven't bought your kit and achieving much the same result as the one you wanted but with fewer zep-pelins and less dynamite. Hang on: if the British Government were fitting their stuff with Zorin's magic chip, Alec Trevelyan's plot was bound to fail anyway, even without sending a strangely-spoken hair-do in a suit to both chase him and annoy us.

Walken's fun though, unbalancing the film with scary gibbering and whacked-out pantomime balefulness and comedy period attire. In the same way as President Reagan claimed to have been inspired by Rambo in relation to madcap foreign policy, one wonders whether Max Thatcher caught Maggie Zorin's gunning down mineworkers and considered this – if for a moment – an appealing way to curtail industrial action. I'm assuming that's the allegory of the scene and it's not just violence to try to keep us awake. It's effective and whilst it is a shocking sequence in certain respects – there's a lot of dying – the response is more a reaction to how sedentary the Bonds

had become, rather than the scene itself, surely? The threats posed in this film are “milky” at best to this stage, so the mine killings do jar, but only because the other content is uniformly insipid. It also reinforces that Zorin is a nutter; questionable how much reinforcement that point needed.

Roger Moore. Christopher Walken. Grace Jones. Tanya Roberts. To call this a challenging cast underplays it. It’s a death-defying cast. Nowhere in one’s most crazed moments would one consider that these four would actually *meet*, let alone “do acting” in each others’ personal spaces. I salute *A View to a Kill* for grouping the least predictable quartet of artistes ever, at least until Queen re-form again with their next “New Freddie”, and this time it’s Michael Dukakis. Moore does his usual, and almost makes these strangers plausibly hang together as a supergroup; again, not given the credit due for remaining calm as things become crazier around him. The leather blouson’s a mistake, unless it was a good way to use the off-cuts from his face.

Ooh, she’s holding that gun right up to her lips and blowing gently. I wonder what Maurice is encouraging us to think of? Little monkey.

Say what you like about Tanya Roberts – keep it clean – but for my money (oodles) the worst performance is seeped out of Patrick Bauchau, about three beats behind the bar on everything he utters: the opening exchange with Mr Saiinnjooonsmythhe, that member of the AA, RAC and The Variety Club (dirty ping pong ball act), is a lesson in a) the charm of Roger Moore and b) cataclysmically awful acting. I’m sure he’s a great chap and delightful company and I accept that “the unexciting henchperson” won’t call for much development but he seems *desperately* disengaged. A saving grace is that he evidently *is* French and playing French, unlike his employer who isn’t

attempting an accent (everyone was too scared to ask). David Yip gives better in an even more thankless role – should have been Leiter, time to kill him off, the useless berk – and obviously the Chuck Lee introduction gives us opportunity for a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it cameo from a star of a previous Bond film. Called Roger Moore.

Woman! Fire your gun! Well done. Smoke to the left, smoke to the right, cross-hairs with a neon beauty – that blue / orange thing again – jiggling about behind frozen Binderspunk. Was wondering when that would turn up. Talking of “wondering when the same old same old hoves its wrinkled backside into view”, here come for the umpteenth time Desmond Llewelyn, Robert Brown, Walter Gotell, Lois Maxwell and Geoffrey Keen. Oh good. Number 1: Why is Q in this film? He doesn’t give Bond any gadgets, he plays with a robot sex-pest toy that he lets into the houses of women a-showering, he cadges a trip to the races and does NOTHING. Except be there, because it’s a mysterious edict and perhaps because he holds black-mail photos of Broccoli in the leotard get-up mentioned earlier. I *genuinely* don’t get why he’s in this one. At least he’s not racist: swapped that lifestyle choice for sexpervery. Er, good? Number 2. Robert Brown has weird eyebrows. Never noticed those before. Has to deliver the phrase “untimely demise” which is hilariously awful. Rock on. Number 3. General Gogol has developed a mucky mac habit – hanging around Q too often – and ultimately confesses that Bond is his agent, engaged to smash capitalism. Why do some think Bond is pro-West? A deftly subversive film, a Loachian study of industrial relations, political hypocrisy and strike-breaking disguised as a flabby lollop around tedious clichés. Good disguise, has to be said. Number 4. Lois Maxwell wears pink. That’s it. Number 5. Sir Frederick Grey, at the height of his double-agency and thinking – or deliberately misdirecting – that Max Strauss-Khan can’t be naughty

because he's "a leading French industrialist". I hate this man. Anyway, that's the regulars, as regular as a load of prunes allows.

Next, Willoughby Gray – an interesting performance, let's be nice – Manning Redwood (playing a San Franciscan rough type with a big moustache – hmm...), and Alison Doody who is lovely and grotesquely underused. Took me years to appreciate the "early riser" comment but fewer to know she justifies it. I'd genuflect, although I suspect I'm too ancient for her (not that *A View to a Kill* suggests it's bad to be several childhood Doctors Who ahead of one's young chum). She justifies all the horse-racey grot, lending itself to substantial sexual imagery. Jodhpurs. Whips. Stirrups. Mucking-out. *Mm*. Papillon Soo Soo gives a turn best described as Soo Soo. Here she comes, with that bigger font for which she is notorious – known for her big fonts, she is – Fiona Fullerton. Perky character and I suppose a Home Counties Russian in yer tub is better than finding a moustachioed ~~Havelock~~ oilman there (but, given that it's San Francisco, less likely). Rumour has it that the character could have been Anya Amasova but it's better off not: Ms Bach's "languid" delivery would slow an already sluggish part of a tortoise of a film into reverse (that's backwards). For any children watching, when she refers to her Tchaikovsky, she means her Octopearlharbour. Curious euphemism, and misses an obvious one, given that the scene is set in Vaginatown.

"The weekend's why". Is it, Simon? Is it *really*? Does offer up an explanation (but not an excuse) for this Friday-afternoon, beat-the-traffic, "it'll do" bodge of a film.

The Second Unit was directed and photographed – they all said "bum!" – by Arthur Wooster (it is a good looking film, even if stuff all happens). Unfortunately the wrinkles between first and second units show by now and, unless it's a homage to the only Bond stu-

pider than this one – the 1967 Casino Royale – the multiple James Bonds on screen is very distracting. The age doesn't help but it's not that – at whatever age, you're not going to have Roger Moore (or anyone with half a brain) hang off an airship, have a fight on a tall and narrow bridge or crash a Renault 11 around Paris; that's not the point. It's the lack of care, in not having the stuntpersons look remotely similar to the great man, that irks. Look, gang, when he dressed as a clown in the last one, that bright red hair was *part of the outfit*. Promise. OK, I agree it's confusing especially as those flappy size 86 comedy feet *are* his. Must have been hell to grip onto the Golden Gate Bridge with those. As far as that sequence goes, it's OK but couldn't you have waited until a sunny day to film close-ups? And what loony carries dynamite in an airship? Oh yeah, sorry, Zorin *is* a loony therefore that's *fine*.

Willy Bogner's ski sequence is splendid to look at, less so to listen to, but insofar as action goes it sets one up to expect excitement; doesn't deliver. Things are stretched out and I'm not just referring to Bond's face. Still, gives us an opportunity to stare now at scenes depicting a famous national monument and stifle a sob that we won't see him more – any more, Roger Moore.

0.07.00

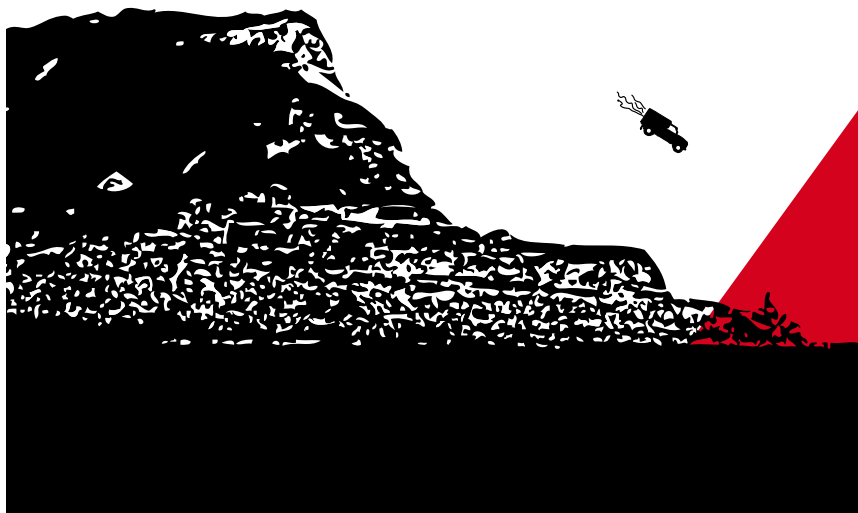
What follows is what follows. Poirot. Firetruck. Quiche. The Fleming Bond was keen on his heartstoppingly calorific scrambled eggs and the Gardner Bond – with his crepe-soled shoes, drab wind-cheaters and dull weapons – is fond of something called “chicken pie”, curry and Janet Reger underwear so it's not *that* disastrous a moment in such company. Still, taking time out from an impending cataclysm to do “baking” looks odd, unless it's a retirement hobby and he is, indeed, going to open that stainless steel delicatessen after all. Taste his pickled plums.

More disturbing is the final scene, soapy-hidey-oh-Jamesy, a young woman giving an elderly gent his daily wash whilst spied on by a hapless pervert. *Grim*. Is this far removed from the Ken Loach vision? Weird to have Bond awarded the Order of Lenin when the Americans ignore his saving millions of their people, the ungrateful swine. Capitalism gets it right up the mineshaft in this one. John Glen, hero of the workers? Hm.

From its 007th minute it's hard to extract an exemplar that *A View to a Kill* represents for the Bonds – the initial purpose of this exercise – although it may be that, like the series by this point, I can't be bothered any more. It's difficult to avoid the conclusion that ideas were dimbulbing so badly that a tactic of chucking slabs of *Goldfinger*, *Moonraker*, *National Velvet*, *Superman* and *Cocoon* at a pot of neon paint and then blatting it out at us, a load of old Pollocks, would just have to do. I can't dislike it, it holds ransom too many childhood memories, but I don't have to respect it. It seems unnecessary and it's not a good film. As the lights went up on that 1985 cinema, I had come to that conclusion and it's never failed to disappoint me since. But life brings new disappointments, daily. Today, the dimension stargate is closed – French portal traffic control on Main Strike again – and trapped this side of the hole is a winged wolf. He looks demented. I suppose, in honour of the film, I should call him Pegasus, although he's obviously called Geoff. I wonder how he'd take to the name Timothy?

A View to a Kill demonstrates that age is no guarantee of efficiency. Whether youth is any guarantee of innovation... yet to be determined.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH
MINUTE OF THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS. JACQUES
STEWART'S KISS IS FATAL. IT'S THE BREATH.



THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS

SCIENCE FACT! #15

At Timothy Dalton's insistence, all the dialogue was translated into pretentious gobbledegook and then retranslated into modern English. Because of a clerical error, a-Ha's lyrics never made it past the first stage. Neither did this book.

I COME NO MORE TO MAKE YOU LAUGH: THINGS NOW,
THAT BEAR A WEIGHTY AND A SERIOUS BROW,
SAD, HIGH, AND WORKING, FULL OF STATE AND WOE,
SUCH NOBLE SCENES AS DRAW THE EYE TO FLOW,
WE NOW PRESENT.

A worthy aim, even if it won't come off. [If you don't want to read on, assume that encapsulates this 007th minute's "theme". It does lose itself in cellos and diamonds and tips for Mujahidining out. I know an appalling restaurant in Karachi; gave me a bad case of the d'Abos].

It's product placement time, gang (don't run, it's not "watches"). Not subtle; I'm busy and am not shaped for sportive tricks, have emergency sitting down to do, contrived flippancy to mash out and humpbalm to apply. So, here it comes; can you spot it? Buy Charles Helfenstein's book *The Making of The Living Daylights*. Do that. Do it NOW. If you're a "visual learner" (i.e. you can't read), imagine me pointing at it as if t'were shiny coin – try not to be distracted by my "face" although you're only human (or vaguely). If you truly cannot read, your gawping at this nonsense is *odd* but, more so, the book's jawtofloor stupendousness will be lost on you; still, there are nice pictures. You could colour them in. I'm assuming your keeper allows you felt-tip pens, if only to sniff. If you can, though, read it. You have nothing better to do. You can't have; you're reading this. You were taught to read for stuff like Mr Helfenstein's work, not to waste it on shallow guffbombs. Value your teachers, value your dignity, give yerself a treat and buy it and read it and learn and become a better person. It'll improve you and make your willy ginormous. That's (probably) untrue but it holds with the mendacious subtext of Bond product placement, be it grotty watches or naff mobiles or nasty lager or delicious Huw Edwards.

So, that's *The Making of The Living Daylights*.

This is not its unmaking.

It's oh-so-boring here, Margot (Fonteyn? Asquith? Kidder? de Valois? Leadbetter? *Tell me*). There's nothing but twerps arguing about gunbarrels. And tennis pros. If only I could find a real man. Family-shattering early-middle-age revelations of latent sexuality mischief aside, my plumbing demands a seeing to (hasten to add, not a euphemism). Oh look, here's one. Parachuting into the film, flung from on high in even higher dudgeon, comes the Literary James Bond, thunderous looks spreading across his lupine brows, dropping in to

save the planet, or at least correct the desecrations performed in his name by a well-meaning but clapped-out fogey.

It almost works.

So *very* almost.

“Bravery” being the compliment paid to failure, *The Living Daylights* is a brave stab at “new” but it jabs away with a blade blunted by its own compromises. An irritating film to watch – and, if Bond’s consistent miffhead is guidance, to be in – as chasms of fecund opportunity to provide changes to the recipe are ignored in favour of mildly spiced-up but ultimately reheated leftovers. On its own merits – the only ones upon which it is fair to judge it, but this isn’t an exercise in fair, “soz” – it’s technically sound; theme choon aside, the music is splendid and the locations are interesting and nicely photographed and there is an attempt to develop, in both writing and Acting, a proper relationship (or a credible human emotion) between Bond and his leading lady, which works. Churlish also to decry the achievement in bunging this one out only a couple of years after the moribund *A View to a Kill*, a film so weary it cannot muster the “Did the Earth move for you too?” joke amongst all its earthquakiness, albeit in the context of the age chasm it coulda been creepy; such trembles as it achieves were only the onset of something debilitating. It remains amazing that the same persons what spewed out that arthritic dismalness produced *this*. The specifications have had a polish and at first fumble it does feel different. Perhaps, though, if they had given themselves more time, it would have been stronger.

On reflection, what it does is willingly deny its potential, uncertain whether it *should* push things despite the groundwork being in place that it *could*. Seemingly incapable of appreciating that its audience deserves novelty, I want to encourage it on, for it to realise its

capacity for brilliance, to plump its self-esteem and reassure it that it's not as lowly as it seems to think and feeling itself obliged to follow the crowd; yet here comes another scene where it self-deprecates itself into tiptoeing around interest, to the point where my patience runs out and any sympathy I had is lost. That's the problem with moping and thinking oneself unworthy: do it too much, to the point of annoying folk, and the same folk will stop their flattery and agree with you. Humility is the worst form of conceit. I tried to help it, but it's now tedious and it might as well show us explosions and the usual guff if that's what it wants to do. Such a shame.

Strange: too many Bonds blare arrogantly despite being all dentures and no dinner-jacket – hello GoldenEye, you vapid wretch – and yet The Living Daylights mumbles along, a consumptive wall-flowered maiden at the dinner dance, chewing its hair nervously, adjusting its spectacles and shyly resisting any advances, despite many appealing qualities. Spinsterhood, cats, lace-making and the ability make a smashing sponge cake – or quiche – beckon, all of which are laudable in their own little, *little* way but this could have belted its way through the world had it had the courage of its own convictions. Instead, its epitaph shall be that of so much waste, so much promise; so little delivery.

The desire not to offend, to apologise for its attempts at change, comes through in another pre-credits disclaimer (I'll ignore that this was a legal requirement, just as “they” ignored the need to put one before Die Another Day, such as “Abandon hope all ye who enter here”). A habit developing amongst the 1980s Bonds, this incidental insulting of organisations. Along with the audience. On the previous blimpride, an attempt to limit liability should anyone believe they were being depicted as a genetically fiddled-with psycho. This time, the Red Cross, Eon apologising in advance for the implica-

tion that their food parcels contain opium. It's not the drug smuggling so much as suggesting that the Red Cross is so unenlightened that it thinks there's a market for antiquated soporifics. That said, the RSPCA are rumoured (by no-one) to cram crippled mules with laudanum, and what UNESCO does with Quaaludes you'd have to read on someone else's computer, were it true.

Still absent though, the apology required to us, for emitting more A. James. Bond. Film and expecting us to swallow it as fresh. Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over again and expecting different results. The bitch. But some truth there, although one could define laziness the same way. One could then define the run of Bonds just prior to this as very, very, very, very... um, very lazy. This one, well it stirs itself *slightly*, but then becomes ashamed of so doing. The same. But different. Not too much. Mustn't draw attention to itself. That would be so crippling, wouldn't it? Oh, it'd just *die* inside if anyone noticed or cared. The desire is there; a lack of nerve to carry it out.

Whilst this isn't going the same way as the last review to a kill, and *The Living Daylights* is so evidently the pinnacle of 1980s Bonds it's embarrassing – any more explicitly and it would die of shame – looking back, it's not a radical shift of gears. Foolish to deny that the gears did shift, cruise control disengaged, for a little while, although the wheels were due to come off fairly spectacularly next time out with an unsafe Mexican knock-off copy.

Has time been kind to *The Living Daylights*? Its more political edge now dates it, along with the mystifying mention of Barry Manilow, but I recall it being popular (at least in the UK) when released, perceived as fresh compared to the Steradently becobwebbed whiff of the previous two flatulent gusts. As the years pass, it seems shunned. On the shelf. Eating fistfuls of cereal from the box and

drinking too much. Weeping. It probably has soft toys; ones with names. Perhaps it's the advent of the Craig films, demonstrating that one doesn't just tinker with the gearbox to "change", but actually have to scrap things wholesale and redesign it from the wheels up as an unstoppable nuclear tank, that makes *The Living Daylights*' tepid revolution look half-baked. It could be a cynical move, to lure the dwindling boredience in with promise of a novelty and yet they find it's the same corrupted nonsense with an eggshell-thick sheen of "new". It's like one's sweetly becardiganed gran suddenly sporting ta moko. Put aside the facial fissures, the tongue waggling and the bearing of her posterior for Royal display and she's *still* yer gran and her hips are still shot to buggery.

It's not his fault, though.

NOW IS THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

MADE GLORIOUS SUMMER BY THIS SUN OF... erm... COLWYN BAY;

AND ALL THE CLOUDS THAT LOUR'D UPON OUR HOUSE

IN THE DEEP BOSOM OF THE OCEAN BURIED.

(He said bosom. Fnarr.)

Let's lay this on the slab and treat knee-jerk opinion as fact. Timothy Dalton is a brilliant James Bond. Perhaps that does need qualification. Timothy Dalton is a brilliant James Bond if that's the sort of James Bond you crave. Which I do. I accept that there are a selection of convenient orthodoxies (can one have more than one orthodoxy in the same thing?) that would propose that the most brilliant Bond is a tax-exile tartaned misanthrope or an American with a speech defect or a bemuscle blond blubbing brutal baby or a venerable well-spoken octogenarian cove who should have appeared in this one, rendering not *The Living Daylights* but *The Living Dead*. The persons holding such views would claim, unwisely,

they are “entitled” to them, alongside other entitlements such as “being oneself” and “not being whacked around the head with a plank because that oneself is a cretin” and a final entitlement to “a proper burial”. Point, they do, these partially-sentient hominids, to such interferences in my tyranny as Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and its bothersome “right” to freedom of expression. Relying upon – but in such reliance, not evidently reading (visual learners) – that inconvenient drivel, they claim a right to express their opinion.

Wrong. Not only in body shape and what they do to dogs. What it bestows is a right to hold an opinion. Hold it. In the sense of “don’t let it go”. Keep it safe, keep it secure. Keep it quiet. Lock it in a box where no-one else can see it. Sssh. *Don’t tell anyone*. Make it your special little secret. I acknowledge I could be accused of ignoring this given that this is my sixteenth emission of “opinion” but that’s the “joke”; *do come on*. Keep up. Acknowledged also the sweeping over the bit about freedom to receive and impart information and ideas. *Au contraire* my lovelies: firm, indeed tumescent, supporter of that jazz. It’s just that the opinions of others contain sparse information and as for “ideas”... don’t make me laugh.

Which brings me back to Timothy Dalton.

Drafted in to cope with a dire predicament – Bond films on a slippery slope, dripping downwards like diarrhoea off a doorknob – he’s not here to muck about and tell jokes. I mean, Red Adair, in he flies, stops the rig blowing everyone into crumbs but he’s not celebrated for his banter, is he? Doesn’t stand around braying “It’s been a blast”, or “Hot today, innit?” or “Time for a station break” and then wait to be licked. No time for such rot, T-Dalt is on a mission. A mission that’s a bugger to understand (cellos and / or diamonds and / or toy soldiers?) but a just cause given the need for an emer-

gency intervention. Not for him saving the series through disarming humour, nor for that matter antipodeanismness nor extreme physicality nor packing on the fat and wearing a pink tie nor Being Pursse Brosnodge; no, Timothy Dalton shall perform his humanitarian crusade of ensuring we have Yet Another Bond Film to gawp at via the medium of Act-Ting. You should see his Mark Ant-Thony. Fnarr.

If you've been brought up on the previous three Bonds, you may not know much about Act-Tors. They hide away. Antisocial herbivores, Act-Tors feed on foliage, fruits and rough grasses. Shy animals with a number of predators, they prefer waterholes (pubs) rather than open spaces. They do not show signs of territoriality. They are cautious creatures. Old males live alone, but single sex or mixed family groups of up to ten individuals can be found. These inhabit thickets within dense woodlands. When roused, however, their braying does tend to draw attention to themselves, *totally* accidentally, and their "art" is vital and important and solves the Energy Crisis, brings peace to the Middle East and saves the whales, and isn't just showing off by shouting stuff written for them.

Quite what celebrated stage Act-Tor Timothy Dalton is doing throwing himself into this rot about rocket powered cars, "bit simple" secretaries, "bit simple" musicians, "bit simple" CIA persons, "bit simple" Q, "bit simple" villains, "bit complex" plots and exploding milk bottles is a headscratcher. It's like finding Ian McDiarmid, a stunning King Lear more than making up for having had to go to Sheffield to see him, turning up and spouting awfulnesses about "The Sitttthhh". The potential for a brave new world, but one wonders whether he misheard Taliban for Caliban. Dalt-Ton is a solid, pleasant, surprise for the Bond films, given the state they're in by 1987. True, we'd been Berkoffed and had application of Walken, but they were spasms of villainy, overwhelming tastes in sparse

measures. Casting Pierce Brosnan to follow Roger Moore as the lead was more coherent and “in character” for the series – knitting-pattern model with personal charisma excusing much, drafted in from a lukewarm telly series on its last legs – and the easy option. Given that 1980s Bond was about taking the path of complacent least resistance, Brosnan was an obvious choice. It’s not surprising they did it.

Transplanting Mr Brosnan directly into *The Living Daylights* as it currently stands and it would have been cackier (this is a technical term). The strength of the film is Dalt-Ton and his Act-Ting, particularly in the first, tears-of-joy hour when he exudes menace and anger and charm and wrath and ennui and tenderness and weariness and accordingly BookBond oozes from him like ripe Brie, or a positive pus. Brosnan would have been cheesy too, but not in a good way; whiffy, with bitter mould running through it. His angry face looks like he’s having a debilitating stroke and one suspects he would have given Saunders’ bisected torso a quick nibble, ‘cos that’s his “thing”. Bolt into *The Living Daylights* a weaker Bond and the central performance won’t distract one as successfully from the realisation that little else has changed. Some of it’s worse. Q’s as redundant as ever – every time I see it, every single sodding time, I want Bond to finish that wolf-whistle and blow the rancid bastard’s head clean off – Sir Frederick Gray is still kicking about albeit fearful of the sack (finally) and Moneypenny is trying out the lifestyle choice of Village Idiot (was there need to turn her into a simpleton?). There are explosions, there’s a climactic sequence that goes on too long, there’s Binder, there’s gunbarrel, there’s a crapulous final “comedy” scene with the Taliban getting weapons through a European airport, and there’s most of the usual lines. They didn’t change those beats for the next one either, fatally undermining it.

It's not the casting of Dalton at the heart of the perception / reality that his films failed or underperformed. They came still loaded up / weighed down with "James Bond film". It's not that they were *bad* James Bond films – it's that they *were* James Bond films and his efforts deserved better. Not enough to draft in a much-more-than-capable leading man and hope he would solve everything; you had to bother with other changes otherwise we would see through it, that this was just number umpteen of the same thing. Casino Royale, they did bother. The Living Daylights, they didn't. One of these films starring an ostensibly "unknown" Bond made over half a billion dollars. The other...well, it didn't, did it? *We'd had enough*. It's a pity, because – I may have mentioned this – Timothy Dalton is exceptional in this, a definitive BookBond portrayal. He carries the thing; it's the carried thing that lets him down.

Yes, OK, he's Act-Ting James Bond rather than "being" James Bond – which would require indulging an amalgam of perceived poopular (no typo) character tics and hurtle us Broswards – and arguably there's not enough in the character of BookBond to sustain two hours without falling back on the films' character gap-filling "quips" – but this Bond does appear to have known a ham sandwich. BookBond has a substratum of the proletarian, a tendency towards the ordinary and a baser nature that occasional – not the films' *habitual* – pretension towards fine living tries to offset. DaltBond buys off-the-peg and may have eaten a bag of crisps, or picked his nose and then hated himself for it and asked himself searching questions and not known the answers. CraigBond is nearly there, particularly plebian in sporting turn-ups on his trizers – good grief – and doubtless necks creatine and protein shakes. Brosnan and Moore give off the impression that they were born with a caviar spoon in their gobs – Mr Brosnan's sounds as if it's still there – and it's all been terribly

easy. The Lazenby Bond is more-or-less on song as one suspects that he believes that Royal Beluga goes best with some tinnies and Conner's Dr No Bond is there or thereabouts, but a subsequent tendency to feast on rich food bloated his sorry hide. Whereas the Brosnan and Moore versions one suspects would cut out the middlewoman and make love to their respective selves if they could, the Dalt-Ton specie of Bond isn't that keen on himself. Look at the tangible doubt in the confrontation with Pushkin; feel the Act-Ting, it's porkrind-chewy. Probably harbours views about the way Koreans smell, too. Slightly edgy, slightly nervy, not totally in control, this isn't yer Octopussy Bond, tolerating the villains for two hours but safe in the boring knowledge that he's going to win and they are mere gnats sent to amuse until he swats them and then does knobbage.

One can see why this might not chime with the "character" of James Bond we've had for the past few films. Is this Bond a slick aspirational figure conceived to sell grotty watches? No, and all the more admirable for that. I averred in an earlier "piece" that the problem with the 1980s James Bonds was James Bond and I stick by that. Not Roger Moore. Roger Moore did the job they intended for him – a still deep voice of calm whilst they flung hirsute girls, ranting Berkoffs and Grace Jones at him – but the part he was playing was just driftng. Dalt-Ton is a culture shock from a nice grandppapy feeding quiche to underbrained dolly bird geologists, but *The Living Daylights* hit just at the summer when I was the target age for Book-Bond (14 – it goes no higher; they are rampagingly adolescent) and I recall sitting there, stunned that the chappy in the books had leapt from the page and was now hanging onto a Land Rover.

On reflection, he's not the letter of BookBond, but there's such spirit about him that suggests he was trying. It's a close interpretation. An odd, insecure mix of a film as a result; BookBond wander-

ing about, furrowed of brow – trying to work out the plot (he’s not alone) – whilst some usual FilmBond checklist rubbish happens around him because it “must”. Yes, they “went back to Fleming” (as if such a move could be considered backward) but only so far. Most of it’s business as usual. Still, it’s considerably better than Licence to Kill which may claim connections to Fleming but, by exhibiting the properties of something nasty and virulent grown in a petri dish, that Fleming would be Alexander.

It’s here rather than in the melodramatics of the next film that Dalt-Ton comes across better as the BookBond. His instant, simmering reaction to Saunders’ death but subsequent suppression of it in quiet rage and getting on with the job is much nearer the stuff what I done readed than huffily spinning off at a wild overemotional tangent because an elderly man he’s only just met (and with whom he has zero chemistry) got himself gnawed in an extreme version of that fishy nibblefoot therapy that seems popular amongst scutters and the flabtattooed.

Anyway, he’s great, the film’s... sorta great, ish, and it’s a shame that it didn’t *quite* work. Like the jokes.

So, up to our 007th minute, this strange episode of so much opportunity yet so much punch-pulling gives plenty over which to mull. The United Artists logo – another new one – has been and gone with a “whoosh”; the sound the money makes as it disappears to the liquidators. Bit of brassiness to the Bond theme and for the Silver Anniversary we have a tinkered-with gunbarrel insofar as Bond appears to fire twice. Better make that two, indeed. Amusing skit with M aboard the same model Hercules they use later (unless the subtext is that all corrupt arms dealers have access to them and, oh look, the British government has one, hmm, I wonder what it is they are telling us...). What, though, are those trophies on his filing

cabinet (and why have these lying around at all?). One is shaped like a cannon. I hope that's what it is and the young man with the big helmet, strapping him in, is a safety feature, not a perverse lower middle-class ritual involving M's extraordinary eyebrows, his phallic bric-a-brac and the framed photo of HM the QEII in her riding gear. Minxy stirrups. Fnarr.

Some lovely images of the freefalling agents – that one where they drop past the camera, the Rock of Gibraltar hundreds of feet below, is glorious – although one wonders how stealthy an incursion that really is. Seems to be a bit of a comedown (Pun!) that the 00-Section is used as playfodder for someone else's exercise. Penance for blowing its budget on mechanised pervehounds last time. Blond 00 is hopeless – blond 00s are crap; how times change – although it's cruel of M to have a useless blond 00 accompany Bond given what happened to Alec Trevelyan the previous year (I think this is how it works). So, dark-haired 00, (who might be Timothy Dalton if you didn't know what he looked like) throws a rope absolutely miles – a talent – and gets killed to death for showing off (it's all in the wrist). This brings on the turn, the glare, the most dramatic of entrances for a Bond, about which I say nothing other than that I could watch it all day, for even in seriousness I would only trivialise its super-ness. Cottaging in a Russian loo it is not. Now and again, Mr Glen comes up with the goods. And then, his “sense of humour” intact, he throws a monkey at Dalt-Ton and it's all downhill from there. Downrock, anyway. Still, wish someone would throw £500 my way now and again. I need Petrus.

The man with the world's loudest silencer carves his way violently through British soldiers and reminds one that it's not only in the now dodgy depiction of Kamran Shah – a Western educated billionaire hiding on the Afghan / Pakistan frontier – that The Liv-

ing Daylights causes one a brainfrown. Death on the Rock, indeed. Hindsight wisdom is best left aside, along with the ageing realisation that this film is now the midpoint of the series and at the point of writing is closer to Dr No than to Bond 24 – arrgggh. Better to concentrate on the sight of a really-quite-furious-by-now-grr Bond barging folk out of the way as he barrels along in his combat gear and hurls himself onto a Land Rover. Just as well they changed actors; Roger Moore in that get up would have looked like a cod's head peeking from a seeping binbag full of old chicken and would have rolled off the Land Rover into the sea, getting himself washed up on a beach somewhere, which is the plot of 1991's gently dire *Bed and Breakfast*, one of those films you feel you've watched even when you know you haven't. Its sole review on IMDb – from 1999, so last century – proclaims “This movie is a dramatic one and it's one of those you remember afterwards and enjoy watching, it's filled with great landscapes, fine music and a great dialougue (sic) which couldn't have been portrayed better then it has been done here.” Better than *TWINE*, then.

‘Ere, ‘old on, you’re dead. Ignoring the deft criticism of the Bond Series – he's here to rescue it, get out of the way, cock-er-ney oaf – and also ignoring how the third bullet emasculates him, on Bond clings and some of the time it's yer actual Dalt-Ton up there; for the rest of the time at least they found a stuntman with the same colour hair. James Bond rides down the Rock of Gibraltar atop a speeding Land Rover crammed with ignited explosives. Reading that back makes one gape at how good this Bond stuff can be. The scruffy back projection and fire effects – seems to be atop a Belisha Beacon – reminds one how naff the execution of its ideas more frequently is. Neatly avoiding the saloon driven by a man last seen trying to ram Melina's 2CV off the road – even stooges have a private life and

are entitled to time away from stooging – in order to destroy placed product, a choice headbutt (a.k.a “A Colwyn Bay Hello”) whilst someone whacks the Land Rover with a loose branch (hilarious) and oops, over we go, nice touch with Bond putting his foot through the windscreen to give the ‘chute purchase, out he ‘chutes, neat escape, and on we plummet headlong into...

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Chap at the steering wheel looks fraught. Sort of face I pull when Mrs Jim reinvents the roundabout or the speed limit or reverse. Still, as she regularly and heartlessly reminds me, she’s not the one who drove into a tree and lost a foot. That’ll be held against me forever, bit like the natty cane I received for Christmas “from the dog”. I’ve come to like it – its silver top has a pleasing maimheft – even though I asked for a swordstick; useful for picking up leaves and fighting off pirates (we get a lot of this in Wallingford – something to do with capped housing benefit, and autumn). Apparently they’re not readily available; I might as well have asked for a tricorne hat and a sedan chair. So this year, I will. I’ll probably get a baseball cap and a zimmer frame. This happens when you send a Labrador shopping. Stupid bitch.

Meanwhile, back at exploding Land Rovers, a Land Rover explodes. Someone on the soundstage floor starts throwing hot metal debris at Dalt-Ton (probably John Glen – he’s already hurled an ape, why stop?) who looks amused about it. You don’t get this sort of thing at The Old Vic, even with the roughest crowd and the worstest play (*Cymbeline*. It’s *poor*). Steaming in, here comes Bond (the past few minutes, from turney-starey to runny-shovey to jumpy-clingy to fighty-killy, have totally nailed it) and he’s about to land in choppy waters (spot the metaphor for the Dalton tenure, everyone).

It is looking rough, for our lovely in the almost-bikini who goes by the name of Linda (is that a Bond girl name? What next – Gwen? Edith? Dame Judi Dench? Still, he *did* marry a woman called Tracy. If it's the same bloke). Perhaps it's the size of her telephone causing the boat to pitch and yaw and do unappealing boaty moves. Definitely looks breezy and she's barely got a scrap on. Splendid. Nothing but playboys and tennis pros, apparently. Dressed like that, what do you expect, you daft moo? No acting coaches, then. Oh, my mistake, here comes one, The Flying Act-Tor Service, dropping out of the sky to give your thespianism a seeing to and he looks pissed off because the first person he speaks to needs a hell of a lot of work.

Hang on a mo-mo; the boat is now stationary. That red liquid in the jug (might be blood – she could be a vampire, she's wearing black (nearly) and has sucked the life right out of this scene) isn't sloshing about. Hmm. Most, most *odd*.

Continuing the dynamic intro, let's have Bond leap down, snatch her 'phone, almost snap her wrist in so doing and bark something comic into it. Quite a hard manoeuvre to pull off if the boat's bucking (that's *bucking*) about like Halle Berry on an elderly Irishman. Yes, that's definitely a real man. Not, say, an airborne mugger. She looks outraged (actually, she looks like Cristiano Ronaldo in a skimpy bikini; but then he probably [defamatory]) as well she might be as she's the victim of a crime. Was ever woman in this humour woo'd? Was ever woman in this humour *won*? Yep. He's tasty, so bring on the Stockholm Syndrome and ask his name.

Oh, that's right Timothy, just *throw it away*, it's just a line, played not for applause in each wheezing Mid-Atlantic pause, but just a man saying his name. One wonders about the Act-Ting journey, from acorn to tree, that brought him to such a delivery choice. Interesting motivation for the scene; a man what just parachuted twice

and killed a bloke and had shrapnel thrown at his head and then performed a petty theft. It's a complex role: Mr Rochester has nothing on this. Where are the headbutts in Jane Eyre? Reader, I chinned him? Nah. Alternatively the subtext is "I am Act-Tor; you are not. I am Act-Ting. Lick my Act-Ting. Do not bother me, woman. Give the Art-Tist room".

At least he doesn't seem to be there waiting for the intelligence-deficient idiots who clap and cheer films (the people on the screen, they can't hear you; it's so pointless and tragic) to clap and cheer it. Flaw in The Method in telling Cristiano your name given the career in phone-jacking, but she's pretty and thick and pretty thick so it may be OK. Not convinced that not actually *telling* Exercise Control about what's happened (a massive security breach, a dead 00, murdered servicemen, an exploding 4x4 and a screechy monkey, and meeting Cristiano Ronaldo in his bra and pants) in favour of cocktails is what I, as a British taxpayer, expect of a servant of the Crown. It seems irresponsible, but I suppose the budget deficit is helped by fencing the mobiles he pinches so I'll overlook it just this once. "Interestingly" he never introduces himself to Kara Milovy – because the energy invested here was so emotionally draining, he was just spent, and his motivation for the scene was unclear. Additionally, repetition of it will only encourage mention of The Scottish Bond, which would be unlucky.

"Won't you join me?" To what? Something equally wooden? I'd nail her.

The next line troubles me. Enunciating his Ts marvellously, it's the Act-tor Ttimothy Dalt-Tton. It's beautifully projected, if you wanted the back row of the Cottesloe to hear it. You're not at a RADA workshop now, T-Timmy love; you're chat-Ting up frolicksome dimbobimbo. I hope he is never called upon to narrate The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler or say the phrase (a common house-

hold one) Tittilate Tetrahedrons Twenty-Two Times. Imagine the spittle. It proves he has his own teeth and he does look as if he was born in the same geological age as her. Bett-Ter make that-tt Two. Sums up his Bond career. How ironic.

Bring on the synthesisers, for these were the 1980s my lovelies, and such traumatic things were done unto us. Thank God they brought The Berlin Wall down on every one of them. Here comes Hoxton Market with a ditty (it rhymes with one's view of it) more brung than sung. Still, magically, we have, right on the ticky-turny of the 007th minute, Albert R. Broccoli presenting Timothy Dalton as Ian Fleming's James Bond 007. Didn't he just?

0.07.00

It set my hopes up way too high. What follows has moments of utter lovely – most of the first hour is magnificent and satisfying, and there's a moment where Bond manhandles a weapon in a public convenience; yay – and nothing much to do with the plot; a relief as when it *does* eventually turn up, it appears to run thus:

K was given \$ by P to buy guns from W to use on KS. K gives the \$ to W but (at some point) hatches a scheme to make \$\$\$ by W not spending P's \$ on guns but buying diamonds to then buy opium (what is this? 1890s Limehouse?) from mates of KS instead. P finds out W has not spent the money and becomes Pd off. Meanwhile, K is getting bored with his wet girlfriend, also called K (he is shockingly narcissistic) who, for ease of “understanding” we'll refer to as K2. Smashing peaks. For reasons no-one ever explains, instead of having N just kill P on the quiet and thereby not draw themselves to the attention of JB and M, K & W devise a more bothersome and resource-intensive “slightly relying on the gullibility of the British” phoney defection scheme that everyone but JB

falls for (SFG does, but he's an idiot) and JB stages an assassination of P which after five minutes everyone ignores, very surprising as killing the head of the KGB is a *big thing* for a British spy to do. When is it revealed to everyone that JB shooting P was false? This never seems to get cleared up. Fake defection. Fake passports. Fake hearts. Fake milkmen. Fake assassinations. At least Q is genuinely annoying. Stop this film at each 20 minute interval and ask yourself this: what the bloody hell is meant to be going on? Seems to work out as $(K + W (+N)) - P ((JB \times K2) + KS) = \text{explosions}$.

Nnnn. Head *hurts*. Show us some Aston Martin. Perhaps that's where the "reputation" this one has comes from, though; it's not easy to follow. Should they be criticised for trying something espionage-y? Unusual to have a Bond with *too much* plot. It does seem to need a mini-series to breathe its way out, rather than two hours.

Bond seems to work it out but instead of telling us properly, he waits until he has wrapped his skull in a towel (to prevent it bursting) and this distracts us from taking in the complexity of whatever it is. Still, there's a fight on a bag to distract us and Felix Leiter shows up and is more inconsequential than usual, a perverse achievement and there's more life in one of Whitaker's waxworks. The second hour loses its momentum and gives up on the good work of the belting-around-Europe bit and, shuffling its feet, awkwardly apologises for itself. Sorry chaps, only joking with the "trying", here's some "Bond film". It's time for ruddy great explosions and questionable special effects. The less said about the final sequence in the Vienna Opera House, the better; pass the chloral hydrate and let me forget it.

Perhaps I should be more positive – that it at least flirts with new things, an approach that the preceding three films didn't bother with, should be applauded. Applaud it I shall, but the longer it goes on, it's the sound of one hand clapping. Is it worse to have avoided op-

portunities completely, or to set them up and then walk away? I do like it – a lot – but I could like it *more* if it came true on its promise of living on the edge rather than a refreshing weekend away at the edge and then retreating into the daily routine. Underappreciated in its attempt to demonstrate that the Fleming Bond could exist in a filmy world, but overappreciated in any proposition that it was radical. Maybe it is the hindsight brought on by shifts in approach since 2005, but I can't help feeling that its light has dimmed when up against the Craig films. Why, this it is, when men are ruled by women. Good thing, too. Was it before its time? No; it's still dependent on the old rules. Something had to be done to the Bonds in the 1980s, but more than this film was capable of. The seeds of what we now have are there but too many of the old roots were proving too knotty and strong to cut through. For this film, a shame.

That it continued into the next one, a disaster.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF LICENCE TO KILL. JACQUES STEWART IS AN
ATMOSPHERIC ANOMALY. ESPECIALLY AFTER SPROUTS.



LICENCE TO KILL

SCIENCE FACT! #16

When Timothy Dalton left the role, major contenders rumoured for the job of Doing James Bond Acting included Mel Gibson, Liam Neeson, Rhodes Boyson and You, In Front of the Bedroom Mirror Doing That Thing with Your Fingers.

[Not that thing; the other thing. Don't be mucky]

Bituvva scandal in 1989 at the moment about a James Bond film value-brand “hamburgers”, whatever they might be, being cut with last gasp desperation for dollars horse meat; popular if uninspired product, delivered on a reduced budget, mixed with the unpalatable. At first glance this seems unfair on Eon Tesco, with its record of being reliable, if insipid, with patches of quality – their lead character is own-brand meatballs are the dog’s bollocks, for example. Still, unwise to mash up suspect ingredients and pretend everything’s OK, business as usual and this is defensible. The consumer may well rebel. Or vom.

Perhaps we're so spoilt by recent Gourmet Bond that it's too easy to sneer at the cheap brands, too easy to buy identical ready meals equally questionably produced but sold in a nicely fonted box that smelly riff-raff cannot read. Science fact: French Script MS causes scutters to immolate. Too easy to become the father who proclaims that his offspring go anaphylactic at the suggestion of a fishfinger and can only eat Danish pomegranates, Nepalese sushi and Egyptian Cotton. Taste the Difference CraigBond, all fancy and theme-y and hand-reared by posh directors rubbing the finest organic artisan jus into its skin, relaxing it into production by giving it a thought-yurt and feeding it honeysuckle gravy with a hand-carved Inca love-spoon, is it really going to be any better for your time-bound heart than reconstituted old bollocks blatted together by a greasy robot? It all comes out as light entertainment in the end.

There's an argument that the cheap product is a more honest conspiracy between producer and consumer than asserting that because one's Bond comes with shavings of free range, corn-fed cin-eh-mah-hh, it's better. If one acknowledges it cost tuppence to make then one is braced for it to be foul; no point whining. How can it disappoint? You know the film is fungal gristle chivvied from the crevices of the Bond factory floor, bulked up with mechanically-separated violence; horrid, but still you partake. Perhaps it's a guilty pleasure; there you go, pretending to like quadruple-fried free-range yam croquettes and Swiss Lobster when what you crave is Scampi Fries and damp Micro chips. In white bread. With marge.

It's fatuously snobbish – and eyegougingly ironic, given the original source of the comment – to liken some Bond products as savourable at Sardi's and others munchable at McDonald's. I am fatuously snobbish. You'd guessed. Even knowing that Bond Sixteen wasn't dealt a happy hand from the get-go, even knowing that as a result I

should be more forgiving and try to emphasise the points at which it outshone its meagre origins, even knowing that I should accept that it was going to be dreadful and therefore spare all of us, myself included, pointing that out at overconsiderable length, taking all those excuses into account it's still, without doubt, one of the most disappointing films I've ever sat through.

Licence to Kill, the budget "all" "beef" patty of the Bonds, gelatinous spumes of "DNA matter" hacked into it, its ideas "ripped from the headlines", although those are about contaminated cheapo cynical fast-buck zero-quality hope-we-get-away-with-it contempt for the consumer rancid gutdross. The maggot-ridden, reconstituted offcuts of A. Bond. Film swept from the dusty warehouse of Bond (Q, naff sight gags, Q, dodgy back projection, visual sogginess, questionable garb and overextended finales and Q in three stupid hats) – wit, style and a decent haircut being beyond budget – cut with an exciting ingredient: other films' violence. Sporadically, entertainment accidentally enters the production process and it's upsetting because that can't have been intentional. His bad side might be a dangerous place to be, but his cheap crud side is undoubtedly a nasty one.

There's a suggestion that time will prove kind to Licence to Kill given that a troubled blood brother, Quantum of Solace, made lots of money (albeit cost a *lot* more) despite being equally problematic for many. Something in that, and it is disappointing for Timothy Dalton – and the perception of "Timothy Dalton" as a shorthand for his tenure – to be lumbered with this failure, but Quantum of Solace seems conceived as a film first and A Bond Film about ninth, and it's questionable whether such a discreditable concept was ever on the list. This, on the other hand, tries to flaunt its Bondfilmness and its "otherness" as equivalents, brilliantly achieving neither; perversely successful in that it's not stylish enough to merit consideration as a

Bond nor exciting – or, frankly, violent – enough as a Joel Silver clone. So nervous in conception, it hasn't got the cojones to jettison Bond clichés, a cojoined twin consistently trying to hit the other head but using the wrong fist, flailing around until it falls over on both faces and / or a collective noun of botty-bots. It has no idea what it wants to be, bit like me at sixteen; I was thinking AJP Taylor impersonator. Still get the odd hen night booking, round Swindon way.

If the intention – born out of trying to keep money rolling in than any artistic vision, come *on* – was to demonstrate that Bond, with all its Q-y, Moneypenny-y, X-ray camera-y, Binder-y built up canker of n-too many decades nailed on, could still go bullet-to-bullet with swearing men with mullets and bullets, using years-past-their-sell-by-date ingredients as garnish, it's an intention sore mistaken. The only thing it has in common with them is their awful music, and the Special Agents Johnson. I know that's an unoriginal conclusion but if you're after novelty than you've come to wrong film / review / reviewer. The decision for GoldenEye to shrug off the shame and ramp up the BONDness, absence breeding fondness, was a superficially far shrewder one albeit time's been *really* unkind to that one (and I shall be no kinder).

Advocates of Licence to Kill (there must *be* some – just as there are advocates of Wolverhampton, handguns and dog buggering) would assert that its legacy is not toxic and the experiment must have worked given that a) we are yet to see Lethal Weapon 23 so Bond Wins Yay! and b) the likes of yer Weapons Lethal and yer Deaths Hard went the other way and developed avuncular Moore-like spasms of cosy routine and c) just look at the Bond films now, they're hard and violent and dark. It was before its time.

Let's play "internet". Having just invented a ludicrous proposition that no-one adheres to, I must now knock it down mercilessly

in order to justify the expression of my own rancid and insidiously right-wing view, so I most righteously rule, yay me. So, in order – a) I sincerely hope we don't see any such thing although I doubt this is Licence to Kill's victory – it demonstrates that such transient, limited concepts weren't worth mimicking and reinforces the lack of wisdom on display in Licence to Kill and b) well, see a), yeah?; and c) yes, OK, but they compete with proper films, ones with budgets and stories and acting and characters and that nonsense. Skyfall is not Licence to Kill's legacy. The Bourne Legacy, arguably. It wasn't before its time: it was of its time and it couldn't cope. The care, the craft, the actually-bothering of the recent films don't enhance Licence to Kill's standing; they make it look paltry.

Some achievement: Licence to Kill was already a depressingly poor film depressingly poorly filmed. Overlit and blandly depicted, be it via unenthralling design or where and how the camera's pointing, a shocker because The Living Daylights possesses gloss and lustre and, whatever its demerits, at least A View to a Kill looks nice. Whether Licence to Kill's absence of panache is due to the low budget is moot. One can throw money at these things and still emit The World is Not Enough or Quantum of Solace and although I'm very fond of that latter film, I couldn't defend it as Two. Hundred. Million. Dollars well spent. But does low budget mean Licence to Kill has to look it? Whatever the opposite of spectacle is – testicle? – it's that.

A frequently expressed criticism, and I'm sure I haven't made this up, is that it comes across as a tv show – a television licence to kill the Bond series, as “t’were”. Whilst the parallels with Miami Vice are obvious / lazy, I take the observation to be more about look and feel, rather than any *particular* programme. Cheerfully admitted that there weren't many tanker chases or waterskis-to-aeroplane transfers on yer average telly show – excepting whenever Dynasty

took its loony drugs – and equally cheerfully admitted that those two splendid sequences are plainly where money was spent, and to good effect; but the rest of it is so, so dull to look at. Easily the poorest Bond film visually, unenthusiastically making the least of a stultifyingly characterless roster of locations. The sporadic perk – the Otomi Centre thing – isn’t enough to make up for interminable scenes in interiors hijacked from a telenovela, borrowed along with the “acting”, little more than histrionic melodrama punctured by epileptic atonal twangdom.

I’m not arguing that all Bond films must have volcano lairrrrrs, albeit oddly in its passive-aggressive attitude to the series, *Licence to Kill* is one of the few that plays on that with the helicopter / panel trick, even if the hidden base is less engaging than the exterior, just a factory. Let’s be kind and aver that this is a witty reversal of audience expectation, instead of cost-cuttingly dull. You can replace “Let’s be kind” with “Let’s lie outrageously optimistically” if you crave. It’s an anti-location, with bog-all happening in the parts that are interesting to look at. There’s an argument that this is an intentional negative-image approach to a Bond film, subversive in a way, also carried through in the notions that Bond goes rogue and the female lead demonstrates employable skills. Well, it’s an argument, but it’s clobbered by the unwelcome presence of Q and his magic bag of *rubbish*.

This isn’t stating that simply by spending more, *Licence to Kill* would have been better. Much more was wasted on *Die Another Day* and look at that (cautiously). A more stylish attitude to presentation may have helped, but it would only be cosmetic: the problems lie deeper.

The concept.

James Bond, enraged, although never coming across as more than *really very cross indeed*, undertakes a mild rampage and defies his orders from a boss who tries to have him shot – subversive and interesting and inexplicable – but a boss who comes round in the end – comfy and yawn and bloody typical. Far more interesting would have been to lift the idea from *For Your Eyes Only*, that M abuses his public office to use Bond as a private killer, and Bond, in obeying such orders, doubts the value of his (ahem) Licence to Kill in a film about the (ahem) Licence to Kill and what it stands for, rather than a film about *not* having one. Fine, they wouldn't have done this 1989, because M was all cakey and avuncular and had eyebrows like snapshots of frozen fire, and corruption of high office was unheard of despite the fact they've rumbled Frederick Gray by this juncture. Wouldn't put it past Eon to try it now, though – that Mallory looks deucedly shifty. One reading of *Skyfall* – or as the Missus Jim calls it, *Scuffle* – interprets The Dench's use of Bond as unlicensed private hitman. Deserves what she got; hateful ratbag.

The catalyst for dullness is Felix Leiter – onscreen for fifteen minutes all told in the Bonds to date, achieving such charisma in the preceding film that he was outacted by his pastel blouson – being fed to a shark. Yes, it's from Fleming, yesyesyes. I know. But Fleming used it *only* as an incident and whilst it gives Bond fleeting motivation and impetus in the latter stages of *Live and Let Die*, it's not *the entire plot*. One could indulge in imagining Ian Fleming's mind – wouldn't mind the swanning off to Jamaica and the drinking myself into oblivion, although I could do without the regularity of the gonorrhoea – and proposing that the point of the Leiter / shark interface – and that it happens offscreen, or at least “offpage” – is that Leiter *wasn't much of a character* and this was a means of getting him out of the story. Throughout the Bond books, what is it really that Felix Leit-

er does, other than provide the author with a means of delivering culture-differences via dialogue rather than description? This may be why he's never worked (or been necessary) onscreen; we can see those things ourselves. As a plot device he has significance in *Casino Royale*; otherwise he's just hanging around giving Bond someone to look better than. Is that enough to generate feeling in the audience?

Basing a two hour film on a convenient plot device for disposing of an inconvenient plot device is insubstantial at best; at worst, delusional. The middle ground between having too much plot in *The Living Daylights* and damn-all plot here gets itself filled with lifeless guff about cornering the drugs market by selling petrol-flavoured cocaine (erm...) and / or shooting down an airliner with a stinger (which, given Sanchez's appalling aim, is optimistic) but *it's all talk*. On we plod until Bond gets his Leiter out (what a pun. Oh, *clever* film-makers, you), flambés the badhat and suddenly one remembers the motivation, how nasty it was, although recollection is immediately undermined by having Leiter in a better humour than he was at the wedding.

Understandable: he married a blonde cretin many years his junior (subversive statement about a decrepit RogBond retiring with Stacey Sutton?) and whilst there's a spectacular pull of a punch in being coy about what that young lusty Dario *does* to Mrs Leiter, and whether he does such things before or after he's unloaded his barrel into her, one assumes that the significance of the marriage is to give those of us aware of On Her Majesty's Secret Service some payoff twenty years later. So, basing your new film on one incident from a book and upon the yet-to-be-rehabilitated least popular Bond film, both dear to a fanbase but perhaps abstract for a wider audience, that's bound to cram you with dollars, isn't it? For those seeking continuity (fruitless, tragic), perhaps an argument that Bond's anger about the

killing of another man's wife is recognition of his failure in his own bereavement and all this is out of guilt more than any actual feeling for the Leiters. An interesting idea, but in the context of the way the films panned out between 1969 and 1989 it doesn't wash and the search for continuity by imposing it on Licence to Kill emphasises more explicitly the gratifying absence of it in the other films.

I don't buy the significance of the Leiter character as set-up, and even seen as a single, stand-alone film, it's questionable whether the relationship demonstrated in the first fifteen minutes is sufficient to convince that Bond would go bonkers because. Perhaps more scenes with Leiter would embed the friendship – but I argue against myself by requiring “more Leiter” when there's really so very little to give. There was more development in the Saunders stuff last time out. Hey ho, chipping away at a Bond film for a preposterous plot devoid of believable emotion is too easy; sum total, though, is that this is just as ludicrous, just as Bond film, as Nazis on a Shuttle, even if it desperately wants to deny that it and Moonraker are cut from the same cloth.

Such denial is undermined by the principal weakness. Q. Until he appears for our tedium, there's some interest, some concern that Bond is out of his depth against a very nasty villain (albeit one who employs imbeciles) and it will be fun finding out how he gets out of this one and... oh God, it's Q, it's gadgets – an exploding alarm clock? *Why?* – and it has to happen because it's a Bond film that doesn't want to be a Bond film yet clings desperately onto the ingredients of a Bond film in a cynical, bipolar love / hate relationship. Oh well, Q's turned up, so much for “on his own” and “rogue” then. SIS operatives provide him with far more help here than *at any other time*. Boredom sets in, it is only a James Bond film after all, despite its pretence, and not an appealing one.

Time and again I have read that Q is the saving grace of Licence to Kill, bringing “warmth” and “humour” and “hats” and making it look like a “proper” James Bond film. Personally – and you may have grasped this – I think introducing the character is lazy, totally unlikely in the circumstances and reinforcement this was spineless non-radicalism. Rather than design the story first and then see what, if any, of the Bond “staples” would fit it and, should they be nonsense or hold things up, not to use them – the current films– this is in thrall to shoehorning the usual in. Returning to that tortured analogy of the horseburgers, the unwelcome ingredient here isn’t the violence but the tired, so tired, Bond stuff. They couldn’t let go, could they? The Bond elements aren’t special enough, overcompensating with daftness leaving the tone a mess, and the much-vaunted violence isn’t that violent in comparison to other action films of the age and therefore the trick of trying to deceive both a core audience and a generic action audience into parting with their cash...

...didn’t work.

Was it the violence that put people off? Wayne Newton being... odd? The divergent tone brought on by cynical compromise? *Had we just had enough?* There’s a school of thought that Licence to Kill was doomed to fail whatever its qualities because of the strength of other films that summer. Perhaps, but that tends to ignore its own lack of qualities by overemphasising those of others. A dull promotional campaign is frequently cited. But it’s a dull film, so a more tenable criticism of the marketing is “*honest* promotional campaign”. Even if the position holds, a more distinctive and less artistically cowardly film, a braver take on Mondo Bongo unsmeared by the usual cack, would have had the merit of having been a glorious failure. They had enough money by then; an opportunity to try something new. They only pretended to take it.

In the lead-up to the 007th minute, compromise abounds. We have a – let’s be nice – novel take on the gunbarrel music, comically fraught, but over the same old images; it’s just another Bond film, it really is. It wants to be a Bond film and pretends it’s not; duplicitous little weasel. Gwilson tells us some gibberish and a ‘plane lands at an ugly-looking island similar to the one at the start of *Never Say Never Again*; this film’s accomplice in fluffed execution and cheap production values. There’s some rotten acting about “the green light” – Gatsby believed in it, y’know – and it starts at a merry old lick of exposition and then a man’s heart is cut out. Offscreen. Mola Ram, did he die in vain? Sanchez is so eeevil he’s not wearing socks. Mr Hedison runs in hilarious slow-motion, but then he is old, and Talisa Soto is out-acted by splintered packing crates although she is ridiculously pretty and this is reason enough to have her tag along. There haven’t *really* been many examples of the perceived habit of the Bonds to have dimwit clotheshorse bimbo characters and yet here, in this so revolutionary shake-it-all-about effort, we have a winner. Has it been edgy so far? Whippings and knifings and stranglings and gunfights and appalling morning suits and boring estuaries so it’s all very Fleming because this is what weddings in his beloved Kent are like. More sunshine in Florida, perhaps. Fewer drug dealers though.

Amusing bit when the Sanchez ‘plane skims its wing on the air-strip, and we come to...

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 LICENCE TO KILL

Let’s go fishing. Oddly emphasised by T-Dalt, as if this is a payoff of an earlier reference to going fishing (which, if memory serves, is in the novelisation); not having included a prior reference in the film makes this over-emphasis sound strange. Still, the concept of the stunt is OK, s’pose, but, as is so very *Licence to Kill*, judgment in its execution is lacking.

Bit of Bond theme to introduce a thing that James Bond would do, nice shot of the helicopter creeping up on Sanchez's 'plane, Bond a-dangle. There's patently a man doing that, a long way up in the air. Brave. Stupid. Humorous moment with Sanchez blithe to it all, humming himself a nice tune, wondering what he's going to have for his tea – something eggy?- and...

And now comes the problem.

Evidently Timothy Dalton is athletic and happy to give things a try. Addressing criticisms that too many of the Moore films patently have "James Bond" doing stuff that a decrepit Roger Moore wouldn't – or couldn't – do, here they show the actor doing action. Worked well for *The Living Daylights* pre-credits. I was going to state that the idea has merit but on the evidence of this (and the model work on the drugs-bag fight inserts in the previous film), tend now to the view that the more convincingly a lead could do the stuff, the less need there is to actually show him doing it if you don't have the means / will to *make it look any good*. I accept this assumes that the money spent on computergrafting Mr Craig's face onto a skydiver or a motorcyclist was worth it, which is also dubious. If by dint of body shape or hair colour that actor and stuntman are radically different one may need a few insert shots to pretend that it's the same man all along; but the execution of this scene is such that it undermines the credibility – and danger – of a real man dangling above a 'plane multiple feet above the sea / ground / death.

Look at it – here comes the helicopter, hovering into view and that's definitely Timothy Dalton hanging outside it. Fine. Except the aeroplane beneath patently isn't moving. Not saying that I would have expected Mr Dalton to *do* the stunt, particularly as I have shares in a number of insurers and don't want them going bust, but the illusion is dwindling now. No budget to have someone on the ground

rock the model about? Oddly, he seems to be being lowered out of the helicopter by a much younger Felix Leiter than the old codger we've been used to so far. His hair's grown black, and back. Oh no, my error, here he is in close-up, performing the dangerous stunt of spooling out wire.

There were odd statements about *Licence to Kill* by the producers at the time; one of the more noxious was emitted in the book *The Making of Licence to Kill* with a presumably sanctioned part entitled "After Moonraker" that castigated that glorious spectacle as if this rot is fit to lick its moonboots. Moonraker does have curious artistic decisions, amongst them its high-altitude opening being marred by flappy-hand Jaws, flailing about. Meanwhile, back at the radical, new and energetic and not ridiculous *Licence to Kill*, we are presented with flappy-hand Bond, flailing about. It's progress. "After Moonraker"? Pah. Same as Moonraker and twice as stoopid.

Dalton, trussed up like a turkey, haplessly spinning around, looking for proper direction. A coded signal to the producers? State of the series in a nutshell, that. Flappy-flappy, spinny-spinny, gurny-wurny. Putting the awful into awfully dangerous, nice stuff such as the lovely shot from above when the stuntman does touch the tail of the 'plane is undermined by putting Timothy Dalton into a baby bouncer and dangling him ten feet off the ground. I'm not sure any other Bond suffered an equivalent indignity, save perhaps for Mr Brosnodge being rendered totally as a CGI surfigst, albeit that made him thinner and more richly nuanced an actor.

Fun double-take from Robert Davi, probably disbelief that the laws of physics have not intervened to tip the aeroplane nose upwards and have it spinning out of control. Big performance from him; Sanchez is a splendidly watchable villain, albeit it's a wonder how someone so easily deceived is so powerful; also, what's hap-

pened to all his socks. That said, he has surrounded himself with the most nicompoopy bolus of nincompoops yet for a villain, presumably devised and cast not to distract from the principal bad guy. Shame that we don't see more of Dario or the manner in which Sanchez kisses him in his chopper.

Looks dangerous, that cord swinging about, although to be honest I'm more diverted by Timothy Dalton's barnet. What's going on there then, unless again he's playing a subtle game by suggesting that this is going to be James Bond's Very Bad Hair Day Indeed. Things were indeed about to turn nasssTy; already had. By the time it gets to that casino scene and he's gone for the challenging "vampire" look, you wonder whether, with handiflap on show here in addition to whatever it is that was rescued from the Exxon Valdez and nailed to his forehead, there wasn't a secret attempt to make James Bond look ridiculous. Then you contemplate the rest of the film and realise that they didn't keep their attempt much of a secret.

Again, coincidence of time or design that a "moment" happens at 0.07.00, the hauling in of the 'plane commences, and that's sufficiently extrovert an incident to pass muster but...

0.07.00

...so little else does.

I have whinged a lot. There's a reason. I used to think Licence to Kill was *great*.

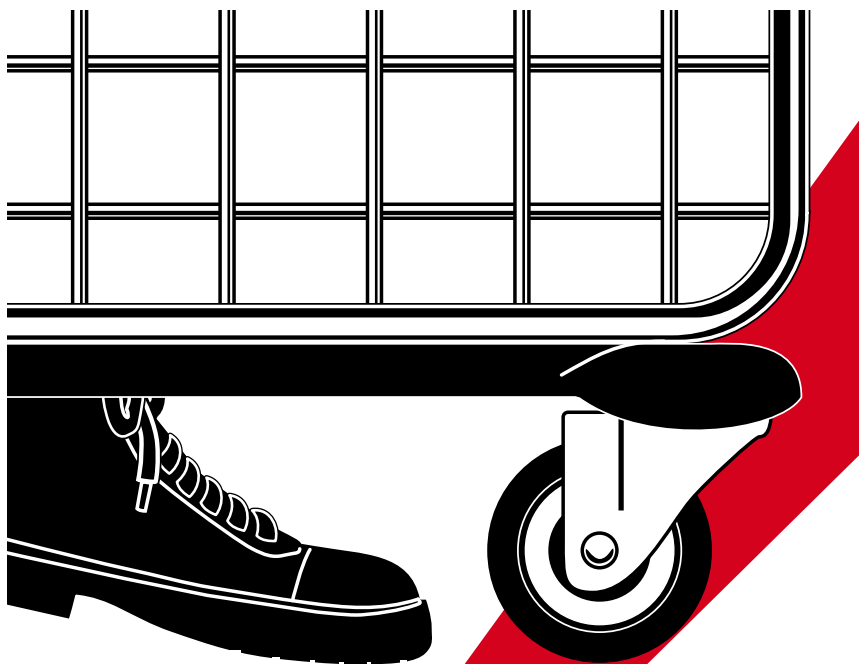
I was fifteen when this came out and the violence appealed to me hugely, and I expect I was the target audience. Whips, exploding heads, skewering, immolation. Magic. Lots of killings. Yeah. Talk to me in, say, 1990 and you'd hear me proclaim this the best Bond film, although I'd also proclaim Johnny Hates Jazz as the future of music,

so what the bleedin' chuff did I know? The "hiatus" did us both good, I suspect. We were on a break. I went off and found someone else to love and Bond went away and asked itself some searching questions, probably did a bit of crying and moved back in with its mum and dad for a few years.

As time trickles on, one sees what a sorry amalgam of tatty bit-parts Licence to Kill is, how weary both in conception and execution, how end of days it all seems, how betrayed my affections were. I spurn it now as an embittered ex. Forgive and forget? Neither and never. James Bond may not be the world's most sophisticated concept, the books are throwaway nonsense, but Licence to Kill demonstrates that it does take effort to make trash look good; as with Fleming's writing, the method of delivery was the series' saving grace. A mid-course deviation to oblivion, a cheap, unenthusiastic and unstylish retreat into moribund norms, Licence to Kill demonstrated that they were out of ideas; out of nerve. It was over.

But it wasn't over.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF GOLDENEYE. JACQUES STEWART BEARS MORE
GRUDGES THAN LONELY HIGH COURT JUDGES.



GOLDENEYE

SCIENCE FACT! #17

Due to an entirely fictional provision, we are contractually obliged to put the words “The Actor” in front of the name Pierce Brosnan, to assist the many who are still unsure about what he is trying to achieve.

The 1980s. Custodian of my childhood. Bringer of the Austin Montego, Kevin the Gerbil, acid-washed jeans and nothing else. Remover of Charles Hawtrey, the Ayatollah Khomeini and tolerable Doctor Who.

Apologist for four-and-a-half duff James Bond films.

That exquisite first hour of *The Living Daylights* almost compensates, but has no real prospect of succeeding against James Bond XII: *Underage, Undershaven, Underwater and Under a Geriatric*; James Bond XIII: *The Jewels ‘n’ the Clown*; James Bond XIV: *Aching, Baking and Earthquaking*; James Bond XV: *The Usual Letdown* and James Bond XVI: *Really Don’t Bother*.

Quite a bit to put right, then.

With awards-bothering Skyfall laying waste to all that dares cross its path, be it ‘Obbittses, vampires or narrative coherence, it can be hard to recall – or recognise – GoldenEye’s achievement. Given the parlous state of Bond at the time, with the films exhausted and Mr Gardner grinding out his contractual obligation in ever more contractually-obliged ways, there was considerable doubt whether Bond films would return, could return, whether they would find an audience, whether there was any *point*. Whilst its supporters would claim that Licence to Kill wasn’t a disaster given that it recouped five times its budget, five times sod all is sodallsodallsodallsodallsodall (science fact). If the 1980s taught us anything – apart from never rub another man’s rhubarb – it’s that with Bond, chuck money abite. Cheapo Bond gets noticed. You can’t make it with donkeycock, road-kill and offcuts of sickly bald Romanian orphan and not be found out. Speculate to accumulate, and spending lots on GoldenEye must have been pretty blimmin’ speculative. Change required.

Artistic merits of the decision aside, on a business basis Timothy Dalton had to go. Nobly, he went. Save for how he enunciated his Ts, he hadn’t clicked, and MGM / UA had shareholders to feed and receivers to fend off with a rickety chair and a whip. What was needed was a Bond built by a corporation to appeal to every demographic but not too strongly in any direction otherwise it could alienate, a Toyota Corolla of a James Bond, a reliable mass-market unthreatening consumer good, an *item*. Gambolling off the convey-or skipped something calling itself a Pierce Brosnan. Fate having associated him with Bond for many years in the PublicEye, and Luck not having exposed to the mass audience his astonishingly recondite talent beyond the challenging role of Man What Gets Fruit Thrown At Him in Mrs Dooootfiah, subject to any prior demands on his time with knitting catalogue shoots he was patently the chap. Bros-Nan,

with GoldenEye as his definition, was a brilliantly populist strategy, bringing us something for everyone along with absolutely nothing for anyone looking for anything specific.

I am being unfair, aren't I? He is, and remains, a good-looking bloke and I'm sure he's a giggle after a few Guinnii. It's just...

...it's just when he opens his mouth and that eccentric noise emanates, that nasal whispershout drone that sounds like it's being phoned-in along with the rest of his performance, that any pretence of goodwill evaporates. I am content, truly, watching him running around in that hilarious little way of his (bless) and his gurnycum-face is a solid bit of comedy business, but listening to him masticate dialogue like a Labrador chewing a hot potato; Christ. Still, that appealing face of his on a poster, on a toaster, on periodicals for every gender demographic – Timothy Dalton got Wolfman Weekly, s'about it – and as you can't hear him speak when on the cover of men's magazines, women's magazines, magazines for dogs (the only ones who can hear what he's saying) and office supplies catalogues, he's the perfect Bond for blanket shock-and-awe marketing, something taking root at the time of Licence to Kill (couldn't cope; out-Batted) and a norm by 1995.

A fantastic vehicle for getting Bond back into the public consciousness, this Brosnan. Just ignore the irritating whine when you give it a spin. Not just a brilliant corporate device, but an ideal Bond to take home to meet your gran –might fancy her chances, especially if she likes her shoulder being gnawed. ConneryBond would indeed leap on her, but only to prise out her gold teeth; Dalt-Ton would scare her, probably eat her and lie in wait for her granddaughter to bring apples; George and little Daniel – keep them away, unless you want her killed, neither of them are lucky wiv da ladies, and Uncle Roger would have a hootsome time trying on her frocks.

I accept – obviously – that all we do when watching Bond is expose ourselves to moneyraking commercial compromises rather than visionary art; it's just that other Bond films tend to disguise it better. With *GoldenEye*, once over the instant delight – pride? – at seeing Bond again *at all*, you can see, feel, hear the corporate design crunching through, so much a cold-hearted checklist that it's good at absolutely everything (even the music; a grower) but the only excel in it is the Microsoft one; the whiff of focus groups and spreadsheets – and fear – is its lingering basenote aroma. It's just *too* smooth, it's just *too* ideal, to be anything other than respected for what it achieved for the series' longevity. Thanked, yes; enormously. Admired, even, for the fact that it's generally coherent and isn't a total rehash despite all the demands placed upon it. Liked? That's asking too much. This isn't about product placement, although it is ghastly here, especially that inert BMW hairdryer skateboard thing – with five forward gears (ooh, mercy) – that Bond apparently has to drive. Those who express shock at the amount of placement throughout the series patently haven't read *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* which splay advertises in wild abandon including, brilliantly crassly, one for a film of the author's own novel. No, not that, amusingly chilling though it is to see Mr Brosnan having cans of Perrier thrown at his lovely, lovely face; this rant concerns the exploitative nature of the enterprise.

Bond. James Bond. You know the name. You know the number. You know the drill. So we're going to manipulate you with it. This Bond is a lickle bit of Connery brooding-stillness; but not too much, he was surly. A bit of Moorey lightness of touch and quipnology and clotheshorsemanship; but not too much, he was daft. More Lazenby than they were expecting, but that was accidental unless they sat through Taffin and concluded that BrosNan was *good*. Moments of

Dalton, but not too much, he was terrifying, and the only RSC the audience should think about is Replacement Sean Connery. Bit from here, bit from there, bland it together, shove it through a mincer (much mincing in *GoldenEye*) and sell it to the Bond-starved, they haven't eaten for six years. Look, we've hosestripped the carcass for the bits you liked and created mechanically reconstituted Bond-Like Film Treat.

Absent a defining characteristic, Brosnan's is the perfect 007 for those who aren't too bothered with James Bond and want it all pressed into one place to save time – comprising most of the audience, admittedly, and *GoldenEye* is popular amongst fairweather fans or those with proper lives to lead – or for persons new to it and who didn't know what a James Bond was, a tasting menu of a little bit of everything in case you can't decide. That bunch, the newbies coming to it with *GoldenEye*, often proclaim it as a benchmark. Words of one syllable now. That. Was. The. Point. You. Cret. Ins. Coldly manipulated by a dark-hearted film; poor mindless slug-heads. So programmed towards its blatant aim at luring a “new generation” that an enterprising someperson could turn it into a video-machine game thing, to indulge the wheezy, indolent, anti-social, underdeodorised and fat.

The headless, divergent nature of the rest of the Brosnan era demonstrates that the producers couldn't decide what he was meant to be, either. Tomorrow Never Dies' Action Stallion? The World is Not Enough's ErUmErDunno But It's *Not* Good? Die Another Day's Bloaty Cack-Walrus? Perhaps he told them, but they didn't understand. Shouldn't have asked him to mime; they'd be none the wiser.

Getting ahead of one's self there. Brosnan is the perfect Bond for the films he was in. Is that kinder? New Minis, the lot of them, *GoldenEye* especially. Better made than the originals, loads more technol-

ogy, smoother and slicker, stuff from the parts bin and pointedly retro with deliberate styling references: but query whether it's the true experience or a bloated, cynical wrenching at suggested memories, a faceless corporation plunging its hands into your past – and wallet – and squeezing, hard, whilst it misses the point even if, for a tiny teardrop of time, we were interested.

Amusing how an evidently corporate Bond would be undone a few years later by an ostensibly artistic decision to reboot and recast but one has GoldenEye's success to thank for that. It gave them the confidence (and the financial wherewithal) to risk Daniel Craig. Without GoldenEye's success, without getting Bond back into the consciousness with four bread-and-butter vehicles, they wouldn't have dared. Without the successful Brosnans as the foundation, this one in particular, there would have been nothing to move forward with, nothing to demonstrate how capable they *really* were. Casino Royale could only happen because of the Brosnan success, and also because they could afford to then drop him. As such, GoldenEye is important for its extrinsic impact, far more than for what it is.

Now just another Bond film on the shelf, three-quarters of the way along, is GoldenEye really any good? As a means to remind us of Bee Ohh Enn Dee it works well, superficially, but as a Bond film in the middle of the pack, as part of a series, it's a peculiar experience, standing to one side as an archly detached commentary, self-aware rather than self-confident. Insofar as it lowers itself to take part, an entertaining Greatest Hits package with some new tunes to trick you into buying it – Female M, mirthsomenely crass introspective moments – but no more than cleaned-up popular classics, so much a run-through of the archetypical playlist that if “they” had cast a Wayans person and called it “Bond Movie” instead, there would have been little difference.

With a cast drawn from TV and sitcom favourites and a ludicrously accented leading mannequin, teetering so closely to spoof, contained within its little bubble it smart-Trevelyaned itself into a corner, leaving its immediate successors floundering for purpose. Everything they had to say was said in GoldenEye; there was nowhere left for BrosBond to go, convincingly. Such mild deconstruction of the character as there is, is over by the end of this film. Once released, saved the series it may have but it totally undermines any artistic point that the remaining Brosnan films could serve, and they have problems enough. Admittedly, the producers may not have been confident that there would have been further films in which to indulge in layerpeeling, hence GoldenEye's self-contained nature and completeness of "conclusion" about James Bond. The other three tread water as best they can; not waving but drowning. Unlike the Craigs, constructing a character, when GoldenEye starts with the leading part being James Bond already, there's little to pick apart. Peeling back the layers is fine, if there's anything that's been built up underneath waiting to be uncovered. There wasn't.

Still, the manner in which Bond did return proved itself such an instant blast of The Good Old Days, brazenly hitting the buttons that anyone out to produce A Bond Film solely from listening to a third party's woozily drunken fireside recollection of them, would gleefully punch: wacky airborne stunts, good-looking and charismatic leading man, dinner jacket, Aston Martin, double-entendre and flirtation, casinos and high living, wicked witches, toe-curling pantomime dialogue, absurd escapes, amusing destruction of public property, villain with a poorly-thought-through plot that's immaterial to the entertainment value, underwater secret base, Q, M, Moneypenny, gadgets, martinis, gunplay, snoggage, saving the world from whatever it was the villain was up to and everyone goes

home happy and is glad it returned. For those who state that this was a (cautious) reboot, I can't agree; seen as an endpoint, it turns from being a straightjacket undermining what comes next, into a joyous encapsulation of all that has gone before, the end of v1.0. You could skip straight from this to *Casino Royale* and lose damn all. I appreciate that makes the next three films redundant and *Die Another Day* in particular a colossal waste of everyone's time. Absence of particular waste matter, presence of particular consulting detective.

Prior to the 007th minute, we've had a stiff-backed gunbarrel, a dire warning of the raw emotive power of the lead performance to which we should have paid greater heed. The bungy-jump is a terrific, wonderful stunt, although when the camera rises behind the chap, one can see a perfectly serviceable set of steps. One assumes that it's yet another of the "time passing" comments that Bond leaps from a dam and out of a mild spring straight down onto what is subsequently revealed as an icy winter mountaintop with a lickle miniature factory on it. Strange seasons, stranger geography.

Strange entrance: bouffant supersonic twerp upside down in a loo cubicle, wrapping his teeth round some meaty dialogue whilst stared at by a naked-from-the-waist-down middle aged man. One wonders quite what one is to make of all this; additionally unclear how long Bond's been there... watching. Listening. Snorting the Whiff. *Urr*. And then three *extraordinary* seconds, the camp sashay down the stairs. What is this? Can't act, definitely can't sing, can mince a little? It's very unbutch. Fab. For one reason or another it's my favouritest bit of *GoldenEye*; the rest is practically unwatchable in a single sit, takes forever to get going after this top-drawer pre-credits. James hooks up with his boyfriend, they troll along to blowzergaztanks and trade banter about ale (James Bond film?) and

determine that half of everything – that would be every thing – is luck and the other half fate, “everything” including my ‘fridge, some badgers and a pebble; this seems an odd and unproveable theorem.

Then things get right mammary and no mistake.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 GOLDENEYE

So young Alec is kneeling in front of a man who threatens to shoot off in his face whilst watched by some very portly soldiers. What is this place? *I want to visit.*

Right, well, Sean Bean. Hmm. The jealous younger brother angle is more diverting than the tiresome “mentor gone bad” stuff that it could otherwise have been, although given the mild ticking off Britain / England / Wherever gets about the massacre of the Lienz Cossacks one has to wonder how old Trevelyan is meant to be. That background seems to chime for a more mature face than “surprise villain” Sean Bean, such a very well-kept surprise right up to the point his name appears second-billed in the opening credits. Still don’t get how he survives being shot, other than he *does* and even that’s not the most distracting part of the character. No-one in “England” has *ever* spoken with an accent like that. Ever. Get Messrs Bean and Brosnan in the same scene – and they all-too-frequently are – and it’s like eavesdropping on the Swedish Chef and, well, Mr Bean reciting Finnegans Wake from drunken memory whilst Fritzled in a cellar half a mile off. It’s very distracting and another reason not to take this tosh seriously.

OK, so Bond reduces the countdown time to three minutes from (oho!) 0.06. Is this some mad passionate suicide pact? I Can’t Live, If Living Is Without You / I Can’t Hear, A Bloody Word That You Say? For whatever reason this seems to be a motivating factor in

Trevelyan's miffed attitude towards Bond later on, although it's not readily apparent how the gas tanks blowing up early caused the man's scarring, or only scarring to his face and not, say, incinerated him, nor quite what he would have done with the extra three minutes had he had the benefit of them; boiled a nice chunky-egg? Yum.

Colonel Ourumov seems quite nice. Is it just me? Very appealing gloves, too. Shame his death goes almost unrecognised, almost as incidental as that fat masked S+M bloke in the Battyman film last year. The sort of things my children make me watch, eh?

For England; so bugger Wales, then? I thought he wanted to save them. Perhaps that's why, y'never know with Hollywood types and their "proclivities". Since when was it the English Secret Service, then? The ultimate threat to "England" and its Land Registry is probably the most badly-conceived dastardly scheme: nick cash from the Bank of England then destroy the British economy, hmm? OK, so whatever currency you put the money in, it's likely to suffer *a bit* from that, no? No? Appreciating that Bonds have had a habit, 1977 onwards, of overplaying Britain's significance, whilst GoldenEye generally adheres to such silliness, insofar as Britain's position is significant to the plot, it underestimates it very weirdly.

Yeah, just shoot him. His knowledge of the Act of Union is all over the place although the long, lingering glances earlier on, by the meat rack, between ooooooh-six and ooooooh-seven suggest that the chances of another act of union were otherwise high. Colonel Ourumov does not approve of such things, any more than he approves of blowing gas tanks. Which is probably a very filthy euphemism. Do hope so.

Bros-Nan looks upset. That's his upset face. Apparently. Lick the acting. Not the screen.

Multiple (two) choice quiz, everyone. As Bond amusingly tensely wheels the trolley along, is that monstrous squealing noise a) the sound of a billion fat spinsters screeching in pleasure at the lovely man and his smashing hair and the thought he'd look twice at them or b) the sound Pierce Eardrum makes when he's humming? It's probably b). a) is a bit unlikely, the tangible homosexual undercurrent of GoldenEye aside: women in this film are either harridans, psychopaths, workdrones or a subspecie of macaque. It's progress, albeit in reverse.

I told you Colonel Ourumov was nice: he's smiling, and now his face is moving about in all sorts of weird shapes. Perhaps a gas tank has gone off, or he's finally succumbed to the pent-up atmosphere and is giving Bond some of the old come-hither.

Oh no! That supporting artiste is about to shoot his load! So much dynamic tension. Just on the money shot, we hit

0.07.00

And then he motorcycles off of a mountain and nothing happens for an hour. There's a cool bit with a tank, and stuff occurs. Then a tone-deaf man sings us a song and he marries Meryl Streep, or something.

Come to think of it, there was once a point behind these pieces, wasn't there – how far is the 007th minute of each Bond film representative of a series norm (and, by accident, how often does something magnificent happen right at the point that 007 is on the clocknoder?). Given that GoldenEye is an explicit exercise in tickling norms, it might show itself as disappearing up its own

backside in self-reverential smugness. Bit like these pieces. Still, onward my lovelies:

DR NO: Brits a-perilled! Send for the besuited anachronism. GoldenEye gives us plenty, fair wraps itself in the flag although it can't identify which nation's. There are photocopier salesman-level suits, big hair and a regrettable pullover / cravat affair. Lots of well-dressed carnage, Rambeau Brummell doing some murdering without any tangible effect on his psyche despite people telling him it should. And there's gambling. It's carrrrds. Well, yay.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE: parallel villainy. Yep, that's here too, the most direct parallel there could be without going the full DoubleShot. 006 seems physically competent and there's a brutal fight at the end, but all it comes down to is just fighting. Seems a missed opportunity not to have a former blond and probably homosexual memorial-walled betrayed agent as a more devious and cerebral villain using his computer genius to tear SIS apart and – oh, I get it now.

GOLDFINGER: saucy brassy. Well, ish; GoldenEye is a chaste film, given its ostensible agenda to “explore” whether James Bond is relevant (conclusion: he is. Thanks for that devastating non-exposition) so having him knob everything in sight wasn't “appropriate” (whereas murdering a platoon of Russian soldiers, all of whom had mothers and childhoods, is). Whassface who plays Natalya is come-ly, despite spending most of the film in a cardy or combats, although the shrieking gibbon in the world's least necessary car chase is hopeless and you do wonder whether CravatBoy is taking advantage of the educationally subnormal, promising that Jim'll fix it. There is an exception.

THUNDERBALL: ramp it off the scale now and again. OK, so the woman's name is... Onatopp? Saints preserve us. Still, she is smash-

ing fun, all lickety-facey, lippy-bitey, thighy-squeezey, cigary-smokey nourishment of the eminently watchable, even if the character is barely one cackle away from the reprehensible Fatima Blush. Fine, she's the vulcanized ghost of Fiona Volpe, but everything perks up massively when Ms Janssen appears. Everything. When she goes, film becomes explodey-basey and timey-passy. Shamey-whamey.

YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE: amidst nonsense, reflective moments. GoldenEye's shovelled that on, hasn't it? Not deftly folded in, given that he spends more time in the first hour dodging stinging psychobabble than he does bullets. Everyone has a go, even Mr Llewelyn's Q-cards. You half want Bond to stop the film, tell everyone to mind their own business and let him blow stuff up. Which in the second hour, this theme exhausted and abandoned, he does. And what has he learned from this lesson? Stuff all; he's James Bond at the start and James Bond at the end. All that chatter filling time in the (slow) first hour amounts to little, other than the producers pre-empting the criticism coming with the return of an irrelevant series. This creates a problem. Is there anything we learn about James Bond other than – and this can't have been the intention – his bullish imperviousness to cheap criticism? Unlike the three Craig films, GoldenEye's weakness is refusal to allow the audience to work ideas out for themselves. No subtext, just broad text, nailgunned into the collective face, making the lack of convincingly argued payoff equally palpable. Unless all this is deft comment by the producers about the longevity of the series, churning out its umpteenth run-through whilst pretending to pay heed to those who carp, taking their money off them in the meantime. You still watched it. Something quietly manipulative – bloody clever – about that.

OHMSS: wink all over the audience; they'll lap it up. Little else explains the dialogue given to Moneypenny and M, there to mallet

home a point we knew and – this is odd – seek to distance the audience from Bond, practically the only time this has been done since Connery knifing a man right up the mangroves, presumably to make Bond's roaring back into favour by the end of the film airpunchy and embracing and not just inevitable and Medding-modelly. Also, patently, to make a Bond film for people who wouldn't be caught dead watching one. The Dench is not addressing Bond in her rant; she's aiming right at the fan audience, chiding them for their fondness for such a rotter, and *also* mocking those who would have described Bond in the same way. Go James, prove the ratty witch wrong, even if she has got good legs. A sneering joke at the audience's expense, again so strongly is it punched into the film that it's questionable where it leaves M going forwards, except drink. The female M is a decent enough conceit while it lasts; presumably calling her Rimington would have been too rude, or too highly reminiscent of the name of Mr Brosnan's little telly show, Scarecrow and Mrs King or whatever.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER: seek solace in old standards when in a time of crisis. Right, so, that's GoldenEye, yeah? You come up with a better example, then.

LIVE AND LET DIE: ...but don't be afraid to nudge new angles now and again. There's M, but he's now a lady. There's Q, but he's now abandoned acting. There's Money Penny, but she's gone and got the vote. There's an Aston Martin, but it does nothing. For those of us who like acting, Judi Dench. For those who like screeching, Alan Cumming. For those who like shampoo, Pierce Brosnan.

THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN: impressive, warped villainy. Even though his scheme is rubbish and he just becomes yet another badhat in a base – GoldenEye living up to the Bond norm of too much plot but not enough story – Trevelyan is a good idea even if

it tails off very quickly into clobbering and sneering and nothing new. Nice idea to have that personal connection between him and Bond, reasonably well-mirrored in the Natalya / Boris relationship, although the flirting between 00s 6 and 7 is more likely to result in rumpage-pumpage. Shame he drifts into snarly and boring as there was capacity for sympathy for the chap; sod that, here comes a fight. Xenia's delightful, Boris less so and poor old Ourumov gets forgotten about which is a shame as his face was just *mad*.

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME: spectacle. Certainly (although it does feel made-for-home-video enjoyment given an abundance of indoors chatter) but there's ambition on show with the magnificent opening stunts, nice stuff around Monte Carlo and the clever use of St Petersburg and Watford so that it's hard to tell which is the run-down grothole that merits a tank driving through it, and which is St Petersburg. Some of the modelwork may not withstand being fitting memorial to Mr Meddings and it's hard to work out how the Cuba base fits together but on the whole it looks posh and expensive and a massive improvement on the previous go, overdose of filters notwithstanding.

MOONRAKER: not sure what conclusion I came to with Moonraker's 007th minute, given that it was a title sequence; for that matter, so was For Your Eyes Only. Insofar as they told us anything about the nature of the titles, GoldenEye hammers chunks out of them with a massive hammer. The titles are funny, weird, cheeky, have something to say and still stack up eighteen years later. The song may as well be called "Bond Song Generic" although one suspects it's a piss-take given its shoving-in of the title without disclosure of a meaning. Never grasped who this GoldenEye is of whom Annie Mae chur-dles – patently addressing the name as if it were a person. Nor am I reconciled to who has been watching whom as a child; one reading

leads to dark waters, unexplored in the Bond series since 1981. Still, that four minutes, following a cracking opening sequence, could it be more BOND? And then we get an hour of Total Freud, which is cockerny rhyming slang for dangleberry. Not halleberry. Not at all.

OCTOPUSSY: dodgy special effects can undermine one's ambition. On the whole, GoldenEye doesn't distract from what it struggles to say by showing us something a bit off, and new effects tricks have been embraced. Not totally sold, though, on the freefalling after the 'plane, which is a shame as the shot with the bike spinning off the mountain is a cracker. The plughole gurgling at the end is a curiosity but by then the film's gone down the drain too so it puts the pathetic in fallacy.

A VIEW TO A KILL: look, kids, we're down wiv ya, yeah, we're modern-shaped persons, not some...um... relic of the Cold War. We're going to say the words Sexual Harassment, Internet and CNN. We're modern – look! Bungy-jumping! – and... er... carrrds. Will this do?

THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS: don't be afraid to manhandle your lead-in man. Nope, not even going near that one.

LICENCE TO KILL: sometimes it can veer into making Bond look inadvertently ridiculous. Strikes me that the first half of GoldenEye is an exercise in advertently ridiculing Bond which presumably the second half is meant to rescue. Does it? Does it *really*? Hmm. Introducing a new Bond by blaring out that he's past it is an interesting tactic because there's a danger everyone's going to agree if you haven't disproved it by the end in any convincing manner. It also gives the new incumbent a limited shelf-life, which is a bonus I guess.

GOLDENEYE: we'll have a gay old time. Lot of silliness at the time of Casino Royale's release about young Mr Craig underdressed in

swimmers and looking utterly butterly, being so engarbed to appeal to gentlemen of the enthusiastic persuasion. Whilst that may be, the 007th minute of GoldenEye (polari for a particular orifice) is blatantly screaming, puts the anus in Janus and cannot be shown in schools lest it be deemed to promote the use of handguns.

A summary of much that has gone before, if starved of Bond for six years it works as a reintroduction. It was ruthlessly designed as that. An event, a mutual appreciation between film-makers and the *cinema* audience. If, however, the most you've done is removed the previous one from the DVDolater (and smashed it, enraged) and sat your puckered hide down in front of this, you might feel cheated that so little is original, left wondering why you bothered losing thirty hours of your life on the previous sixteen when it could have been done in the span of this film's two. Don't worry: it's not as if *you* were going to achieve anything meaningful in that time wasted, is it?

Tremendously appealing product, audience and shareholders both satisfied. Hellishly manipulative, though and waking from the dream generates a nagging suspicion that however good a time it was you'd had, something went wrong and you feel fiddled-with. Used. Still, that can be fun every so often, as long as you take precautions, like not telling the wife.

As a Bond film, it's arguably brilliant, one of the very best when it's not engaging in self-hatred, and it would have been a disaster had it not been as it was bolted together to be a Good James Bond Film. Less successful are its attempts to be a Good Any Other Sort Of Film, Like A Proper One With Acting And Characters And Sustained Themes. The cressy garnish flourishes of penny-dreadful psychoanalysis that spasmodically try to elevate GoldenEye *don't work*, as they cannot change Bond in any way: he sails through, as flatline a cipher of an invulnerable tailor's dummy as ever. If the idea was

that the world may have changed but James Bond hasn't then that's reassuring and fun for a *one-off*, but sustaining subsequent interest in Bond as a character rather than a blitz of suits, watches, catch-phrases, explosions, cars and guns (you write a better synopsis of Tomorrow Never Dies), was hobbled.

It's not a case of having nowhere to go after Die Another Day; there was nowhere left after GoldenEye. Though not without their frailties, the three Craigs have attempted to be Proper Films first and James Bond films incidentally, lobbing juicy stuff at us about terrorism being no match for the violence of betrayal (ooh), revenge not being cool and violent but actually grimy, unsatisfying and sour (vair Fleming) and, er, whatever Skyfall thinks it's up to (Help the Aged?), whereas GoldenEye proves that stapling a few ostensible deeper moments onto the usual windy balloon is ultimately risible and it simply goes bang.

As an event in 1995, though, throwing the jaded crowd a Madeleine every five minutes, feeding off their benevolence to the tatty majesty of the Bond series, guzzling on their goodwill, wisely – at the time -choosing to be seen to be competing only with its own forebears and our indulgence of them, by crikey it worked. The emotions surrounding, and the consequences of, GoldenEye are stronger and more meaningful than the film itself. We're still here. Series saved, luck and fate combining nicely thank you very much.

Job done. *Bit too well.*

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH
MINUTE OF TOMORROW NEVER DIES. JACQUES
STEWART WATCHED YOU FROM THE SHADOWS AS
A CHILD. THE MAGISTRATE'S NOT IMPRESSED.



TOMORROW NEVER DIES

SCIENCE FACT! #18

Tomorrow never dies. Yesterday smells of Dijon mustard. Week last Thursday? Totally spatula. March 2003 had its ups and downs. Don't go outside next Tuesday. Seriously. Your birthstone is pebble. We're not joking about Tuesday.

Lost at sea.

Adrift.

Torpedoed by GoldenEye leaving little more to say credibly about this James Bond, but kept afloat by ~~creating great art~~ screwing money out of us, here come the James Bond Wilderness Years, a.k.a. the ones that aren't GoldenEye, a.k.a. did he do any others? Oh, I remember, aren't they meant to be dreadful?, a.k.a Them Other Brosnan Films What Got Washed Up.

Flotsam, jetsam, any old junk, grimly oily, bloatydead in the water and looking like they smell real bad, grim rubbery matter one's Labrador – not a fussy eater – masticates and subsequently resplendently emits from a smorgasbord of damp orifices; directionless, noisy, violent but unarguably vivid, memorable and, in their own way, expressive art.

A musing. [N.B. Read not as “amusing” – wrong place. “Amusing” is telling one’s offspring that Hodgepile (guinea pig) has been eaten by the dog. “A musing” is contemplating how children can contain so much crying. A further musing is whether this will cause the ghastly sprogs horrendous trauma for years to come. “Amusing” is knowing it will]. My musing is whether Tomorrow Never Dies – the series’ most apparently superficial enterprise, an achievement given solid competition – would be missed were it not to exist. A secondary musing is whether art needs a purpose in order to “be”.

I’m not wasting time on the second one; a pretentious stumble through misunderstood theories. To experience that, watch the aggressively emetic *The World is Not Enough*. However, the first thought may justify a brief (-ish; it’s me) ponder. Tomorrow Never Dies does seem to have a reputation of... actually, what is its reputation?

A perception, insofar as it gets “discussed”, is that it’s insufficiently substantial a follow-up to the mighty GoldenEye (everyone curtsy, do) and nowhere near as polarising / justifiably derided as the two films that followed it. No strong emotions generated. A pity; it *now* seems the most coherent of the Brosnan Bonds. Without doubt, it’s the most consistent in tone. As a dog returns to its vomit, Tomorrow Never Dies merits another lukewarm chewing.

Unlike GoldenEye, it conducts itself without wobblingly tackling a question it cannot answer other than on a pitifully superficial basis and then, one uneventful hour in, giving up. Unlike TWINE, it doesn’t contrive pointlessly and alienate, and bore, and annoy, and sicken, and turn one against every human being on Earth, and generally smell. Unlike DUD, it’s not mouth-dryingly dreadful at a sub-atomic level. Some masochists wanted a fifth one. Yikes. Still, Tomorrow Never Dies burbles along merrily, much blows up from the start, an honest approach rather than deceiving one into sitting

through a turgid hour of sub-sixth form “deep feems”, and its jokes are the funny side of stupid. Even if not apparently operating at beyond-petri-dish-depth, perhaps its success is that this is the right level for those participating to do so with trace elements of conviction. Everything’s a hoot, Mr Brosnan seems relaxed without being called upon to do more than wear clothes, and certainly not “act”, and he copes, save when called upon to struggle with a foreign tongue (a.k.a. Danish. And German. And English), and it’s still zippy, its longeurs hanging around no longer than they need to. Even if it boils down yet again to a routine gunfight in a moist shed, it’s over mercifully quickly.

That’s negative praise, and *Tomorrow Never Dies* deserves better than winning (easily) by default of not being as terrible as the other Broffal. Amazingly, there are moments of diverting novelty, some achievement for Bond Umpteen, and in not *trying* as disastrously / tediously as the films either side of it to SHOUT RUBBISH in their search for a “story”, *Tomorrow Never Dies*’ incidental subtleties are of greater interest even if, again, they don’t really work.

In ignoring Bond, he’s tedious, some notions germinate even if guns booming prevent them blooming. In particular, Carver’s cuckolded jealousy is beyond the usual insipid rot of James Bond stealing a baddie’s bit o’ fluff and the villain going “Tsk!”, boringly. That Bond wades in and wrecks Carver’s marriage – OK, it’s orders, but it’s not as if Bond objects – does plump the dynamic between the two men (a bit), giving potential for one of the better-written villains, one with a credible emotional grudge (more than 006’s grief for parents who died at least ten years before he was conceived).

Even if Mr Pryce’s portrayal erupts into pantomime, Carver is a novel slant. British villain, for a start. Trevelyan doesn’t count; no-one in Britain talks like that. Additionally, have we had a married

bad guy before? Whilst his scheme would bring, at best, transitory glee, it's fresh to have a villain driven by fear of humiliation. More so than with many villains, usually Bond's "equal", accordingly equally dull, here we had a chance to see *how irritating* Bond is if you're not as super, especially when he keeps calling you by your first name in a *really* condescending manner. If one accepts such potential for this interpretation of Carver, much of what Bond does amounts to little more than indiscriminate picking on a weaker man. Boo. Not nice.

A chance to show the impact Bond has on a mentally frail chap is, however, blown. Not by Mr Pryce's grinsomely cackledaft performance, Rupert Murdoch meets The Hooded Claw meets a badly coked-up Darth Sidious on a right old binge. If more muted, he would be sympathetic, risking the scales falling from the collective eye and exposing James Bond as a nasty, sneering bully in a flashy car and a shop-bought suit, who'll nick yer missus. They probably weren't ready to risk showing that.

I know that's where they had Daniel Craig in the first of Casino Royale's many, *many* hours, but that was a man in development, who grows out of it, adding layers rather than peeling them back to find hollow dregs. The Brosnan Bond is ostensibly the developed man, and all this amounts to is another example of the producers having a decent idea – Bond isn't nice and a bit of a git, knows this and might be tormented by it – but finding themselves lumbered trying to execute it with a locked-down leading character imprisoned by years of bland misuse– no he's not, he's smashing, he's always been smashing, we want what we think James Bond is and you're going to give it to us and we need him to sell us aspirational lifestyles and watches and tea-towels – a concept that cannot be used to demonstrate what they might want to say. They did not learn from

this and instead tried to fight it, so it gets much worse next time out. You can't make the nasty bits look convincing without being brave enough to destroy the canker built up over so many years. With a hard-shelled, unyielding character, The James Bond We All Know And Love, and realising that such "development" will look ridiculous, the rescue plan is to make the villain so boo hiss cape-twirly that it distracts from exposing how futile the attempt was. In TWINE, badhats mopey and subdued and less diverting, the hopelessness of what is being done with the character of Bond becomes more marked, becomes part of the plot, becomes a total impediment to logic and likeable entertainment.

That several ideas that struggle to breathe in the Brosnan films seem to be revived in the Craigs can't be accidental (picking on politically-connected weakling Greene / picking on politically-connected weakling Carver, lots of TWINE turning up more engagingly in Skyfall etc). For Casino Royale onwards they had Bond where they needed him to be, showing the character stuff as building Bond up, not breaking him down. Perhaps they now an actor capable of delivering such things, but what's going on in the Brosnan unfantatsic four was impossible for anyone to deliver. Accordingly, it is not Mr Brosnan's fault that the James Bond he was required to present us with is, simultaneously, all over the place and nowhere. DUD's pitiable identity crisis is a metaphor for Bond himself during this misconceived period (a bitter joke at the audience's expense; a cruelly honest film much misunderstood? Or still a big bucket of bottoms?). Mr Brosnan waited to be Bond for so long, and they gave him this Bond to be. Be careful what you wish for.

The relationship between Paris and Bond, intermittently acted, is presumably meant to give us Bond reflecting on the consequences of his actions, be it the initial abandonment, their inevitable coming-to-

gether (fnarr) and her death; however, because he's The James Bond We All Know And Love, it's too much for the hardwired character to absorb. And – look! – now he has a remote controlled car to play with. Nothing is made of it, for nothing can be. He's James Bond; he loves and leaves 'em, a pity if it grieves 'em, Mr Snore Snore Meh Meh. Immature CraigBond staring at a dead Solange – basically the same character as Paris, basically the same idea – guilt all over his head, a bloodied soul and notably not chewing her shoulder – more emotional oomph, there. It works in Casino Royale because he is a fledgling;. With Brosnan Bond already the full turkey, it doesnae. Where they go with Bond after Skyfall is going to be interesting, although with three successful films exposing his flaws, that he is still tormented underneath it all is at least potentially credible.

Fortunately for Tomorrow Ne'er Dies, it's because of its surface distractions of fightin' and exploderin' and less punched-into-the-gob failed emotin' than the other Brosnans, that make it easier to enjoy. Its gentle pokes at greater meaning, when the noisiness allows them through, are incidental without being critical incident necessary to propel whatever plot there is, which would have made them more significant to the purpose of the film, and more culpable in their failures when they don't work. This is why it convinces more than GoldenEye and entertains much more than TWINE. On a level of letting it eat time as one fills one's face, it strikes me that TND is the closest the Brosnans got to the aspirational idiom of Sixties Bond; slick, sharp, swift, cheeky, light of both heart and conscience, and *that* Bond's last hurrah. Albeit dedicated to Mr Broccoli, it feels more like one with the extravagant hand of Saltzman conducting it; no bad thing. DUD may have tried to recapture the series' youth with its shambolic referencing but those dragged it down to a particular Hell where it's more than welcome to burn.

Tomorrow Never Dies still looks fresh, even if in showing (ahem) “techno-terrorism” (wh’evarrh), big spacey satellites and a British navy amounting to three ships, it could have become very dated very quickly. Only occasionally does its vintage show, in the baffling absence of any reference to the internet (odd, given the “plot”, and when GoldenEye’s “characters” kept screeching “modem!” and “spike!” (whatever that is) as if they’d discovered fire), a telephone the size of a shoe and the only memorable character from the Brosnage – Dr Kaufmann – handling a weird plastic rectangular thing that takes one several seconds to recognise as a video cassette. He might as well be holding scrolls of hieroglyphics and jabbing at them with flint.

Admittedly, the headless, virtually plotless rushing arind, light relief from searching for a soul that isn’t there, isn’t something one wants every time. It would bore, in much the same way as one cannot crave every Bond to ask us to bear witness to two hundred million dollars being spent on Quantum of Solace’s even swifter, but considerably more-thought provoking, and satisfyingly Fleming-esque, examination of how the world is rubbish and revenge is unsatisfactory and provides no succour except as a diversion for the psychopathic and corrupt (in all corners) to muck about to no beneficial end whatsoever, so they might as well destroy each other. Such enterprises do not a series make; but they may sustain it, especially given their excessively drawn-out and tonally muddled predecessors. Jiggering it up proves harmless in the long run. This is why there are 23 of them. Just as nine hours of Casino Royale 2 in 2008 would have been creative withdrawal and a misguided statement of intention, not so much losing opportunity as banishing it through choice, so to a lesser extent the redirection of the plodderyness and puddingdough of GoldenEye, into brisk exercise

and brassy, slick violence in this one, was solid thinking. The initial reaction to *Tomorrow Never Dies* – I well-remember thinking it – of “Is that it, then?” was naïve. What they show us, as in 2008, is the breadth of the series in different styles, how much of an improvement in vision this is over the ladles of complacent, reheated RodgeStodge in the 1980s and how one doesn’t need to go on for blimmin’ hours if you can tell your tale perfectly adequately in fewer.

Aspirationally, would you *want* to be the GoldenEye Bond – barbershop-photo-haired and hoarsely traumatised by the death of your Special Companion (what rumours?), and every five minutes yet another person calls you a redundant git? The TWINE Bond – a jawflooringly thick, mood-encrusted, easily-deceived and manipulated simpleton, trapped in the body of a right old idiot? The DUD Bond – um... an attempt, with double surfing and techno-row, to disguise portliness and creakery: some sort of Big Phat Jabba, then.

The *Tomorrow Never Dies* Bond – if you accept him as being James Bond and ignoring doomed-to-fail attempts at stapling an emotion onto him – has a grand old time, wears a lovely caramel-coloured coat, nicks the villain’s wife, blows lots and lots and lots (and lots) up and patently gives not one damn. Totally clotheshorse, totally empty, totally Brosnan, and, yeah, totally brill. Blessed relief to be able to watch it when surrounded either side by films fartsacked down with much moping and pretend introspection and embarrassingly dead-behind-the-eyes “performances” several awards beyond the reach of those trying to carry them off, trying to engage one on another level and failing, badly. Shallow it may be, but at least it can be taken as consistently so, brazenly so, and for that I admire it. It can be embraced as thin and just getting on with it,

rather than suffering the fate of its immediate three brethren in being toecurlingly exposed as anorexic very early on yet continuing for frickin' hours in heartlessly, noisily, subjecting us to "meaning" and "character" and "well, at least he's not singing, I suppose", flapping about in washed-up deaththroes whilst the choking, soapy grime drowns them.

So yes: I would miss it, hugely; more than I would have expected to. This doesn't mean that it's objectively any good; just better than a few Bond films, and easily the most enjoyable one since Moonraker. Before they rebooted and started making proper films, that's a more than acceptable achievement with all the straightjackets that came with "James Bond".

I suggested that the film doesn't court opinion, but that's not entirely true (i.e. not true at all, i.e. a lie). Having taken a break from spewing this piece of rubbish (a house to move, a mother-in-law to bury, a guinea-pig to feed to a dog), I did have a sashay back through the views expressed about Tomorrow Never Dies on the Commanderbond fora, such as could be found and such of those found that could be found to be literate. Something that came across in all three posts was that the humour was cruder, especially the badinage between M and Second XI Hockey Captain Money Penny. Perhaps. This business about "pumping" is stunningly unsubtle, but then "Pussy Galore" isn't the pinnacle of deft wit – whatever his strengths, Fleming's humour remains in the teenage dormitory (he's not an amusing writer, is he? Perhaps we don't need him to be) – and none of "Holly Goodhead", "Chew Mee" nor the entire script of Diamonds are Forever are cunning, linguistically.

The potency of the observation may lie in the novelty that most of the filth emanates not, as one has come to expect / dread, from

Bond listlessly sexpestering his way around the planet and leering at anything with a pulse – BrosBond doesn't give much quip here, probably out of breath, poor old sod – but pretty much every other speaking character is zinging off barbed one-liners like there's no tomorrow (which there must be, because it Never Dies, science fact). M, especially, seems to have toned down from Utter Heartless Frownface Cowbitch Good Legs last time out to Nice Eyes Guttermouthed Cheeky Headmistress Ooh Miss Just Said "Balls" To Another Teacher, She Did. True, it's not much like Bernard Lee – and certainly not like Lickle Bobby Brown and his Eyebrows of Disgruntlement – to indulge in blatant smut, but that would be to ignore the subtext of Lee's M sucking on that deep shag-filled pipe of his as he gave Bond yet another dressing-down. Shooting from the quip, some of it's super, some of it isn't – Dr Kaufmann, oh yes; Carver jiggling abite kung-fu like, oh no – but at least they have tried to surround Bond with diverting characters / disguise the fact he's not interesting by giving great flippin' wedges of the fun bits over to others.

Nowhere is the erosion of focus away from Bond more evident than in the pre-credits sequence, James Bond's running about being incidental to the reactions of others to James Bond's running about. The joke of this sequence – the MoD squad, M and her posse of bitchy jokesmiths are watching a James Bond film and, like us, wondering what's going on, which one's James Bond, why it's so noisy and when it's going to end. It's a funny idea, although it does little to diminish Bond as an invulnerable ubermensch – White Knight, dear God – that everyone's in lurrrrve with; competing with this sort of thing, the ostensible emotional frailty labelled "interesting peeled-back layers" cannot work. Again, fecund opportunity for an assessment of how Bond's behaviour affects these folks – is this

the first time we have had a M witnessing and thereby contemplating what s / he has unleashed on the world with 007? – and again, even if it doesn't come through (vs. M's angry reaction to Bond's assault on the embassy in *Casino Royale* betraying her culpability) its failure to take hold doesn't disrupt the purely visceral enjoyment of watching Bond blow up a machine gun truck in a very beautiful blue / orange way.

The ostensible grey area in having M witness all the violence is only a dabble, of course – after all, these are Bad Peepels at this Terrorist Arms Bazaar (you can tell it was 1997; what's on sale here you can get on eBay) who deserve to die, rather than innocents being injured by an immature agent on the rampage. You couldn't have *The Bond We All Know And Love* go ape in an embassy; it would look curious, as curious as not having the Americans involved in this Khyber Pass operation, but terrsm hadn't been invented by 1997, so fair enough.

So, up to the 007th minute, we've had Colin Salmon performing much the role I have to adopt when watching a Bond film with my mother – telling a grumpy old boot what's going on as simply as possibly whilst still trying to keep up with it myself – and also stumbling into the consciousness as a potential Bond himself. A good-looking, well-spoken British actor, looks crisp in a suit. He must have been too tall. Pretty much everyone else on show seems to have been drafted in from Sunday teatime British sitcoms, which doesn't make any of them particularly credible, and leaves one waiting for the preposterously accented policeman from 'Allo 'Allo to turn up; my mistake, there he is, stealing a 'plane. Gordon Ramsay sets off a missile, then can't destroy it, and everyone struggles to be heard over the ridiculous music. Although in several places during the rest of the film, what Young Mr Arnold brung us is splendid, evocative and

fun, here every single moment – even the most mundane – is ramped up into something hilariously accentuated as Oh No! Perhaps that should be Tomorr-oh no!

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 TOMORROW NEVER DIES

Tomorr-oh no! Bond's finger is on the trigger. Let's hope he fires the right missiles otherwise this could "make Chernobyl look like picnic". With Three Mile Island Dressing.

Tomorr-oh no! That truck blows up absolutely beautifully! Blue! Orange! All told, it's a more colourful and visually arresting film than GoldenEye and the camera moves around in a tremendously fluid manner, especially in this pre-titles bit. Super.

Tomorr-oh no! Bond's been spotted!

Tomorr-oh no! The co-pilot is waking up! Not surprising really; the music's going bonkers!

Tomorr-oh no! Bond obliterates a Jeep, slightly brutally! Hmm.

Tomorr-oh no! Here comes the missile!

Tomorr-oh no! That's a really weird-looking un-flat runway, isn't it? I'm sure I read that it's thousand of feet up in the Alps somewhere. Ryanair probably call it "Paris".

Tomorr-oh no! There's been no dialogue for a bit! Good.

Tomorr-oh no! Here comes the other 'plane!

Tomorr-oh no! The pilot looks a bit like Bond so he's not that easy to distinguish!

Tomorr-oh no! The other 'plane is blocking the runway!

Tomorr-oh no! Bond sees it, sighs, and this makes his eyes go in slightly different directions! It's most amusing.

Tomorr-oh no! Rather lovely crane shot over the back of the red-tipped 'plane! This is more of a Tomorr-oh yes!

Tomorr-oh no! Only thirty seconds to impact! Hmmm... quite a long thirty seconds...

Tomorr-oh no! Oh Judi / Will you be rude-ee / With me / Judee?...anyway, she's looking all a-tense and Colin's so horrified at what he's watching / waking up to his tokenism that it's made his headset fall off. The man to Colin's right is so excited he's fallen asleep and, on the balcony, a blue-shirted type is saluting. Bring on the MoD budget cuts, frankly.

Tomorr-oh no! Here comes the missile! Still!

Tomorr-oh no! Bond pulls a determined face, like he's trying to work out a colossal trump!

Tomorr-oh no! The plane blows off! Unless it was Bond. Unfortunate editing juxtaposition that, at least to the childish mind (hi).

Tomorr-oh no! Here comes the 'plane! Is it a model? Pretty good one if so. If it's real, it does rather remind one that this is a Bond film and they do this sort of stuff for real. Bless them for it.

Tomorr-oh no! Bond is all (Remington) steel-ey eyed and appears to have overcome his gastric discomfort! Must have just been a touch of inderjaggers.

Tomorr-oh no! The co-pilot has woken up! Looking around in blank-eyed confusion. He could get a job at the MoD.

Tomorr-oh no! Bond looks a bit cross!

Tomorr-oh no! Yellow 'plane hurtles up, red 'plane cruises down!

THE 007TH MINUTE

Tomorr-oh no! Here comes the missile! Um, still.

Tomorr-oh no! Here (still) comes the red ‘plane! How long is this weirdo-runway?

Tomorr-oh no! Bond is looking really quite narked now!

Tomorr-oh no! Tug yer joystick! That’s what all this exploderating has been about, after all.

Tomorr-oh no! It’s take off!

Tomorr-oh no! The music’s gone mental! Bond’s ‘plane rises from the ground and...

Tomorr-oh no! The missile’s (finally) arrived, after its leisure tour of pleasant snow-capped valleys! Oddly, Bond’s ‘plane still appears to be on the ground, meaning an additional Tomorr-oh no! He rather unwisely appears to have landed it, just as...

Tomorr-oh no! The missile explodes!

0.07.00

An exemplar of the series’ propensity to go amusingly OTT, cleverly executed, the 007th minute of Tomorrow Never Dies might not add much new, apart perhaps from sustained decibels. Thankfully, not all of it continues at this tempo – it would exhaust – and there are several notable highlights following on, namely:

A crow shrieks.

The Carver Media group logo appears in the inevitable blue / orange thang (what is it with that?).

Gwilson speaks!

Oxford (lovely, lovely Oxford) gets to be the first British city outside London to be shown in a Bond film – science fact. Good call.

Pierce Brosnan gives German a try. It's gratuitously violent.

An old man wears a horrendous scarlet jacket.

The more Kandi-Lou elements of *The Family of Man* are indulged with stuff like "station-break".

A lovely bemuscle blond psychopathic German lad sets the fight against national gender stereotypes back several decades; an equally lovely Chinese female super-agent compensates for this and very nearly almost gets close to working.

Dr Kaufmann steals the show, not that this was difficult. Shame he had to die; would have been a far more welcome returning character than the execrable Jack Wade and the fatuous Zukovsky.

Bond flings a boringly-shaped car at pedestrians.

Several bits get filmed in slow-motion, presumably to make the enterprise the length of a feature film and not just the sort of rushed adverts for watches and motorbikes that would appear in the aforementioned station-break.

There's a smashing bit when Bond and Wai-Lin kiss underwater in a blue / orangey way as things blow up above them.

It all ends with a cracking Robert Maxwell joke and an insanely camp end song and we are invited to put aside the nagging thought that we have been subjected to a film about how wicked a media company is in manipulating what we see (buy BMWs), produced not by some yurt-based anti-establishment anarchist collective as you might therefore think (buy watches), but by a media company hurling product placement at us in a, gosh, yes, totally non-manipulative way (buy stock in MGM, please, we're about to go bust yet again, look how we have salted the exhausted mine with gold dust, please buy it? Oh dear, too late).

THE 007TH MINUTE

Because it doesn't try so, so hard to be something it cannot become, it's substantially the most rewarding Brosnan Bond as a piece of simple entertainment. (Mostly) amusing without being laughable, energetically and engagingly filmed, time has been kind. Give the people what they underappreciate. The best Brosnan film on its own merits, in comparison it leaves the others distinctly undelicious. In retrospect, Bond's teasing of Carver about a capacity to produce tortuously bad entertainment may have been... well, it may have been a little unwise.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH. JACQUES STEWART IS IN A
PUDDLE ON THE FLOOR, WAITING FOR YOU TO RETURN.
AND MOP IT UP. AND STOP THE DOG DRINKING IT.



THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

SCIENCE FACT! #19

Diseases as amusing as Stockholm Syndrome include Nigeria Nose (one's left nostril refuses to work until recognised as a self-determining autonomous region), Cardiff Catarrh (it gets really quite nippy in Cardiff) and Los Angeles Tedium (contracted simply by going there).

A limited concept stretched to its umpteenth circumnavigation of one joke, becoming bloaty, self-indulgent and unfocused; churned out regardless.

As for *The World is Not Enough*, submitting it to a 007th minute could be the unreadable in pursuit of the unwatchable. This may become as turgid as the film it gnaws. I could claim that this is “meta”, if I understood what that was.

Right.

Must I? Cold-blooded murder is a filthy business. I hope you're not after "constructive"; construction isn't exactly my speciality. Quite the opposite, in science fact. Still, there's no point in living if you can't smugly slag off witless entertainment with zero accountability for its failure to meet whimsical criteria. It must give me pleasure. Remember... *pleasure*? What brings you pleasure? A pleasure you'd confess to the police or your granny? Something you'd tell the meltypops choccydrop eyes of your doggy-woggy without abusing its uncomprehending trust, even though the wretched hound is only waiting for you to fall downstairs again so it can eat your face.

Let's assume that you haven't found this balderdash by searching for "abused granny doggy confess police" on a wage-cage colleague's computer at your salary-farm, avoiding whatever you "do", marking time until a yumlunch of low-calorie wet chemicals and (avert your soul) bought cake. Assume, let's, that giddywhirl of super isn't your day, this only [x] day of [y] 20[zz] you'll ever live, so a reasonable inference must be that something that has given you pleasure is James Bond.

Whyever not? Breadth of shapes, heights, perversions, fatuous belief systems and smells that the human race tolerates, within the films there must be something that appeals, even if not all of them will, save to a hardened deluded core expressing love via the medium of defamatory whining. If the lazy myth were true, that Bonds are the same thing 23 times, we would never have had 23 times.

They're designed (some say cynically) (N.B. I am one of "some") and (ruthlessly) targeted so that core ingredients – Gunbarrel! Explosions! Jiggaboo! Weak jokes! Cars! Guns! Beastly furr-ners! Grr! Cackle! BOOM! DahDah d'DAHHH durdurdur – the rot of continuity, routine that draws in "Bond fans" however much they snivel, the stuff those "fans" neglect to admit impedes the series' longev-

ity and continued interest for the passing filmgoer – all that tedious dross can be hidden in films *actually* aimed at those who liked Shaft or Enter the Dragon or Jason Bourne. What is Moonraker other than trying to entice fans of the Jeddy, or whatever it was. Arty-Deety, that gang. And Nazis. Diamonds are Forever? Supporters of ennui-dripped sneering and Manfrockery. GoldenEye's patently for the Undemanding Deaf and Die Another Day for the Undemanding Dead.

These aren't made "for the fans", locked in their anonymous begrudgery. These are made "for the fans of other things because we want lovely money off them, too". Taken one look at, say, George Lucas' billions and thought – let's devise a film for those accepting such concepts as an elected queen, must be pretty thick, lure them in with equally stilted dire-logue and an invisible car: no less ridiculous. This doesn't always mean appalling results. If Bonds were actually made "for the fans" they would be impenetrable to the casual viewer who doesn't give two hoots whether Bond was married, nor that the Skyfall car cannot be the Casino Royale one nor, as it turns out, the colour of Bond's hair or where a gunbarrel is. Where the producers try direct continuity – Quantum of Solace the obvious example – the sequel aspect is its weakest element. Would civilians coming to watch The New Bond Film have expected spending ninety minutes trying to remember a film they think they saw two years previously, oh she *died* didn't she, I remember now, I didn't expect a memory test, I just wanted diversion from the kids and the perpetual threat of redundancy, what do you mean that's the end? Bit odd. It just encouraged the more demented "fans" to whine that Bond isn't wearing the same suit, has lost weight and doesn't seem that upset. That way lies Star Trek. Bring on an impossible Aston Martin in a London lock-up and make a billion dollars instead. Even implicit continuity can be awful; but that's the next film's problem.

Insofar as the Brosnans demonstrate this lust for grooming beyond those with a Pavlovian reaction to a gunbarrel slapped on any old rubbish, already got *them*, we have Tomorrow Never Dies' turbo-action, DUD's Pokemon-strosity and GoldenEye made for those who half-remember bits of Bond films they might have seen on the telly but couldn't put a name to.

Which leaves... this.

If the theory holds, the conclusion is that there are organisms that feeble telenovela The World is Not Enough was devised to capture. Capture's an idea, certainly. Ideally with nets, spears, tasers, CS gas, many grumpy dogs, several particularly splintery planks with rusty nails sticking out of them and a portable guillotine. When I find them, I *will* kill them. Actually, no, perhaps they've suffered enough, but maybe not as much as they should. Why Eon thought it wise to lure the daytime soap opera crowd and feed them their hearts' desires of stiff melodrama – smelodrama? – unappealing locations and ludicrous performances, defeats me. Presumably the last interest group yet to have “their” Bond film; even paedos have For Your Eyes Only.

Ooh, “TWINE”. Cool. Twine: hardness, tension. *Yeah*. Tries so, so hard to be about more than bikinis, bullets, bombs and BOOM. Those who would advocate that the Craigs have introduced a level of pretension that ill-suits an essentially throwaway series of wormfart significance, can't have watched this one (although, as a judgment call, can't fault them for that). A taut thriller about betrayal and its consequences, with a wet T-shirt jigglecheb competition. Hmm, can't be right. A taut thriller about betrayal and its consequences, with a frickin' moron of a leading character who has (hee hee hee) X-ray perveyspecs. Nope. *Tricky*. A taut thriller about betrayal and its consequences, with buzz-saw helicopters and weak puns every

thirteen seconds and Goldie administering “acting”. Nope. A taut thriller about betrayal and its consequences, where the betrayals are either a) historical, unseen and poorly described or b) without convincing impact and, accordingly, the consequences of both prove shruggable. A taut thriller about betrayal and its consequences that seems to have been directed by different people who never met to glue two divergent but equally poor films together. Compared to this, the Niven farce is a study in narrative cohesion. A taut thriller about betrayal and its consequences that, once the pre-credits ends, is flabby, momentum-free and tired.

Perhaps this TWINE’s tension is the type symptomatic of panic, cold feet and a lack of confidence. In wanting not to look silly now that Austin Powers had grooved into view and taken *very* mild, fond swipes of limited amusement, this film’s thunderous po-face is all the more risible, a teenage strop, only drawing greater attention to this Bond being ill-equipped to carry baggage convincingly. If you try to do something for which this iteration of James Bond isn’t prepared, it’s not a surprise that the nailing of character tics onto the invulnerable super-agent doesn’t render him layered, dimensional and conflicted; instead, insipid, confused and under-educated. Ooh, my hero.

One thing it does answer is GoldenEye’s question – is “James Bond” relevant? Whilst GoldenEye blithely went “Lalala not listening, don’t argue, course he is”, that cannot hold when presented with this. He’s not the same here as in GoldenEye; accordingly, that Bond must have been irrelevant after all. Significant (cough) story shifts in TWINE depend on alteration in the Bond “character”. Laudable that he’s not cruising along blowing things up, but the traits exposed are new to both him and us. Inexplicable flaws in Bond are critical to the narrative, so when they don’t come off, the enterprise collapses. Ac-

cordingly, TWINE is vital to the series, demonstrating even more explicitly than GoldenEye the new producers' ambition— Bond's character pushing plot rather than riding it — undermined by the materials with which to implement it — the Bond we, er, said was totally up to date two films ago...um, sorry, we were wrong about that and now we're stuck with him, damn. Look! Parahawks! Dunno why they appear, but they'll distract you from the prevailing weakness. Rework, reboot, result. TWINE grasping hopelessly for things beyond its reach shows that they had to go DefCon Craig level of radical shift to meet their vision. Carrying on like this would have wound up the party years ago. You can see why DUD is the way it is — they'd given up and just decided to raid the ideas bin for whatever was left, anything'll do, it really doesn't matter as long as we can spend one hundred and forty million dollars ruining everyone's day. Mrs Jim buying yet more shoes has much the same impact on me.

By the time TWINE's 007th minute flabs into view, we've had abundant Ford Escorts, we have Patrick Malahide in a role unbefitting his magnificence and therefore yet another lost Blofeld (c'mon, he would have been smashing), and Bond delivering some sort of quip or pun in practically everything he's given to say. Really, just stand aside from this for a moment — wouldn't this James Bond be really, *really* irritating, just firing off laboured, smart-alec cack every time he opens his cakehole. You'd want to smack him in that mouth of his, real dead hard. Nowhere in this film does he have what could amount to a regular conversation. He definitely could not say hello like a normal person (a bitterly cruel joke at the audience's expense, that). Everything's crafted; everything's hollow. Even the material that's supposed to be "serious" sounds glib, which is part of the problem. Whether banging on about Stockholm Syndrome or "plutonic" relationships or "perfectly rounded" figures — bloody hell, the

man's totally unbearable. Just. Stop. It. You. Complete. *Psychopath*. The (very nice) angry look Bond pulls at one point in the pre-credits was presumably juiced out by Young Master Apted whispering in his ear "...and we've decided to go with the name... Christmas... Roll Camera!", and Mr Brosnan contemplating the truly dreadful things he will be given to say as a result.

What *is* going on in this scene? Ultimately it's a means of getting the bomb into the SIS building – which relies on King being there, which relies on Bond not getting killed (for being very annoying), or arrested (for being very annoying), which relies on... I give up. Something about money 'n' reports 'n' ting. Again mistaking plot for story, it's a big bag of Yeah, Wharrev-Arh. More amusingly, the notion that a secret service is used as a private hit-team for politically connected resource-gobbling multinationals and those being a greater influence on agents' instructions and actions than any notion of being a servant of the people... nah, that'd never happen. It's an interesting line more courageously developed in *Quantum of Solace*, the courage being to ignore the cries that James Bond films were being corrupted with a liberal agenda from those who had missed the same idea here.

Channelling Connery (the patent boredom, anyway) in the line about hidden asssssheyts (an "exploding gun", Lord help us – do we really go in for this sort of thing any more?), there's a fight because there has to be one, it's the law, and Bond's life is ultimately saved by a sniper who could just as easily have killed all the silly persons in the room prior to Bond getting there, thus ensuring Bond would get his hands on the briefcase and saving him the life-threatening struggle with the "script". Bond jumps out of the window – is fun – and lands next to a very large West Highland Terrier – is art – and then the pre-credits sequence is over – is lies.

True, in comparison to the cunning stunts of *GoldenEye* and the big bangs of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, leaving matters here would look impotent. However, to make it all more spectacular and not go on for a hour, the banker sequence is patently edited into minimal narrative coherence and the boat chase – still the film’s best bit by a long, long chalk – also seems to have had the snip (the geography’s haywire, for a start). Yet it still goes on way too long. By the time Bond’s tumbling down the Dome towards intermittently convenient injury, one could forget how it came to that. Perhaps that’s best, though. Symptomatic of the film – plot fragile, here comes unconnected action that arguably doesn’t need to occur but we’re going to make you watch it; *be* entertained. Don’t think; just let it happen. Certainly not arguing that other Bonds are not as guilty, but with one that so explicitly sets out its stall to have a story, the lurches between the talky bits and the blowy-uppy bits are more exposed. It’s like watching an indifferent musical: you know there have to be songs, just as Bonds have to have explosions, but it still jars when singing / exploding breaks out for no logical reason.

Statutory blue / orange with the money and the scanner, masturbation wit with Miss Money Penny, lines landing like bricks, and a revelation that M and this King creature “read Law at Oxford”; must have been one of the very minor colleges, Brasenose or Queen’s or Trinity, one of those hives. Possibly the polytechnic, given the decision-making on show; arguably Lincoln. It’s only at this point that Thick Bond sits down and has a think about whassjushappened. Only now he’s wondering why someone wanted him out of the office alive with the money (albeit risking that by making him fight his way out, etc)? Only *now*? Not, say, on the ‘plane on the way home? No doubts at all that someone you don’t know but is prepared to kill wants you to take that big bag of money all the way

back to SIS (albeit assuming that you will do precisely that – but a safe assumption ‘cos *you’re a bit dense*). None? No suspicions at all, until now, getting pissed up with the boss? You, sir, are an idiot (Cambridge). Still, without Bond being really stupid, we would have been “deprived” witnessing:

Bond thinking he’s found a proto-Tracy – rich bitch of a morally dodgy father with whom she has ishoos (these are the only people Bond falls deeply for; what an odd man) – and instead “realising” at least a month after everyone else that she’s actually a proto-Blofeld (would have been better as a proto-Scaramanga, at least from a nip-pular perspective). This could have been a story worth telling and an interesting parallel to Tracy to show how wrong she could have gone when under the influence of a violent psychopath... erm... but the initial emotional attachment is woefully underdeveloped, so it doesn’t work;

Bond failing to contemplate who it is that benefits from King’s death – could it be someone within the family who has undergone trauma that Bond has seen, due to decision-making by her father that he is told about and who must be an insider and who reverses her father’s decisions immediately, which he witnesses? Gosh, it’s such a *mystery*, innit? Bet it’s... the unarmed security guy, so I’ll murder him. At least then I will be able to get insider. Fnarr.

Naval commander James Bond driving a submarine into a seabed.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

I do like M’s lampshades. Not a euphemism. Probably not a euphemism.

Right, so cosy chats with evidently dodgy CEOs – as a taxpayer that’s not what I expect the head of the secret service to be doing, al-

though that's because I'm hopelessly naïve. Corrupt old witch. All of this is your fault, and you get away with it. Rancid villainous hag.

So Bond (and the audience) are getting gened up on “the pipeline” and Bond (having the temerity to speak for the audience) proclaims this as “interesting”. No it's *not*, and how dare you assume this. It's not remotely interesting. Of all the laughable rubbish you've had to say so far, Thicko Bond, this is the worst. Again the plan comes down to “control of resources” – heartless, greedy and cynical grabbing by underhand means of all the gold / microchips / cocaine / television / oil / water / cinemagoers' cash.

No, Jamesey, it doesn't explain why someone would want you out of that office alive. Very little actually explains that. Why is this only crossing your mind *now*, you clown? Oh yes; if you had given it a moment's thought earlier, we wouldn't have the rest of the film. Oh, *good call*.

Hitting the booze seems a blessed release from having to think, I know, but it's uncouth to use one's fingers to grab the ice. The realisation about what's about to happen largely depends on Bond not having washed his hands since handling a stack of fifties that have been dipped in urea (urr). The mucky pup. Admittedly he didn't know that they're doused in hogwee, but still... you don't know where that money's been. Even if it has been freshly laundered (sorry).

“Moneypenny! Stop -King!” M's diction is failing (booze); you can't quite hear the “wan-“ in that second statement. If you think that's in questionable taste, bear in mind what they had poor Mr Brosnan and poor Ms Bond say about two minutes ago. Even if this is actually a direction to stop “the man of great integrity” from developing into “a man of substantially less bodily integrity”, query what Moneypenny could actually do – King left ages ago. Oh, here

he is, walking all over the SIS coat of arms, which is presumably a metaphor for how big business treats the security service. Can't think of any other reason why they would a) need to design this or b) put it on the floor or c) show him wandering over it just how he pleases. He deserves death, capitalist pusbag running-dog filth.

Out of the way, you extras! Here comes Bond! Oh look, Q. Now, if you have put yourself through some of the other 007th minutes (sorry) you'll be aware that I'm not too fond of Q and would advocate that the character exemplifies the worst of the Bond series – trotting out the same old bloody thing every time on the Broccoli Shopping List of Dull “because the audience likes it”, complacent old rubbish around which fragments of story are hung in a desperate attempt to distinguish one film from the other. What ultimately happened to Mr Llewelyn was tragic and the film's Q scenes here have a poignancy ill-served by John Cleese behaving like a gibbon and Q's concluding dialogue about “always” teaching Bond two things (the third was acting, but it proved futile); where did this “always” come from, then? Whilst it impacts in (sad) hindsight, I remember being very confused by this emoty-Q who now determines, like any bad teacher, that he has told his pupil things even when he patently has *not*. Perhaps he's trying a bit of Stockholm Syndrome on Bond. Wouldn't bother mate: he's stoopid. RIP Mr Llewelyn: on the evidence of what happens in the next film and Skyfall, you have proved irreplaceable. That it was deemed necessary to replace you is, though, a bit of an issue.

Ooh, a pile of lovely money. Personally I wouldn't get out of bed for such a paltry-looking sum, but hey ho. Bond is screaming “Stooooopppppp!”; still the proxy audience member, plainly. It *doesn't* stop. I'll apologise on the film's behalf.

Fings go bang – a load of money is completely blown, a splendid metaphor for a sorry little film – and the walls of MI6 are decorated a

fetching shade of Burnt Daddy. A big hole is blown in the front of the building and the skyfalls in. I suppose this is proof, if proof be needed (it be needed) that the Brosnan M and the Craig M are different women: how, realistically, can the same thing happen and have her still in charge? That the Skyfall explosion does not require dollops of contrivance to get the building to blow is arguably better, although as a demonstration of watertight narrative coherence that film's not much of an improvement over this one. More on that, "later".

On no! Someone has their red-dot thingy set on Bond, a someone who was entirely reliant on Bond's lack of personal hygiene meaning that he would guess what was up, chase after King and appear at that point. That's a high-odds accumulator bet if ever there was one. As the 007th minute reaches its end, we leave Bond poking his head above the ruins of the institution; deliberately metaphoric imagery, one suspects.

0.07.00

What does the 007th minute of TWINE represent, as an exemplar of a Bond series "feature"? Sometimes it gets too contrived for its own good? Sometimes the script is abject nonsense? Have to think of a positive... Well, I don't "have to" but it would be nice. It's a sunny day and...

...struggling. May have come up with something by the end.

As the rest of it stands, TWINE is a film in which a Weirdly-Voiced Hero, played in a over-mannered and stiffly stand-offish way that undermines demonstration of emotional conflict, a man both physically and mentally scarred when it suits and to the same extent not, when it suits more, goes up against The World's Greatest Terrorist, a most unlikely personage who gets his hands on a nuke and there's a shocking twist with a Duplicitous French Female Villain

that everyone else saw coming when she first opened her mouth but our Weirdly-Voiced Hero was so taken with her (unconvincingly quickly and totally inexplicably) that he comes across as a dangerous liability and a one-man exponent of daft.

T'riffic.

Breaking this down further, although it hardly needs my assistance to fall apart:

Weirdly-Voiced Hero is injured, and a bit past it if we're brutally honest, but this is ignored when expedient (= when fighting is required).

Weirdly-Voiced Hero improvises an abseil down a building. We see this from above. That we see it at all is a momentary thrill. This is about as exciting as it gets.

Potentially interesting sparky female character eventually – inevitably – turns into another subservient little helper by the end.

Despite all the build-up, all the talk, the final confrontation between Weirdly-Voiced Hero and The World's Greatest Terrorist is dull, basically "some thumping", resulting in a stultifyingly underwhelming death for The World's Greatest Terrorist. The more entertaining struggle is watching the Weirdly-Voiced Hero at war with the script and patently resenting the rubbish he has to say and disguising his contempt very, very *badly* indeed.

Weirdly-Voiced Hero tries his best to draw it altogether via a range of adventurous acting solutions and extraordinary speech patterns and unnatural noises but eventually even he disengages as the film crumbles to a halt.

Practically every major character goes around speaking Words of Wisdom about how damaged they all are and how crap every-

thing is, because apparently we cannot work these things out for ourselves. The more it has to shout about its depths, the shallower they become. In trying to deny a hootsomenly camp past, absence makes the heart grow fonder. As an antidote to a penchant for the ridiculous, it becomes an antidote to joy.

Weirdly-Voiced Hero and Duplicitous French Female Villain commence intimate relationship based on absolutely nothing very much.

The Duplicitous French Female Villain is the daughter of a Celt. There is no ready explanation for this, but complaining that something is unexplained in this film is a descent into the bleedin' obvious.

In retrospect, Duplicitous French Female Villain places herself readily – and mindbendingly incoherently – in mortal danger prior to the due time for her plan coming to fruition.

Due to the shocking twist everyone saw coming, it's impossible to credit the Duplicitous French Female Villain as anything other than an underdeveloped cheat of a character. Once you know she's the bad gal, very little of what she does in the early part of the film makes any sense.

Duplicitous French Female Villain isn't a pleasant or sympathetic character to begin with, which undermines what twist there is.

Weirdly-Voiced Hero suffers spinal trauma at villainous hands. Nothing comes of it. He's OK, everyone!

The World's Greatest Terrorist takes control of a nuclear device that was about to be decommissioned. Inevitably, it doesn't go off with about half an atosecond to go.

A Creepy McCreep emotional relationship between the Duplicitous French Female Villain and The World's Greatest Terrorist, born out of captivity. What's hinted at is interesting, but probably far too

dark for a product-placed corporate product of this nature, therefore it remains a gutless hinting.

Weirdly-Voiced Hero fakes his own death in a bomb blast. This achieves unclear dividends as he hardly goes into hiding thereafter. Note how “unclear” is an anagram of “nuclear”. This is a digression, but it’s more interesting. Can’t help feeling I left the iron on.

Weirdly-Voiced Hero hooks up with heroine who is begarbed in slobberclobber aimed at the groin of a fourteen year-old erotomaniacal heterosexual male. But not at his brain.

Having tried so very, very hard – painfully hard – to state “stuff and fings”, at its close the film comes to no conclusion whatsoever on those points, and just stops.

Hard to say whether on balance the greater threat is the planned destruction by The World’s Greatest Terrorist, or the haphazard violence brung unto us by Weirdly-Voiced Hero.

Faithful Retainer overacts in a jawdroppingly pathetic manner in an attempt to engender some audience sympathy; it works not.

Duplicitous French Female Villain has some serious Daddy issues to work through; unfortunately, we have to watch these.

Duplicitous French Female Villain is played none-too-happily by an award-winning actress in such a curious manner as to a) remind one of a distressed hen ensnared in a rusty mousetrap and b) cast serious doubt on the winning of said award and leave one wondering what the competition must have been like, leading the conclusion that it may have been a three-day-old egg sandwich.

You’re still left wondering how the three-day-old egg sandwich contrived to lose.

Let's be generous and say that the accent delivered by The World's Greatest Terrorist is "Well-travelled". Let's be less generous and say "Uh, youdunwaht, whaaa?"

The World's Greatest Terrorist has a freakish physiological set-up that is none-too-fully explained, lest mild scrutiny open it to utter ridicule.

Familiar faces from British television pop up now and again in a manner that begins as unexpected and very soon becomes unwelcome and at no juncture becomes even a pleasant distraction from the rest of the dross.

Weirdly-Voiced Hero travels from place to place without too much explanation of how and despite a supposed countdown to carnage, fannies about doing other inconsequential stuff instead.

The World's Greatest Terrorist publicly murders a defenceless nuclear scientist turncoat weasel who has outlived his immediate usefulness. Because... um... erm... is anything else on? Apart from the iron, obviously.

Flying hover-vehicles. Well, *quite*.

The motives and morality of an authority figure are brought into question; the question being "They won't pursue this very far because this is a nonsense franchise film"; indeed, they do not. Despite being at fault for a lot of whatever it is that happens, everything's OK at the end and their shaming culpability is largely forgotten about.

A city under threat of nuclear incineration because... because... it can be? Because everyone needs teaching some sort of lesson? I dunno.

It's as exciting as damp gravel and filmed on a dank series of days. Overcast in appearance, undercast in acting conviction.

The motivations – and reappearance – of at least one supporting character depend on the audience remembering / caring about events a couple of films prior to this. Whilst this could be “arc”, its execution reveals that this film hasn’t enough story to justify its own existence.

The overwhelming realisation that one wouldn’t be watching this unless it was part of a series that has previously brought glimmers; were this totally stand-alone, it wouldn’t get away with any of its rampaging inadequacy.

The Dark Knight Rises.

As for *The World is Not Enough*, the above, plus *The Dench* at her most enunciate-y and the lamentable Cleese titting about, making me want to chew my own arm off for a greater guarantee of fun. This Mr Nolan person may or may not want to make a Bond film; quite why he saw fit to inflict upon us a remake of *this* one is a peculiar decision and tends to suggest he should be kept well away.

I still can’t think of a terribly positive thing that the 007th minute of *TWINE* exemplifies although its demerits do lead me to one particular positive.

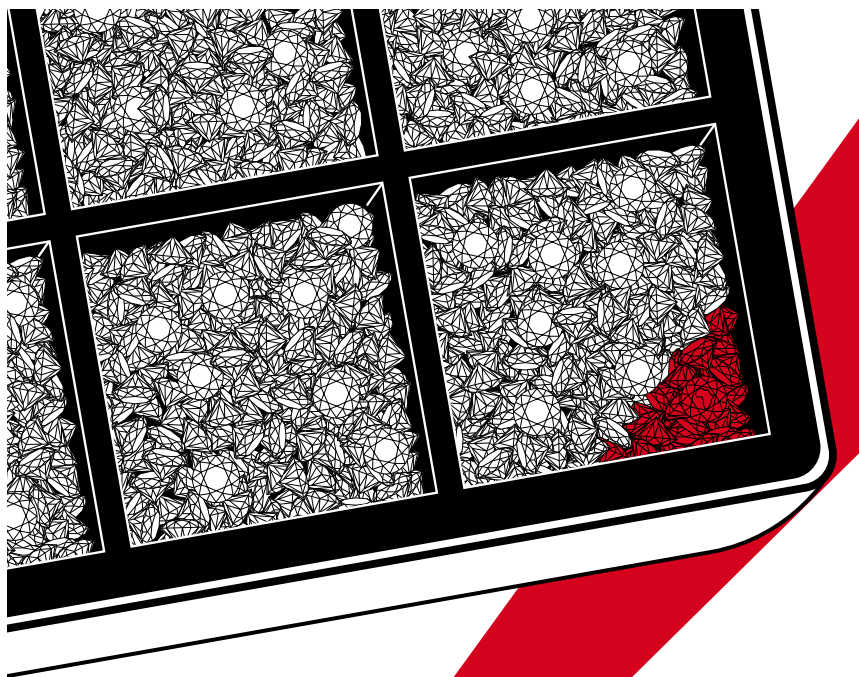
Pierce Brosnan.

A gain – it is a gain – of watching the Bonds for these meretricious pieces, is an enhanced appreciation of Pierce Brosnan and sympathy for the hand dealt him. Not in the ending of his tenure, but whilst ongoing. He promised a splendid James Bond, but “his” films (come now: no more “his” films than Lazenby’s was his; a convenient shorthand) confuse James Bond. I still don’t think Mr Brosnan is much of an actor, but I doubt anyone could cope with

The World is Not Enough and make it work. If there's a perception of personal Brosnan-bashing coming through in this stuff, I apologise; he seems a decent chap, game for much, voice a bit odd but otherwise genial. If, however, for "Brosnan" you don't read the man but as the four films he was in, then I withdraw that apology and categorically deny it ever occurred. They had the leading man they wanted but paid too little attention to the Bond they wanted. When it comes to it, even though what happens in that one minute (or any one minute) of TWINE is total rot, the leading man remained dependable and watchable. Therefore the conclusion must be this: whatever may be going (very) wrong onscreen, you can usually count on the presence of the lead, in a "pulling you along unwillingly like a demented puppy" sense of lead, but reliable nonetheless. They had that with Roger Moore, they had it here. The negative side of that is a sense of invulnerability, that they could get away with any old thing as long as the main role was solid.

Something put sorely to the test with the next one.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH
MINUTE OF DIE ANOTHER DAY. JACQUES
STEWART FEELS SAFE, SCARED, READY,
UNPREPARED; IT'S PARENTS' EVENING AGAIN.



DIE ANOTHER DAY

SCIENCE FACT! #20

Die Another Day was based on an original screen treatment Ian Fleming developed with Kevin McClory. There, that'll cause trouble.

Whoever loses that case has to own it.

I'm forty. This may surprise you, given the childishness on display; alternatively you may consider it splendid that the age matches the IQ at last.

"Forty" seems to be one of those things worth marking. The... Mrs Jim (I struggle for an adjective adequate) asked / told me how I wanted this marked (my Space Shuttle never arrived: Moonraker *lied* to me). My initial answer – "not", can't make me, you're not the boss of me (that's a lie) – was met with her patented benev-iolence because the children wanted to "do something". My wishes and "incidental" are in the same bit of the Venn diagram; whatever emerged had to involve the offspring in its organising (not in the "paying") meaning they had to be invited too. What utter bottom.

Therefore, the choice was:

- a family holiday away from "it all", the brood ignoring their presence as a permanent feature of that bracket. Favoured suggestion was a bivouac in mid-Wales (where?) without telephone, television or internet. It had board games, meaning arguments, and books, meaning my sons wouldn't read them, and opportunities for mud, meaning the boiler would burst. Straw Dogs beckoned. I suppose we could have pretended it was a temple in South Korea; or

- a New-Age retreat where one could detox the body and soul (it says here) and commune with one's future through paradigms of guided holistic meditation (it also says here), perceptions of the developing One becoming a springboard into the next stage of life (it does go on a bit) and embracing the sort of inner peace and smug self-satisfaction that usually arises five minutes after a really satisfying vomit (it doesn't say, but means); or
- sodding that for a load of old halleberries, blowing a stack of (my) cash and inviting everyone who's ever heard of me around and spending far too long revisiting tired anecdotes of past glories, tales they've already heard n million times before, perhaps with a few flourishes to pretend they're new, in the hope that it came together as a unified whole but would probably spiral totally beyond control and fizzle out well before its end, leaving all those who witnessed it in denial, upset and dissatisfied.

None were fitly defined by the phrase "a good idea". The first would have been boring and I knew we'll end up cannibalising each other. It would have been "Devon 2005" all over again: tchoh! The second was patently going to involve scented candles and was probably a front for pushing "relaxation herbs". The third was Die Another Day and not so much a fortieth birthday party as a wake.

Which it is. For James Bond at forty, life does *not* begin.

They were killing off the "James Bond" we knew / they were bored of making, and inviting us to the world's most outrageously gem-dripped post-dispatch piss-up. Mix me a mojito, pass round the individual pork pies and let's reminisce with a moistened eye about how fine it used to be. Self-indulgence excused because we're still in shock about witnessing it collapse in front of us last time out, overstretched, wheezy and attempting things way beyond its strength

and ability, painful exertions it wouldn't have dared try (or needed to) at half its age.

140 gazillion dollars spent on (at best) questionable artistic decisions, DAD is a costly public euthanasia solution (I would have gone for the pillow and / or canine bolt-gun option) but disappearing up its own AFRICAN CONFLICT DIAMOND-encrusted backside is possibly still cheaper than disappearing into a warehouse on a Swiss industrial estate. Plumping for Indignitas instead, it's not a celebration, it's a commemoration. Commiseration, maybe.

The series had keeled over and its damp corpse was being nimbly – if jitteringly – stepped over by The Bourne Improvement. With this sort of rubbish, Eon left the door wide open for it to do so. Barbara Broccoli is on record that September 11th 2001 changed everything, but DAD was filmed after that. I know these things take years to develop but questionable not to reconsider the approach whilst filming; the “Making of” indicates that much outlandish stuff came about in early 2002, as they went along. Whilst it's noble of Ms Broccoli to react, I suspect it's the events of June 14th 2002 that really made them wonder, waking to the realisation that it was too late to reverse decisions on the DNA replacement therapy, Bond stopping his heart, the dialogue, the invisible car and the CGI kite-surfing, all that money blown and Matt Damon in an old Mini had just driven right through the whole sorry circus. Why bother? So they didn't. DAD's lasting impression is as a series end filler clip show where, surprised that it's gone on so long, they forgot to commission a script and just have people sit around foreshadowing “best bits” by saying “D'you remember that time when...”, mould passed off as fresh. There was nothing left to chivvy from the bottom of the barrel.

As such, prescient (as well as ghastly) the Madonna person's “song” may well have proven. She does appear to be ahead of her

time, albeit her archaeologically intriguing appearance in this film suggests her time was February 1564. They *were* going to close the body down. They *were* going to wake up. They *were* going to find another way. It *was* their time to go and there was so much more to know. They *were* going to avoid the cliché. They *were* going to deeee-Lay pleasure, at least for another four years. They *were* going to break the cy-Kel and shake up the sys-Tem. It's just that they had these things screeched at us *one film too early*. Consistently premature ejaculations, those lyrics. Sigmund Freud, analyse that. Why casting Daniel Craig took enraged dimbulbs by surprise is, accordingly, a mystery: the producers had made a two-hour film demonstrating all that was wrong in so overblown a manner that no-one in their right mind would clamour for more of the same, and even commissioned a (sort of) song about their intentions. What more clues could people possibly need? When the "tune" is repeated at the end of the grim spectacle, it's reassurance that they now have all this addled gunk out of their collective sys-Tem, they're about to undergo (ahem) DNA replacement therapy themselves and they will never again emit anything quite as cacky.

Never say...

Die Another Day has its enthusiasts, as do caravan holidays, cider and serial killers, but it does appear for many to have become the series' whipping chap very swiftly, the consensus seeming to be that this is the point at which the Bond films jumped the shark / surfed the tsunami. I have some reservations with that status. It's not as miserable as its immediate predecessor, nor as arthritic as *A View to a Kill* and, unlike *Licence to Kill*, they remembered to give us some pretty pictures to gawp at. You'll note I'm only venturing to compare it with its own kind, however. As I have come to bury DAD and not praise it, I'm not suggesting that it will, in due course, achieve

the wider public “rehabilitation” of OHMSS and (to a lesser, but more special, extent) Moonraker. Perhaps the latter benefits from childhood nostalgia, but it has great charm. This has much noise. It’s not going to happen.

That may have something to do with being the first Bond of the mass-access internet age and therefore the first new one open to the greatest benefit bestowed upon creative ventures by the World Wide Web: unaccountable anonymous abuse typo-shouted by those who would otherwise be experiencing electricity as a seating solution, or trying to lick it. It is a truth universally acknowledged – or at least a truth poorly punctuated – that Die Another Day is an unmitigated scabhole and anyone disagreeing with this is a liberal AIDSworm, with AIDS. It’s a long road back from the onslaught of the received wisdom of the enraged. It may never recover.

Let it never recover: what the hyperbole masks is that it *is* poor. It might be a reasonably good “James Bond film” within the meaning of that creative prison – more on that in due course – but it’s a fascinatingly terrible, cynical film when compared with anything other than the limited clichés of its series. One wonders whether this was becoming annoying. All that money spent on it, a “name” director and even getting With Special Guest Star Halle Berry in there, and they knew going in that the fruit of their creative endeavours would still only ever be regarded as better or worse than “other Bond films”, films ignored as mechanical product rather than artistically merited, flapping about in their little, *little* puddle. Such debate as DAD generates is of its merits as a Bond film. It would seem ludicrous to begin to compare its qualities to those of the major films of 2002 such as Hart’s War, Scooby-Doo and Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever, whereas the likes of Casino Royale and Skyfall are capable of going toe-to-toe on lists of the Ten Best Films of their given year and not

be laughed out of the reckoning. Evaluating DAD as entertainment where the benchmark is any film ever made other than its 19 brethren, it's a catastrophe: a DUD.

D'you see what I did there? An interesting acronym, "DAD". Perhaps serendipity, but in reheating their father's Bondily output (producing bodily output instead), it serves only to remind one how special many of those were – entirely at this film's expense. Praising their father by trying something as outlandish as *You Only Live Twice* or *Moonraker* and – this must be the case, little else explains it – *deliberately* failing, shows the world that, absolutely, Nobody Could Do It Better Not Even His Own Family; oh gosh, what a "disaster". Tsk, eh? "Oh dear". Guess for Bond 21 then we'll just have to do our own thing; unleash Wroughton the blond ape boy! An unusual tactic, one I wouldn't recommend my own children to adopt, but maybe that's how billionaires behave. DADDy issues. Oi, Sigmund, got another one for yer over here. It certainly makes some of the weaker Bonds shine in comparison, which will up their value next time the television rights are negotiated. It's a business, not a donkey charity. It must be hard trying to continually flog a back catalogue millions of people have already seen numerousteen times. A deliriously inane loss-leader pumped with all your most feeble ideas is a ballsy way of renewing interest and sympathy for what has gone before. But still a DUD. It's certainly not close to most of DAD's films. Given its end-of-era purposes, how about DEAD? Inserting an E might not be wise: Die Another Day evinces taking far too many already.

If it stands for anything – if it stands at all, last legs collapsing under exhausted, saggy, gunbarrelly bore-O-flab – DEAD is testament to the power of the word *no*, and how impactful it becomes when it's not said as a check on very stupid ideas, or as a safe-word release from otherwise consensual torture. Let's play a little game,

more skill than knowledge. Lie back, my lovely darling, and use your judgment to insert “no” at the appropriate juncture, perhaps just when you feel it starting to chafe your brain. I shall grumpire.

The villain has wholesale DNA replacement therapy, which in even the scantest understanding of a totally impossible and silly thing, would mean that he surely (er... somehow) grows an entirely new brain; however, his memory remains completely intact and is capable of holding a bizarre conversation about Donald Campbell.

(...I’m waiting... Well, to give you credit, I went in several levels above the usual start, the gentler, ticklier stages of “*I’ve been known to keep my tip up / Big Bang theory / Cock fight / It’s very hard, isn’t it? / Keep it in*” followed by *The USA only has one missile and they nicked that from Tomorrow Never Dies*, building up to *James Bond stops his heart through the power of flashback and then restarts it immediately and he’s suddenly at top fighting strength rather than a complete vegetable* and climaxing with *John Cleese is a really, really great idea: yeah?... OK, your call I suppose... moving on, with a heavy sigh...*)

The villain, within the space of 14 months, has been absorbed into British society and knighted despite being a non-Russian Billionaire Johnny Foreigner. Assuming that the film is deemed to take place in or around November 2002, the last Honours list would have been the previous June, giving him roughly 9 months in which to have achieved this: no-one appears to notice or suspect anything.

(...surely you’d stop at this stage? Most people flick their wrist gun into the “device” at this point. They claim it’s a wrist “gun” anyway. Playing it cool, eh? Right...)

14 months of scorpion venom torture, face / ice interface scenarios, execrable music and amusing beard growth can be shaved away by

a quick go on a Global Product Partner's latest shavey thingummy, and then never mentioned again lest that suggest the Global Product Partner's consumer good is actually quite poor.

(...you're a glutton for punishment. I have done my best to warn you. You're on your own now. From hereon in, it gets really violent...)

The villain invites Bond to Iceland for no feasible reason whatsoever; he just "does". Had this invitation not been extended, the notorious second half of DEAD could have been entirely avoided.

(...c'mon, you "no" you want to. Hmm. Seriously?... okaaayyy...)

In Iceland, James Bond gets into a fight with a man called Mr Kil who attempts to "Kil" him with a very pointy hair grip.

(...you're trying my patience... will you yield – in time?...)

At one point James Bond makes his escape from the villain's clutches in a rocket car, pursued by the villain's Death Laser From Space, which is controlled by a big glove.

(...go on, surely anyone with any sense would say "no" at this point?... tell you what, if you say "yes" I'll interpret that as "no". It'll be better for the both of us. Should have said that to Mrs Jim just before I proposed, so take this as the voice of bitter experience... aw, c'mon, you're not playing fair. OK, if you must, but I really cannot be esponsible for the consequences of your actions; continue at your own risk...)

James Bond escapes certain death by turning into Horace Goes Skiing, surfing a tidal wave and returning to the villain's big ice palace and destroying bits of it with his INVISIBLE CAR.

(...you're Lee Tamahori, aren't you? Nice bra. You're not? Nice bra, nonetheless. OK, how about one blink for yes, two blinks for no. Was that a second blink or just your usual inbred squint? You really are playing hard to get, aren't you, you big old flirt? OK then, time for a big one...)

Jinx.

(...God, stop screaming. Sssh! You'll wake the kids: their cellar door is only so thick. Still, you held out a long time. Not bad. Not bad at all. There was only one level left, but I won't tell you precisely what it was as it's too upsetting to be transcribed and, if you have parental filter on your internetter, it'll never get through. Described in person-friendly terms, it starts with a priddy lay-dee waggling in from the sea in the director's bikini and ends with her doing squirt-yjiggledance with an equivalently-breasted "frisky" ex-hostage of a certain age and uncertain shape whilst – very mysteriously – eating a fig. Everything that happens and everything – *everything* – that's said in between those two moments would give Torquemada the runnytums and you'd opt instead for being waterboarded in perpetuity by a psychotic hick whose first overseas cultural trip is to murder shepherds).

That's not an anti- With Special Guest Star Halle Berry thing; she's a priddy lay-dee and demonstrates competence in some films what she dood. Evidence though it is of desperation to cast With Special Guest Star Halle Berry and shove her on the posters in an attempt to scoop up more demographics, it's an error. Society has "developed" and they've been letting even women and Americans watch these films for a few years now. The major problem with yet another weak American Bond girl – they're all a bit "off" – is that there's no character. Even Stacey Sutton had a dead grandfather to enthrall us with, and a degree, although that may have been cut out

of a colouring book about cats. We know nothing about Jinx at the start – save that she’s a bit of a corker – and even less by the end other than she is in some way “bad”; not disagreeing but I suspect we’re at cross-purposes. The watertight evidence for this is...

...

Nope. If one takes the view that Bond films are not about introspective back-story but character proven through actions – how existentialist of you, you clever old button – OK then, what actually does Jinx *do*? She doesn’t engineer Bond into the clinic – he was going there anyway. She doesn’t get him to Iceland – he was also going there anyway, even if Graves’ impromptu invitation is most odd, and Bond was capable of getting into North Korea without her. They may have come up with a Bond Girl that you could remove wholesale from the “story” without impact, save sparing us some brainburstingly bad dialogue. A school of “thought” has an alternative (ahem) “reading” of *Die Another Day* as a Jinx film into which Bond has wandered. It’s he who just “turns up” now and again without any plausible explanation other than to look pretty, hit people and say Very Bad Things. There’s probably a two hour “Jinx’s side of the story when not onscreen” film on the *Die Another Day* Special Edition DVD (if it were that special, it’d have Thunderball on it). Whilst that’s amusing, parallels colliding, the fun only lasts until the reality dawns that you really don’t want to see *either* of these hollow ciphers of nothingness ever again. She’s a bantersome American agent with a forced sense of humour. Patently DAD’s “homage” to Norman Burton’s Leiter. Including the bikini.

At best, Jinx is a device to trigger Bond’s heroism; the perpetual need for rescue questions her competence and makes you wonder what the other 19 Jinx films were like. Without her, all he does is wearily amble around soundstages. Without With Special Guest

Star Halle Berry to haul out of trouble, Bond's urgency in "gurgling Af-TAAA HIM! (wobbles finger, beard, teats) is soupy, not a roaring rampage of revenge but a mild middle-aged meander of miff. He doesn't even kill cacklewitch Miranda Frost – Jinx's only contribution, robbing Bond of catharsis – but by then, like the audience, he's probably forgotten about his incarceration. Stands to reason: he's had at least three shaves since. It doesn't need the talent of With Special Guest Star Halle Berry to "play" Jinx. The inside of a loo roll with a smiley face crayoned on it (and in an orange bikini) would have the same impact, not be required to deliver appalling lines and is probably less likely to keep getting itself captured. Whether it would generate Bond's absurd ejaculato-face (his mandible's wobbly: is he having a stroke?) depends on how he would use it, I s'pose. Much has been written (inaccurately) about the vacuous female characters in Bond but I can't think of any less significant to a film. Even the likes of Kissy helped Bond's "disguise", Melina's handy with a crossbow (could do with DADdy Bond's magic shaver, though) and Octopussy has a smashing dressing gown. Jinx is the nadir of Bond girls, and plays wholesale to the lazy criticism, the producers going eyeball-to-eyeball with the critics and hollering that the lazy, often untrue, stuff they've written for years about vapid characters, inane plots and self-reverential indulgence– well it's all here! It was ALL TRUE! You were right all along! Mu-wah-haha. DAD isn't made for the fans: it's made to flatter-to-deceive the critics, softening them up to turn the tables so dramatically next time around. What a tangled web.

In the Bert Broccoli days, they promised – a.k.a. lied – for years about the lead female role in the next Bond emission being "independent and a real Bond equivalent", or some such. In DUD, to show what a really bad idea that is, *they gave us it*. Jinx is independent, or at least

unconnected to anything other than what we witness her do on screen and when the film ends, so does she. That's not a million miles away from the waffer-then James Bond. He exists to keep the adventure going – there has to be a human being there, a bag of radishes wouldn't look right – but outside of that, is little save a suit, some watches and a gun: cue credits. What the DAD Bond and Jinx *do* might be interesting; what they *are* is not. Jinx can fight as well as Bond, kill as well as Bond, quip as appallingly as Bond, when a daring but ridiculous escape is called for she can mutate herself into unconvincing pixels just like Bond, is as unaffected by torture and “events” as Bond, wears expensive clothes and drives a nice car like Bond, and has a spiky relationship with her boss like Bond. (S)he is Bond. And (s)he's a bore.

With two equally malnourished characters, the Broccoli offspring expunge through DAD any residual desire to give us a “female equivalent” of this James Bond– because Jinx is what you get. I'm not asserting that they've given up on the idea but the modern idiom of “a female Bond” is Camille's parallels with the Craig Bond – a secret agent disturbed by the calling, not fond of killing but eminently capable, bitterly wounded by past experience and teetering on the edge of losing it completely. Whatever one thinks of those attributes, at least they exist. DAD's use of Jinx to reflect beat-for-beat, pun-for-pun, the emptiness of James Bond is quite devastating. That it's the producers of the Bond films doing it is thrillingly insane. The self-hatred going on in DUD drips off the screen. Either that or it's the product of massive egos – not wholly deee-Stroyed those, then – asserting that even if you hate the film, you cannot hate it more than we already do. We win! And thank you for your lovely money.

By the time the 007th minute lumbers into view, inflicted upon us is a Bond theme played on Mr Arnold's kitchen implements and James Bond firing a bullet (slowly) down the barrel of a gun several

yards away. I'm not going to pretend to contemplate whether that's possible: what it shows is the producers being as bored by the gun-barrel as normal people should be, and a desire to muck about with it. C'mon, Team Whine, it's as plain as day. What did you think was going to happen? They spent \$142 million exploding it in your face, and you didn't notice? OK, basic stuff that'll help you: deodorant is not a luxury, a jam jar is not a glass, that matter in your navel is not a meal and you're not allowed to think those things about your sister. We'll move onto more sophisticated stuff – breathing – when I determine whether it's in anyone else's interests to let you know about it.

Meanwhile, in a part of North Cornwall played by Pinewood Studios, Mr Brosnan flaps ashore whilst local residents hose him down and wait for the Coastguard to drag a noble creature back to deeper water, or put it out of our misery and crack him over the head with a shovel. Clear demonstration of a post-9 / 11 scaling back / unwillingness to fly anywhere that this film appears to be about stopping a Cornish civil war generated by a loony hiding out in the Eden Project. This is a homage to the dankly British alternate reality *A View to a Kill*: see its 007th minute, if you can stomach awful rubbish. That you persist with Bond films suggests you can.

We're shown something we haven't seen in a Bond film – surfing – and something we should never see in a Bond film – surfing. One wonders about it as a stealth mechanism; its characteristic as a “sport” is “showing off”. It's a homage to *A View to a Kill*, where Uncle Rog and Tibbett creep around Zorin's lab through the medium of ribbon gymnastics. The surfing goes on a long time – I think we're meant to be impressed – so save for Bond coming across a briefcase that can take a block of C4 and a tray of AFRICAN CONFLICT DIAMONDS – a stroke of luck – and an amusing kickbag skit to introduce Colonel Moon (who doesn't look particularly Cornish, but that reveals my

ignorance of Bude's thriving North Korean quarter a.k.a. the whole of Bude), sod all in abundance happens until Bond arrives at a washed-out, grim, military hellhole (Aldershot) transformed by set design and digital grading into a washed-out, grim, military hellhole (still Aldershot; I think the film wants us to believe it's Newquay "International" Airport but it just isn't sufficiently grotty; nice try, though).

We "meet" Zao, the campest creation since May Day. Same purpose, ineffectual high-fashion love-puppet for demented villain. At least he's Korean, sorry, Cornish, with those lovely cheekbones and tousled hair nurtured by bracing costal walks and nocturnal rough 'n' tumble on Bodmin Moor. The other soldiers – fetching bandanas designed by Colonel Moon – don't look indigenous, although they may have been bussed in from Exeter. Both Mr Kil and Zao introduce themselves in the same manner: I wonder where Mr Kil picked that up? Where you spending your nights, cheekboner boy? Colonel Moon's definitely going to need a new anger therapist when he finds out. I can see why though: Kil does have a *divine* collection of hair slides.

Something something something about Western (Scilly Isles) hypocrisy yeah yeah but Whitey Still Wins This One. A bit of a sop to "waking up to the World" and all the Bad Doods out there in Foreignistan who were all suddenly born in 2001 and want to destroy Western culture (the culture that produces Die Another Day... um) but it sounds a bit odd given forty years of a British agent being well aware of the other countries of the world, because he's murdered people in practically all of them. Along with serial resource-rapist capitalist scumbag Robert King, Oxford chalks up another badhat in Colonel Moon. The admissions policy needs work: the greatest threat to peace and harmony isn't Quantum or SPECTRE, it's Keble College. *Figures*. Floating over the minefield "pun" – shoot him! – we're told it's America's cultural contribution. What, that *and* Dude

Looks Like A Lady? My, they have been busy. Let's ignore the point that Bond's capture following Moon's plunge from a model waterfall, and another wretched pun, shows that not only can a hovercraft float over landmines but so can a truck, and pay more attention to a bit of Colonel Moon's dialogue being muted out: presumably it gave away "the Cornish" when he referred to Bond as "Mr van Bierk! moi luvver". He's not your luvver. Zao, however, rather obviously *is*.

Let's see, then, what can be brung unto us by just a 007th minute. Clement Freud, analyse this.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 DIE ANOTHER DAY

The AFRICAN CONFLICT DIAMONDS handed over, Zao is all manly and gruff when he orders them to be checked out, quickly. He hasn't told anyone yet about the sneaky piccy he's taken of Mr van Bierk on his telephone, hee hee hee. He'll enjoy that later. Nor has he wondered why this van Bierk doesn't sound remotely southern African – or anything readily identifiable – but then you don't get many Boers west of the Tamar.

We haven't had a soul-destroying pun for at least three seconds. "Don't blow it all at once". Ah, there you are. As you were, everyone, as you were. We don't see Zao's eye-rolling reaction to this quadruple-entendre, but that's because of the MPAA (a familiar reference for those unsure about the Keble College one, above, although with that level of intellect, you'd get into Keble College, no worries. Probably to teach).

Cheekbone-Tousle-GemBoy seems to be wearing a ferret around his neck. This is a homage to Melina Havelock's moustache. We're told by Colonel Moon that he has "special plans" for this consignment of AFRICAN CONFLICT DIAMONDS: he's going to buy Zao an ice-cream in Padstow. He's not expecting change.

Zao logs onto Twitter – it’s so fab for hot goss – and Mr Snowden’s only gone and ruined Bond’s day, hasn’t he? The scunner. Pierce looks around, for escape. #brosnanworriedfacenumberone. No. Pierce, you signed the contract so you now have to do and say these appalling things. Sorry.

Zao gives Moon a come-hither look. Hm. They do seem to understand each other very well, these young gentlemen friends. It’s probably all the drinking and football and burrrrdds and uniforms and eyeliner and AFRICAN CONFLICT DIAMONDS and other manifestations of butch.

“His name is James Bond, a British assassin”. #brosnanworried-facenumbertwo. So worried, he might actually be doing a number two (he’s getting on). Still, in that suit, no-one would notice for a bit. He does look raddled, and this is before application of toxic arachnids (Madonna). His hair, a swept-back, slick badgery mane, is a homage to Christopher Lee’s in *The Man with the Golden Gun*: science fact! It’s definitely the same hair; they probably keep it in the Pinewood ‘fridge along with [redacted: defamatory]’s cocaine and [redacted: even more defamatory]’s crystal meth and [redacted: reaches for thesaurus]’s mother.

Man looks at diamonds closely. #brosnanworriedfacenumber-three. Come on, plot, hurry up or he’ll run out of #brosnanworriedfaces and start singing and then we’re really in the [Aldershot]. Colonel Moon isn’t impressed by what Zao’s just said, bit like that time he insisted it was Moon’s turn to cook dinner, do the bins *and* take Rumsfeld along the lane for his evening widdle.

They had to cut out Zao’s reaction to Colonel Moon standing there proudly waving his massive shooter around. Ban this sick filth now. Interesting judgment call to retain the terrified, non-blinking

soldiers standing around Moon, though. Look on every face of fearing that it'll be "The Naughty Game" after lights out. Mr Arnold's music is subtly hinting that there's summat wrong, *moi luvver*. This'll teach you to go inland, you grockle. We don't loike strangers in these parrrrrts. I'm not sure, but am pretty confident that during the course of the film, Mr Arnold has a bash at every instrument known to man and some he invented himself, such as hitting glue with a carrot, and fondling cress.

Moon shoots off at Bond's chopper. I suspect I'm missing a subtext somewhere. BOOM! However, pre-BOOM, odd thing happens (yes, it's a film maw-crammed with odd, but this *is*). Just as the helicopter explodes behind Bond – something you'd notice happening if you were there – the two soldiers behind him dive for cover and Zao moves to restrain Bond / cop a quick feel and yet Mr Brosnan is *stood absolutely dead still*. 'Tis odd. After all, Bond has seen Moon aim his gun. Perhaps he's getting old and the reflexes aren't what they were. Certainly, he does nothing to slap Zao's hand away despite "going for Bond's gun" (a likely story) down the right-hand side when it's readily apparent two seconds later that Bond dresses to the left. I suppose it's nice to have attention from such a strapping lad.

Remembering that he's being paid to appear (I did initially write "act", but... no), Mr Brosnan launches into a series of hilarious #brosnanstrugglingfaces that, on a frame-by-frame basis, are the absolute highlight of the film. Seriously – wow your friends, scare your children and reassure yourself that it was never to happen again.

Zao points his gun at Bond's head but in the next shot, his chunky, loaded shooter is at Bond's chin. Where's it going to end up next? Whilst I let you imagine that, you scamp, we reach

0.07.00

And Zao ends up with diamonds in his face, runs about with his shirt off, tries to ram Bond right up the Aston and is crushed to death by a chandelier, none of which helps quell the rumours one bit.

Amazingly, the 007th minute appears in the first half of the film (science fact!) and it seems to be a generally held / shouted view that the first half of *Die Another Day* is fine and “it all goes wrong” in Iceland and thereafter. The first half of *Die Another Day* is *not* fine. That it is not as bad as the second half is not an endorsement, any more than suggesting Pol Pot’s was a nicer form of genocide than Hitler’s. The first, intellect-shrivelling hour of *DEAD* gives us:

- surfing. Think about that; a simple yet terrifying sentence. James Bond goes surfing. Where did he learn how to do that? Was it when a British public schoolboy in Cornwall itself (no wonder we should all fear it), popping the collar of his Sea Island cotton polo shirt and hanging around Rock talking about how he and Toby have this ‘mazing idea for an internet media node, Torquil’s pa’s got this, ya, space *yeah?* in Hoxton and it’s going to be, y’know, cool. James Bond. Surfing. No. That it happens twice (sort of) is just taking the piss.

- the incumbent writers’ propensity to tell us things that have happened off-screen – e.g. what a bad old egg Zao is – *without showing us any of it* (one would have thought they had learned their lesson from *TWINE*’s persistent chatter about Renard’s beastliness, and then we find out he’s a wee ickle midger, with a droopy eye). Zao comes across as largely harmless and the most menacing thing about him is his refusal to burst out laughing derisively at his boyfriend’s pwonunciation of “dweam machine”, presumably DAD’s homage to David Essex. Perhaps if he cracks a smile some of his bling drops off. Or, because his “DNA replacement therapy” was interrupted, a limb.

- Madonna. Opening her mouth. Like the surfing, twice. Like the surfing, *no*. Some years ago I think I described her definitive interpretation of the challenging role of “Verity: a horny lesbian” as looking like a particularly whiskery ferret peering through a mophead. I acknowledge now that this comment was unfair as it was more about her look than her performance, so I should set the record straight. She looks like a particularly whiskery ferret peering through a mophead, and she can’t act. Happy to clarify.

- James Bond’s mutant power is stopping his heart and then starting it again and zooming orf. Presumably this is a homage to the mechanical reliability of a 1964 Aston Martin DB5. It’s certainly not a homage to sense. How do we get Bond out of this scrape? No idea. Sod it, let’s just have him *die* for three seconds, then wake up and have the strength to fight his way out. I know it’s ludicrous but no-one’s going to be giving this much hope, are they? I mean, did you *see* that bit where Bourne beat up those policemen in the park? We can’t compete with that. It’s Podgers Brosnan, remember?

- the unintelligible dialogue experiment that takes place in “on a Havana rooftop” (midtown Polzeath) between two men hammering away at words and noises and seeing what comes out, sorta free-form latin jazz mixed with something mildly desecratory; Buena Vista Seal Club. “I Wurrndernt ASK! Youtobe-TRAy your CoUN-tree”. Erm, half past eleven? No idea.

- personal trauma can be shaved away and then never mentioned again. I wonder if this is how he got over Tracy? Albeit Diamonds are Forever suggests that was achieved through comfort eating.

- Cleese. The Holodeck. The Q scene. The introduction of the invisible car. More giddy pleasure is derived from your Labrador

contracting the Ebola virus, and then demonstrating this all over the duvet. Similar sort of impact.

- the performances by the “reporters” outside Buckingham Palace. Dreadful. Some leeway given on the basis that Madonna turns up in the very next scene and achieves being even worse, but still: *clucking bell*. Die Another Day’s homage to the critical myth that too many Bond films have truly awful acting in them. Query whether that’s something to “celebrate”, though.

- Bond meets Jinx. Wow, now there’s a mouthful. Of hot vomit.

- the Dench M telling us that whilst he was “away” (he wasn’t on holiday, you heartless cow: he was in Perranporth Butlin’s), the world changed. *Really?* What happened? Given the euphemism, a couple of troubling thoughts emerge. One: despite the calamitous Western security failures, the Dench M is still in a job? Perhaps she has the key to the booze cabinet. Not sure the female M was a successful recognition of the feminist revolution: she can only do her job when blitzed out of her brain. The Lee M never needed that, even refusing the booze on one occasion. The Dench would have been necking Sir Donald Munger’s sherry (not a euphemism) from the bottle, claiming “I need it, I can handle it, it makes me work, I’m in control” and then going and doing something daft like reciting poetry or sporting bad scarves. Secondly, are we in very dark territory of suggesting that Bond could have stopped it? Admittedly, they don’t quite go this far, and just as well. James Bond is a fictional character.

Still, the Rubyeon joke is quite good, the torture is amusing (if totally inconsequential), the sword fight is fun and that makes about eight minutes, all told. If I could bring myself to watch the second hour of DEAD at any point (I haven’t for years, I just believe what

the internet says about it, it's a much easier way to review something, as lots of folks found when it came to *Quantum of Solace*), I doubt the overall aggregate would reach double figures.

One thing to look back on, though, is that it's an unbelievable eleven years since *Die Another Day* was unleashed. I recall that my reaction at the time (once over the trembling) was to commence an internet forum thread (eaten by upgrades, thankfully) that was abuse masquerading as a massively contrived concept; in this case, a *Die Another Day A-Z* (pronounced, it appears, *Zee... America's cultural contribution...*). In method, Bond has moved on, massively. I patently have *not*. The mistake one made at the time was to fear that this was where the series would go. No. The clues are all there, perhaps with some reconstruction through subsequent events but there's enough in the film to make the hypothesis stand: they were going to club us over the head with BOND!, let us rest a while, and then kiss us gently awake from the nightmare to an apple-blossomed dawn. The BOND! stuff is patently all over the screen at various points, the homages coming thick and thicker, but insofar as they were trying to be true to their legacy, I should make an effort and try to be true to my concept as well.

You've probably forgotten, I wish I had, that up above, somewhere, I postulated that DUD may actually be a pretty good James Bond film. They tried to do it by homages such as Bond setting off a jetpack underground – he's still an idiot – or the American authority characters being very stupid and aggressive. Odd to do this when *GoldenEye* did the same – running through the legacy only a couple of films later couldn't suggest creative emptiness, could it? Perish the thought. Still in a homage to that (the creative emptiness, not *GoldenEye*), some of the descriptions below look damnably familiar as I trudge my way through establishing

whether this film hits the spots its predecessors' exemplar 007th minutes demonstrated:

DR NO: peril to British interests (Bond?) in a foreign land (Cornwall). High living (give it some due, DUD does look flashy most of the time). Sophisticated hero – the usual trappings are there. Half a point as it's not clear what threat there is to the British in all of this, save covering up for giving yet another crook a knighthood.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE: the parallel villainy. Graves tells Bond this explicitly, even if it's a bit puzzling to claim that he based himself on Bond. Comes across more as the obnoxious trust-fund braying hooray kicking about his beloved Cornwall to me. Perhaps a bit book-Bondy in his “not being very nice”? Still, that's avoiding the point: this Bond / villain / Bond stuff is also evidently here. Big point.

GOLDFINGER: plentiful attempted cheekiness in DAD, albeit poor dialogue is the sole method of delivery once you've stopped goggling at how With Special Guest Star Halle Berry walks. Perhaps after nineteen previous goes, we could all the jokes coming. Perhaps, by calling one of your characters Mr Kil and another Miranda Frost, you drove them at us with headlights full-beam. A qualified recognition: Die Another Day tries to be funny, but fails to be witty. Half a point.

THUNDERBALL: teeter on the edge of simply becoming wild, but have the grace to know when you're about to go just that step too far. Bond / Jinx meeting. Bond / Verity dialogue. #brosgnancomeface. Arguably too far over the edge? Tipped by the wave-surf, without doubt, but it didn't need much pushing. It's not a very subtle film, is it? As the point of the Thunderball 007th minute was that it just goes to point *n* but stays so very, *very* closely within the wire this

side of the minefield, this one just tramples all over the wire and everything blows up in its bloated face. No points here.

YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE: amidst nonsense, reflective moments. They try. *They do try.* The opportunity was there, with Bond betrayed and abandoned and generally feeling a bit miz. They shaved him, stripping him Samson-like of the strength of finally coming up with something new for him to be. Then they showed us John Cleese and an Aston Martin. One of these you can't see. It's the wrong one. Quarter of a point, to reflect the proportion of the film in which anything's tolerable.

OHMSS: break the fourth wall. G'an, sniff that shoe. Not enough? Kite-surf right through the bastard, that'll do. One point for doing it, point taken off for how it's done.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER: seek solace in old standards when in a time of crisis. "Is largely what appears on screen". It's the end of the pier show, folks, let's bring 'em all out on stage for the big finale reprise of your favourites! All the old gang is here! M's got booze! Q's got... whatever, don't care! Moneypenny's got her man at last! Robinson's got some lines! Even if it's not a good idea, they did it. One point.

LIVE AND LET DIE: ...but you can try to spin the old discs a different way now and again. They all look slightly different than last time! Bond grows a beard and, having read the script, goes into hiding! Oh no, sorry. Half a point: such novelties as there are, are distracting (a Holodeck? *Really?*) and, for some of the things they tried to change, either they, the audience or their microprocessors were not sufficiently ready. Point.

THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN: twisted villains, freaks. Yep, well, whatever one may think of MoonGraves and Zao in terms of

impact, logic and motivation, they are *quite unusual people*. But then people from Cornwall are, so it's arguably a documentary. One point.

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME: spectacle is nothing to be scared of. Unless it's created in a computer. Still, we do go into Outer Space at one point, and lots of the Iceland material was patently intended to look huge (even if for various reasons, the execution is seriously lacking). Whereas the previous film was located in a series of tubes and tunnels, this goes broad and showy. Feeling generous. A point.

MOONRAKER: not sure what conclusion I came to with Moonraker's 007th minute, given that it was a run through a title sequence; for that matter, so was For Your Eyes Only. DUD's titles are a highlight, though, cleverly done and all fire and ice and scorpions and Mr Brosnan getting smacked about. This promised much: undelivered. For that, you score nil, and you're lucky to get that.

OCTOPUSSY: dodgy special effects can undermine one's ambition. We all know what this is about. I'm sure Mr Brosnan's beard is fake. Point.

A VIEW TO A KILL: hey, we're modern and ting. James Bond is da bomb (is that what young people say?) = Madonna. Horrible though it is, it's there. A point. Point. Like "tip". Or "prick".

THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS: don't be afraid of roughing your lead up. Got to give him credit, that does appear to be Mr Brosnan playing "North Cornwall applebob" (we can't afford apples) in the credits sequence. Bit autopiloty after being asked to walk around in moist jimjams (he's getting old), but definitely a point here. A good sport, particularly in the purposes of a *terrible* film. Actually, two points just for that.

LICENCE TO KILL: sometimes it can veer into making Bond look inadvertently ridiculous. If I've read Eon's intentions correctly, this appears to be the purpose of the film. Point.

GOLDENEYE: we'll have a gay old time. Just as DAD nicks Golden-Eye's "legacy" mood, so it steals its 007th minute too. Don't you "point" that thing at me, young man. Moon & Zao: Wint & Kidd. Much the same.

TOMORROW NEVER DIES: let's go totally over the top and make our explosions the biggest explosions of anyone's explosions. Yeah, stuff "blows up", extraordinary amounts, really, including an aeroplane that takes about twenty minutes to do so. Point, but it's not really an achievement, is it?

TWINE: your leading man's most daring escape is with his personal dignity. Well, almost. Few too many occasions he looks weary (the ostensible reason that "Bond's recovering from torture and 14 months in Cornwall" not really holding water given the ease with which he does so). "But he should of had a fif'th one", "write" some. Dunno: after two Greatest Hits releases in seven years (invariably a sign that the juices have dried up), and opportunities to do both action spectacle and "terrifically good dramatic acting about Stockholm Syndrome", what more could there have been for the Brosnan era to say? What would this mystical "fifth Brosnan" have given us? Advocates suggest there would have been a pattern in moving from a Moonraker to a For Your Eyes Only, presumably being the suggestion of going from daft to deadly serious and thrilling. There are two problems with this. Firstly, Senator, I knew Moonraker. Die Another Day, you're no Jack Kennedy. Secondly, For Your Eyes Only is inane, lazy and moribund. Why would you want this? "But they should of given him one more". Why? *To get it right?* They'd spent about \$600 million trying already. Are you saying the four Brosnans aren't good enough, then...? I'm confused.

So, racking up quite a few points on the Bondometer, there. Not that great a surprise, of course, but then little about DUD comes as surprising; what happened next, though...

We'll never really know the ins and outs of how Pierce Brosnan left / was ejected from the series – the internet has, however, determined its own truth about who treated whom very badly, and upon such watertight truths religions are founded, so with that benchmark it's not very surprising that arguments about the motives of the makers of specious entertainment won't get resolved, either. He does look *pretty bored* in this one. Maybe a stackload of cash would have cheered him up next time around but it's likely it would have had a valedictory air about it – which Die Another Day had more than enough of, frankly. Just as with Greatest Hits albums, there can be only so many farewell tours to try to flog them. As the pixels danced about the icebergs, surely we knew it was Game Over?

That A–Z thing I mentioned; I gave up at T. I now recall one of the “U”s I had in mind was that Die Another Day was the umami of the Bond series, a hard to define taste, sweet and sour and bland and lumpy but not easy to put one's finger on, and not for all. I would have been very wrong. Whilst contrivance could have made that label stick to DUD, with its challenging bouquet of the wet fermented stuff sloshing around the bottom of the bin, it would have been a waste given what was about to happen. Mr Brosnan was gone, Bond was to go feral, and everyone else decided they desperately needed to talk about hair.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF CASINO ROYALE. IT IS JACQUES STEWART'S
TIME TO GO. BUT NOT TO CORNWALL. IN THE
END, I WENT TO THE PUB AND, WALKING HOME,
FELL INTO A HEDGE. MIGHT HAVE BEEN PUSHED.



CASINO ROYALE

SCIENCE FACT! #21

Ill-informed tabloid rumours that this film would be a remake of the spectacularly incoherent David Niven effort were proven untrue. Until Skyfall, anyway.

Time for a reboot.

Casino Royale is good, if long. It bothers to tell a story, rather than simply mine long-exhausted seams. Its 007th minute exemplifies something. Blah blah blah about the dog and overwritten whimsy. James Bond will return in the 007th minute of Quantum of Solace and Jacques Stewart will refer to himself in the third person, because that's the sort of prat he is. Some nerve to accuse Bond of being formulaic; what a hypocrite. I prefer playing James Bond forum games anyway, like the ABC one. It learns me spell good.

Ah ah ah, not so fast, poppet.

It's not *that* radical, is it? There's M, there's gunbarrel (the law), there's climactic action that goes on well past forever's bedtime, there's Bond theme, there are ghastly watches, lovely Aston Martins, booze, ladies of acceptable architecture, dinner jackets, carrrrrddd (with the excitement that brings), there's still an infantile grasp on political and geographical reality and there's fighting, explosions, destruction, kissing, weak sex jokes and general daftitude.

Disappointing. Not what I was promised.

For at least a year in advance the internet told me – *betrayed* me, for internet is truth – that Casino Royale would be a disastrous experimental art project starring a deformed, flappy-eared, asexual, trades-faced mendicant dwarf with a head like a Belisha Beacon driving an automatic Fiat Panda, the highlight of which would be witnessing conjoined mutant step-siblings defecating glistening, maggot-riddled pusblistered-stools onto a plate of wilted broccoli. All so very Belgian. Although you might have a view of the sort of “person” what I am, you still can’t imagine how much I was looking forward to watching that. So many profound commentators who knew things stated their predictions as Total Unadulterated Fact. Everyone they knew (might be true, poor souls) agreed with them. Religions kill for such concord. The hu-mil-i-a-tion was going to be fantastic.

What a chuffin’ let-down.

Instead of the guaranteed cataclysm, what Eon put me through was an exercise in finally grasping the bindweed their complacency had let choke the creative development of the series for twenty-five years and – clever, this – not removing it *all*, a slash-and-burn policy being a step too far, but selecting the bits they actually needed to tell a story, rather than obliged to shoehorn them in. No Moneypenny, no Q, no rubbish that came with both, no complaints from me. Albeit not a perfect film, propelled by a compelling lead performance and evident thought about what they were doing beyond shaking our memories until more money fell out, it’s the closest to a proper film for decades. Story first, statutory Bond bits second: Die Another Day reversed. Disconcerting. Who knew that this was going to happen? Who knew that the internet was so full of expertise about how it couldn’t?

Who knew it would succeed? It remains faintly astonishing that the same paws that flicked TWINE our way could even *do* this. Perhaps that’s where the internet’s angry anxiety came from: the last

handful suggesting that they couldn't even make "Bond films" properly, aspirations towards more credible endeavours were bound to fail, so the infantile apoplexy at the producers' decisions was actually kindly meant, cossetingly protecting them from overambition in a (very mysterious, very well hidden) way. I accept this is a stretch; it's hard to extrapolate benevolent concern from ranted speculation about the pH value of Ms Broccoli's mammary glands.

It's too much to call the decision to recast and reshape "brave", since Casino Royale is undoubtedly a skittle though product-placed corporate compromises and brand committee vision, and still recognisable as part of the Bond films if not dependent upon such membership for its existence. No, not "brave": *aware*. Aware that GoldenEye, whatever its ostensible reputation, hadn't saved James Bond, but clamped around him like an iron crab, rendering attempts to push the main character elsewhere as contrived and counter-intuitive. GoldenEye was *too* impactful and Pierce Brosnan's first performance *too* archetypal, too close to the perception of what James Bond is, to allow anything else to breathe. In trying to establish whether that James Bond was relevant in the 1990s, they had to give us all the cack that surrounded him, lest they be accused of uncertainty about any element left out. Laid themselves a trap. The masaging around the edges in the rest of the Brosnan tenure ignored (or chose to) the terminal problem in the heart, the element bluntly resistant to change when trying "undernourished postmodernism" or "exploderating" or "flatulent soap operatics" or "smug gurning": *James Bond*.

Die Another Day did not *actually* kill the series. It made money and had a reasonable critical reaction, which after umpteen centuries of the same thing was a win. However, it probably killed James Bond, and about bloody time. Seriously, look at it (through the wince).

James Bond “is” deathly puns and smart-bottom comments in a suit who fights foreign persons and seems unaffected by – and thereby disconnected to – events. He then does a comedy sex wee inside a nice lady. The film ends. Over the course of twenty such exercises, these things happening more often than not, this renders him groaningly tedious. Bond films weren’t identifiable by their characters but by their *events*, The One In Which X Occurs – the one in which he skis off a cliff! The one in which he fights Jaws on the Moon! – being the clearest distinguishing feature. Amusing once or twice but, eventually, corrosive repetition of “stuff” happening, nothing human. Such traits as there were, set to robotic; expected items in the baggage area (trace – or Tracy – elements, at best). Surrounding Bond were exciting new ways to incinerate plywood, but the character had just evaporated into one-liners and blingsome accessories shilled by vile multinationals. All the outlandishness of DA-Day! couldn’t disguise it. An invisible car driven by an invisible man. James Bond films might still have been worth watching; James Bond himself wasn’t and those pretty explosions and distracting With Special Guest Stars wouldn’t and couldn’t hide it any more.

Ah, “you” say, as indeed did many at the time, have you not heard the expression “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”? Yes, just like I’ve heard “The customer is always right” and “We’re all in this together” and “Please remove those from my wife” and they’re *all* bollocks. The first is especially odious, a charter for regressive indolence, albeit an apt epitaph for the creative vision in Bonds 11-20. Living in caves and smearing one’s excrement over the walls as the prevailing medium of expression wasn’t evidently “broken” and yet we did progress and here we are, emerged from said caves and smearing our excrement over the internet via the medium of complaining about light entertainment, and quote games. But, “you” say (not too keen on

people interrupting me, to be honest: it suggests a lack of “school”), whilst I revere you generally as an enlightened visionary and World Leader (how kind), on this occasion you’re emitting hot gusts from your mouldy stinktunnel, you utter, utter... *Jeremy* (ouch). Fleming’s Bond wasn’t a complex character at all so it hasn’t been fibs for many of the films to describe their besuited dullard vacuum as “Ian Fleming’s James Bond” in their credits. He doesn’t need pretence / pretensions towards “depth”.

Fair enough: FlemingBond isn’t perpetually prone to inner monologue, there’s a tangible subtext of suspicion of intellectuals and intellectualism (Fleming having a pop at his brother, one suspects), and excessive soul-searching would get in the way of cracking people across the face and being beastly to Koreans, women and The Hun. Yet there is more there than Eon’s pun-puking, inadequately pixelated watch salesman suggests. You might not be convinced by what it says, but (as an example) chapter 20 of *Casino Royale* is chewy. There’s an argument that because its introspection seems unheralded, forced in, this stuff is what Fleming was intending his tale to tell us, intending to “write”, rather than his suggestion that an avocado is pudding. That chapter tells me more of interest about James Bond than all the brand fetishism that would clag things up, however deftly described it is. I accept that Bond sitting in bed pontificating about The Nature of Evil for ten minutes wouldn’t make the most engaging fodder for the Bond-film punter, but nor does it mean that the Bond of the films must be as hollow as *he* had become. Some argue, with vigour, that book Bond is an animal entirely separate from film Bond, and the films are not made for those who have read the novels. That may hold water, but only to the point where one queries whether *Die Another Day* was made for those who have read *anything*.

Patently there was a medium to strike in the name of entertainment / scooping up cash, and by 2002, the bias just tipped too far one way; it had to be reset. Not so much rebooted as rebalanced.

Did it need a reboot? (This is a distinct question to “Did it actually get one?”) The Bond series had retreated from outlandishness before and not had to bin the Bond nor the (loose semblance of) continuity. Something in that, should you believe that the tepid precedent of *For Your Eyes Only* – not too silly, not too violent, not too distinctive – ultimately benefited the series. Financially, Bond seemed to be cruising along quite happily, churning. Stable. Dull. Whether the audience wanted to keep seeing the same thing had to be balanced with whether the producers wanted to keep making the same thing. I’m not asking for “Pity a Poor Billionaire”, but far too many Bonds prior to 2006 demonstrated listlessness of vision. Given what we received with *Casino Royale*, the challenge they set themselves seems to energise them into wanting to make a film rather than simply having to. Pierce Brosnan as Ian Fleming’s James Bond in *Duty Demands It* ((2004) Dir: Vic Armstrong, starring With Special Guest Stars Sandra Bullock and Barney the Dinosaur) might not have been much good.

Not a decision immediately warmly embraced.

From what can be extrapolated from the adventurously articulated abuse, the ire of the anonymous about the impact of “rebooting” appears twofold. Firstly, that Piers Bronson wasn’t going to be in it, “fired” from a contract he didn’t have. He would have had to have gone at some point, though, and DAD tends to betray colossal weariness on his part. On balance, Pierce Brosnan didn’t give a bad performance as James Bond. The problem is that it was a “performance as James Bond”, that’s *all* it was, imprisoned within preconceptions of the image and incapable of being credibly evaluated by any other measure. If that’s where you set the bar, fine, but hold a moment

while I mash up your food / face. Even in retreat from DAD's cynical banality, what could Brosnan V: The Final Frontier have achieved? We'd seen him do "serious Bond" in TWINE, a curiosity similar to looking down and trying to recall when exactly it *was* that you ate that sweetcorn. He'd done action. He'd done melodrama. He'd done stoopid. What was left? Singing? To be fair, having seen him in other things, I expect his uniquely arthritic style was well up to a "Bond's last mission" sort of film, several aspects of the Casino Royale story chiming well with that, if tweaked. However, that would have totally undermined the next person along, the audience confused at having been told it was all over. That vibe clobbered Dalt-Ton from the off and they weren't making that mistake again. Gather cash from four popular Brosnans, get that in the bank, then throw everyone with a quick change of plan and make the films you always wanted to. Risk? Certainly, but only because the Bond series was a byword for total risk aversion. A decision that may have surprised, might have revolted, but even if one didn't like it, it was bloody interesting at last. Point to Eon.

The second target: Daniel Craig. A limestone-faced, amusingly-eared Ac-Tor from a terrible Angelina Jolie film and Our Friends in the North, known for intensity and the whiff of prickly truculence, was a surprising choice to take on the relaunch of a British cultural icon. Considerable concern about the wisdom of the venture was eventually muted by a huge popular reaction to it. Shame that he only lasted one series and then it disappeared back up its Eye of Harmony with that Tennant chap. Or something. "But... but... this Daniel Cregg... I've never heard of him!" Daresay he's never heard of you, either. *Still*.

The Craig abuse had a thrillingly camp sub-bracket regarding his hair. Who knew that there were so many trainee hairdressers? Per-

haps there was a government scheme at the time and the “feedback” was encouraged by the prevailing administration to demonstrate its public worth. For the next film, a lot of the same folks became professional film editors. Such untapped resources out there: this lot would solve the skills shortage in one go, or at least in the competitive field of “hairdressing and film editing”. Given the amount of them about, and the learned expertise people were determined to show, one can only assume that it’s hugely popular at degree level (unlike “spelling”). Has more employment potential than Media Studies, anyway.

Trouble was, this delicious shashay of an argument about (... just take a moment...) *hair* was often (if not, granted, universally) advanced by those who insisted that book Bond and film Bond were distinct. Not too sure about the logic of falling back onto fidelity for Fleming otherwise never before relied upon, to insist that he had written about a dark-haired man. Apparently, Eon should have pursued some sort of unwavering faithfulness to the source, the abandonment of which for about forty years or so oddly didn’t seem to worry people as much as this one. Ian Fleming’s James Bond wasn’t blond. True. Ian Fleming’s James Bond wasn’t Australian / Welsh / Irish-American either, and he only claimed his Scottish birthright once Fleming understood that referencing the films could make him money with which to drink himself into oblivion. Ian Fleming’s Tracy Bond wasn’t a ginger, although his Hugo Drax *was*. Ian Fleming’s Blofeld wasn’t a hostile dwarf / a nasal gangster / Widow Twankey. Leiter a straw-haired Texan? Hedisonnotfelix.com. Ian Fleming’s Mary Goodnight wasn’t an IKEA flatpack and his Max Zorin never got himself written. The Connery early-years Dark Matter / Bald. The Connery Diamonds are Forever Roadkill Badger. The Dalton Spavined Vampire. The GoldenEye Permanent Wave. Yes, the film Bonds were all dark-haired, if by “all” one means “not all”. I’m

not sure what colour Uncle Roger's hair is meant to be in any of his films, but by the final pair it was definitely skinned from vixens caught sniffing around the Pinewood bins.

Richer in (generally unpleasant) subtext than the novels' terse prose tends to suggest, it's still a bit of a stretch to assert that a key Fleming theme, alongside "women cannot be trusted, nor foreigners, people who use big words are homosexualists and Britain's all gone crap", is "only a dark-haired man is capable of doing these things". He really didn't write that, y'know. Yet it persisted, this insidious attempt to disguise what was essentially dispensing unaccountable knee-jerk abuse – because you could, here was broadband – by asserting nonsense about what Ian Fleming had allegedly created. This may have been a desperate attempt to convince people that they could read; the spelling usually suggested otherwise. "Ian Flemming would of been spinning in his grave" was a popular refrain; presumably this would be the Ian Fleming who, reflecting on his sacrosanct description of Bond, sat back and thought "I know: David Niven".

What this unexpected devotion to mis- / un-read texts tended to show was that the film Bond had just become an image; it was time for something to "act" rather than "be". Daniel Craig's face would not have been the first one to spring to mind, I would admit, but then that shows the potent corrosion of the shallow, hollow symbolism that James Bond was by then. We had come to believe that what he looked like was important to what he *was*. Casting Mr Craig in some giddily foolish hope that people would be sensible and look beyond the surface attributes and see the work being done to establish a character was bold, and probably assumed too much of certain parts of the audience. Another tall, dark-haired knitting pattern type might have thwarted that idea. We may have got no further than his hair, after all.

Bumpy enough circumstances anyway, and the first new James Bond of the mass internet age gave unaccountable troglodytes their opportunity to go for Mr Craig, not just within their own caves but a worldwide dirty protest. Being a heterosexual, physically able white male, he could be abused without an –ism attaching, so it was open season for the internet to spew its finest acrid bile in that noble way it has. From the moment Daniel Craig splashed along the Thames with his armbands on – look at him, just look at him, my eyes, they burn, the Crappy-Albino-Weils-Disease-Dodging-Not-Wanting-To Drown-In-A-Tidal-Sewer-Weed – every day, new pleasures would be announced, setting my disaster anticipation level to “getting leaky”. He can’t drive! He has nine teeth! He has to wear a Morrison’s bag on his head when doing a wizzle! He buys own brand! Here’s a picture of him next to Piltdown Man! I LITRELLY CA’NT TELL THE DIFFRANCE AND SO CANT ALL MY FREINDS. He cannot sleep without smearing himself in tartare sauce and getting weasels to lick it off! Pearce Bronson would of drunk that river water! I’ve seen his birth certificate and his middle name is Spasmoloid which sounds Muslim to me and he was born in Kenya so he can’t be James Bond! Or something! With Daniel Craig at the helm, this reboot about a man changing into Bond won’t be Pretty Woman but Ugly Man; it’s Pig-Male-Eon! Do you see what I did there?! Here’s another picture of the Ephalunt (sp?) Man! I had it from an Eon insider THAT I HAVE NOT MADE UP that their firing him next week because he licks chisels, the chisel-licking, bad-headed muto-freaktard *prick*.

What’s happened to those websites that preached such vision? I suppose they’re still out there. The internet’s quite big after all, big enough to permit them access to an audience in the same way as (I’m assuming) there are sites for persons who rape voles or obtain erotic gratification from the Vauxhall Chevette. Big enough to permit me

not to read their stuff. I wonder what they can possibly be talking about now, given the Craig tenure's critical and financial success? At a guess I suppose they hold a candle (probably at the wrong end) for still retaining the freedom to write such things; a clear demonstration of either a) the enabling democracy of the internet or b) a tyranny of unaccountable cowards. You decide. If you like b), you'll just lurve Twitter.

Up to the 007th minute, much to engage and indicate a new(-ish) direction. The black-and-white scenes are novel and, in both the brutality of the fight and fleeting glimpses of the family life of this Dryden blokey, at least pretending that mowing people down won't just be slaughter off a duck's back any more. Making us feel it, are they? We gather our first bit of "Bond" with the gunbarrel and there are more – if not all – of the "attributes" / "BondClag" to collect as the film progresses through its month-long running time. That appears to be the point. At least the gunbarrel makes sense exactly where it is, which tends to suggest that proper nutritional thinking has gone into the shopping list this time around, rather than DAD's lunatic trolley dash of overfacing bloat.

The song's grown on me and now seems familiar; at the time, a dabble in tweak that did give me a bit of a moment, along with the card game being poker, with its whiff of beers and deep-fried breadcrumb finger food. Mr Cornell doesn't seem so bad now, but I still have qualms about the game choice. I always understood the appeal to Bond of baccarat to be the total leaving it to chance, the danger one card can bring, the fluke, rather than (at least how it's presented here) poker's pseudo-mathematical struggle but I suppose it's a backhanded way of potentially showing this emergent Bond as smart and not just a bemuscle walbursting lummo, in a very bad shirt.

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 CASINO ROYALE

It's been produced by Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli – and not the ghost of the patriarch – and one senses the shackles of the past dropping away, respectfully but not before time. It's not a total break for freedom – this and the next film plough a reasonably steady course to building James Bond up to “where he was” but the decision to show the development of his character does give more to explore / exploit on a dramatic basis as he gets there (and once done, gives credible character background for actions / decisions thereafter). If you start with Mr Perfect, there's nothing for you. It's not a wholesale reboot, though, is it? After all, Mr Craig isn't that young and we haven't gone right back to the start of Bond's career in the secret service. The suggestion is he has been there some time, at least time enough to develop something of a reputation, experience and some (roughish) skill. Therefore, although one can understand the observation that Mr Craig's too old for some of Bond's behaviour in the first half of the film, *too* young an actor and I fear the second, much more significant half, would have collapsed. I know Connery was younger when he started but he wasn't acting young; depresses me that he could be so good in Dr No and only be 32 at the time. I digress into my own mortality.

It's not so much of a reboot that it's at the level of another awful teenage fool getting bitten by a spider, or Bruce Wayne's parents eating bullets yet again (one would think they would have learned by now, the useless clowns); more a rebootscraping, still recognisable as the original comfy footwear but just scrubbed clean of the stuff the series had been stepping in. Ready to rewalk the path, once cleansed, and doubtless about to tread in the same dung now and again, but possibly not going quite as off-map and beyond rescue as before.

There seem to be a lot of ten pound notes flying around. Despite science facts to the contrary, that the film was going to be cut-price, the thing looks glorious and luxurious, even if it does suggest that Montenegro is littered with Bentleys and not, say, land mines. A lot does happen in this film – arguably a bit too much in the over-extended first hour – but they did give us a solid show here. Compensating perhaps for much of the second hour taking place inside and (not sure why) underground, when it does break out into the fresh air, it looks absolutely splendid. Other Bonds may have had more bizarre locations, but I’m not sure any have shown what they had, to such effect.

Ah, Mr Craig, in colour this time and... hang on, wasn’t he meant to be hideous? Anyway, here comes loveliness, melting out of the indestructible 2D silhouette of the (splendidly amusing) titles to present himself as flesh and blood. I suspect they’re trying to tell us something, here. Can’t quite see the hair, slightly distracted by the blue eyes – at least they got that right. But I was promised an albino homunculus! It’s not fair and it’s a disgrace and the moment I have sat through it all several times I shall go onto the internet and tell them off, in swearing and then they’ll be sorry and then they’ll continue to ignore me and then I’ll do something really vicious in a quote game and that’ll show them! Somehow.

Martin Campbell done the directing of it. Rather splendidly, although he could have done with being more insistent with his editor to zip it along *a touch*. Whilst it’s wise to spend time on the Bond / Vesper relationship to render it credible and worthy of its ultimate impact, the first hour does feel like just too much build-up. Once we’re on that night train through the Balkans, though, it’s all very entertaining, and it can’t have been easy to make lengthy “carrd-

ddd” scenes engaging. Is it a better job than GoldenEye? Seeking to achieve different things. It looks better, certainly, and this project may have offered a reasonable amount of carte blanche (not of Carte Blanche, of which “absolutely none at all” is the most reasonable of amounts; of the two reboots, it’s the more unnecessary). There’s some great stuff in here: the pacing of the shower scene, as an example, just strikes me as one of the best judged pieces of any Bond.

The huge amount of material in this film – even when you think it’s nearly over, along comes a day’s worth of sinking house to cope with – may betray uncertainty about whether the quieter moments would carry the audience. They do; unusually for a Bond, I’m not waiting for the chasing to start as a blessed relief. It’s the other way around, good though action such as the stairwell fight is. It’s not that the script is particularly erudite or convincing – there’s far too much about Bond’s “ego” (or, as Ms Green says, “egor” which suggests she saw that picture comparing Mr Craig to Marty Feldman) and God alone knows what plot holes M’s chat with Bond at the end is trying to paper over, but at least they’re attempting full, coherent sentences this time. Wow, now there’s a mouthful. Because there was something to write and therefore something to direct other than exploding traffic, it is the best Bond for many years, albeit that’s not much of a compliment.

Fun way to end the titles, focusing on Mr Craig’s eyes, which are an arresting feature and not uncoincidentally the same colour as his bathers. Perhaps some will have been perplexed, given the promise of a squat day-glo scrotter, about how much emphasis there has already been on Mr Craig’s appearance given that it seemed to be the view of many that he should wander about with a binbag over his head. They can’t have enjoyed the imminent beachside scene,

SexGollum emerging from the waves – as Clive James once memorably said of Herr Schwarzenegger – like a condom filled with walnuts. Seems the next two films (literally) toned him down a smidge; possibly for the best – he’s not remotely inconspicuous looking like that. The daft horsey woman spots him immediately, although she may be wondering how a pink bottlenose has found its way this far south. Also, how it got into those very tight looking shorts. And how she can help it out of them.

Oh, it’s raining. Lazenby aside, has it rained on any other Bond – actual rain, not just abuse? Little lad running about, camera following him (even in a short extract such as this, it’s evident that there’s greater originality about where the camera goes than many Bonds, which can be terribly static). Apparently we’re in Mbale, Uganda – which I shame myself in admitting I had to be told, albeit I could have lived without the earlier revelation that Prague was in the Czech Republic (where else is it likely to be?).

Look everyone, the Lord’s Resistance Army must be really sinister, because here’s Mr Kony playing pinball and being rude to his guest. Exploiting child soldiers, yesyesyes, all that front page of the Observer tosh, but it’s the lack of hosting grace and the creepy way he opens his bottle of carefully not clearly identified nor warlord-endorsed sweetened vegetable extract drink that really emphasise what a naughty sort he is. This Mr White – I’m not sure the name’s subtle, in context – looks distinctly unimpressed. He hasn’t been allowed a go on the machine, let alone a chair. It’s tipping down outside and he’s turned up to this mudhole in the most impractical garb, could at least have offered him a macaroon. Still, he can look at his watch, even if a decision was taken during production that his original opening line “Hello everyone and look at my OMEGA, bitch” was so great, it had to go to Bond.

The way that lad's running about, those two bottles of fizzy pop are going to go off like grenades. Perhaps he's used to that. Mr Kony or whatever he's called is quite avuncular to the sprog, although one suspects that only lasts until the boy objects being strapped to an AK-47 and told to kill his mum. The sinister influence stretches to the child taking up pinball, one of UNESCO's noted Evil Games, along with cribbage and American football. There's a bit of blue / orange shining off Mr White's head as he carefully studies the boy. I'm not even going to contemplate what's going through his head at this point.

It does seem a curious question, this one about trusting an unmet man with money. That's how banks work, isn't it, my little chutney? Come now, it's 2006, nothing's going to go wrong and it's not as if corrupt bankers (cockney rhyming slang) are about to gamble it all away on completely crackpot ventures, is it? Not sure this little exchange of unpleasanties was intended to have quite such bitter prescience although with its concluding housing collapse it's possible to regard Casino Royale as Predictive Metaphor, in the same way as Quantum of Solace tells me much about the methods of my utilities providers and Skyfall explores Incoherent Old Age.

All Mr White's organisation provides is an introduction. Well, that and opera tickets. And something fine by Jaguar-Land Rover. Acceptable suits, access to top people and splendid houses. *Please* let me join. Absolutely my kind of chaps. Much better than SPECTRE: you don't have to pretend to like cats, for a start. Even if the only thing on offer is something that has "wiping" in the job description, *please*. I can adopt individual irresponsibility and still work well as part of a project, be it depriving folks of water or cackling or making erstwhile blabbermouthed chums drink motor

oil. I'm really motivated to join the team here at "...” Oh go on; I'll bring my own left leg trauma and rich sense of gated community spirit.

Right, here comes baddy; you can tell that, he has a black car. Lots of African kids wandering about with machine guns and heavily tooled up. As I'm left wondering why we don't have another caption telling us that this is "Florida", located in "According to Fox News", we hit

0.07.00

For the next hour, the plot gets wobblier than a blancmange contemplating its fate, text messaging and Bond being an uncouth, poorly-dressed simpleton both assuming critical importance. There is application of Tom Chadbon, so it's not as if the first hour's dreadful: just seems a bit overplayed, and I'd liken that to holding a particular poker hand if I knew one (or cared). Along comes The Money – I wouldn't object to making a deposit – and the film elevates itself to a dignity well beyond that sort of crass joke. The "little finger" stuff does stand out, and not well. You would hardly have noticed it in the previous ten.

From turbo-thug to efficient, cool killer via means of mashed-up nadgers, the most pyrrhic of victories and increasing awareness of his purpose as he both affects and effects events, Bond grows and the Bond "stuff" has room to grow around him, carefully nurtured rather than grafted on hideously. If it's not a Bond film if it doesn't have Q in it, then it's better off not being a Bond film.

Not easy to extrapolate a paradigm from the 007th minute of Casino Royale – perhaps it's not playing the game quite as we had come to expect / dread. The "revolutionary" aspects of the whole film less than were expected / dreaded, what the film as a whole

represents is simply another Age of Bond (if I write Bondage, you'll get an early morning call from the rozzers. "Bondage", then). We've had six already.

Casino Royale to From Russia with Love – high-living English gangster contrasting austerity post-War Britain with enticing morsels of sleaze and obscene amounts of food.

Dr No to Thunderball – ultra-spy, all flashy and exciting and indestructible, world traveller and slightly ludicrous.

The Spy Who Loved Me to Octopussy – deathdripped, deconstructed.

Saltzman & Broccoli – cheery, immense, dominating.

Broccoli A (1977-1989) – comfort-food, bit stodgy, bit Rodgy.

Broccoli B (1995-2002) – only certain in its uncertainty; significant legacy issues.

The seventh? One spy in his time plays many parts, as the other Jacques may have said (but didn't). The internet showed its childishness and promised mere oblivion, as if it was going to be possible that we should like a Bond sans teeth, sans height, sans taste, sans everything. However, this second childhood now promised rebirth, regeneration. Reboot.

I receive a goodly dollop of private correspondence in my "role" as moderator of a James Bond message board. Some accuse me of whimsical decision-making, which I'll take as a compliment. There's no point in having "power" if you can't abuse it. A fair amount runs "Your a a*hole" (airhole?), to which I don't reply because I cannot disagree. I am an airhole. On occasion, one receives the likes of "Please let me back in; I have devised another contrived post for my blog: They Contain Words: The Startling Connections Between

The Man From Barbarossa And The Argos Catalogue”. Now and again, amidst the embittered, nanosignificant drossblisters of souls in self-inflicted torment, I receive something worth taking seriously. One sympathetic correspondent asked why I continued to bother with the Bond films when the second ten only seem to have encouraged exaggerated contempt. It’s a fair question. I have a one-word answer.

Liverpool.

Not the whole city, although it is divinely charming and well worth a visit, with its pristine parks and views towards Alpine meadows, the clear waters of the Salzach burbling beside its fabulous coffee shops, although they do go a bit overboard on all the Mozart stuff. No, I’m thinking of the association football franchise, with its (at the date of writing) amusing cannibal and that other player who [deleted] with his [deleted, but definitely true: I read it on the internet so it must be] and then [ooh, he didn’t, did he? *Christ*] into a cup of tepid coleslaw. Admittedly the pending metaphor could stretch to supporting any footballist team, as indeed could moderating a fan-site be likened to finding one’s self in a borderline Tourette’s crowd given the opportunity to scream abuse and not get caught, but Liverpool seems the most apt.

For some time, coasting along, not really achieving very much and banging on about history and legacy and “this time it might work” but ultimately doomed, chugging along and barely keeping up. Then, rather unexpectedly and totally against the odds, halfway through the first decade of the twenty-first century, they only went and won the Champions League. That’s why I’ll still watch Bond. That’s why the Liverpool fans still watch. We now have hope, having seen what can be done.

THE 007TH MINUTE

All you need is hope.

And a fair bit of money, a very talented leading man, a credible script and tangible artistic vision.

And the capacity to ignore the internet completely.

Just as well, really. What came next appeared to *melt* it. You'd think – history of the Bond films dictating this, so it's not an unjustifiable thought – that the next step would be to replicate for Bond 22 and wait for the cash to roll in. You'd be slightly wrong, but it doesn't matter; you can call yourself what you like and post it without retribution. They don't know your name. They don't care.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE
OF QUANTUM OF SOLACE. WHEN THE STORM ARRIVES,
JACQUES STEWART WON'T BE SEEN WITH YOU.
HE'LL BE HIDING IN THE CELLAR.



QUANTUM OF SOLACE

SCIENCE FACT! #22

When not Doing James Bond Acting, Daniel Craig spends his spare time eating wasps. “They’re so crunchy and stingy; they’re lush, I just can’t get enough of them, and they help me develop my look of total radiant sunshine!” says Daniel, 83.

Revolution, evolution, resolution. Revelation.

Perhaps.

The origin of the specious, Casino Royale misled some that what was to follow would be as previously begat. A mild dabble in black & white, realism (pfft) and moody mirrorstaring now out of Eon's system, the Bonds would surely settle into comfy routine, the back-story done. Casino Royale wasn't as startling as the demented fire & brimstone trollpreaching lead anyone simple enough to believe, to so believe. Bond was complete – must have been; said his name, earned his theme – so steering complacent passage beckoned. We'd seen it before.

We knew.

We were the Bond-Knowers, a tremendous way to use up the only life one lives. To do anything else but give us “a Bond film” would be heretical and lead to purges or at least be anonymously commented on most tartly with brave spelling solutions and voluntary exposure of the quality of one’s education. If creating Bond was what Eon was now up to, we were entitled to see the creation come forth in the way oodles of films and umpteen books had taught us. If I’ve understood it correctly – questionable – creationism manifests itself in a variety of ways. The Word that is Bond was written by Fleming in the 1950s. The Word that is Bond was written by Fleming in the 1960s. The Word etc was the Connery films, or at least the ones where he’s not morbidly obese. If undereducated, the Word – word, bro – is something with the Pierce Brosnan gentleman. It appears that creationism is as susceptible to evolution as anything else. The Bond series not having been overburdened with originality since the 1960s, there was an understandable view that the first Craig having created the world, all would then come to pass as given and bode well in 00-heaven. Amen.

Until one encountered the Anti-Bond.

At which juncture, “persons” were upset, gnashing teeth, mashing keyboards, their heads spinning as they wrote in tongues, vomiting us a “view”, blaming the convulsions on trying to follow the editing. Expressing themselves in a way that witchburning used to satisfy, Quantum of Solace shook various clashing faiths in Bond, whichever version one considered gospel.

Some raged at the lack of explicit / explosive “closure” (ugh) of the Vesper “arc” (ugh ugh), others at the milky villainy or the inconclusive approach to Mr White and chums. For many, jiggycam confused (James Bond is in a chase and he wins; is this hard?) and for a select bunch, the undergraduate realpolitik didn’t appeal. The

song's apparently dreadful, the 'plane fight crashlanded in from another film, Bond shoving Mathis in a skip epitomises what should happen to the film and what goes on, goes on too quickly to engage. And the gunbarrel's all done wrong, inevitably. For a few hardy troglodytes, Mr Craig remained a problem, but most evolved people seemed to have pushed themselves up by their hairy knuckles and overcome this. Many told the world that it wasn't could have been better (surely the fate of all Bonds once the glee erodes) but should have been better. Should of. Or longer (albeit plumped with what has never been satisfactorily fingered).

However, it seemed rare to dislike all these (and other) allegedly negative attributes, and the gnawing seemed not so much between those who liked it and those who didn't, but between those who loathed it for X seeking dominance over those disliking Y. For the poor sods who admired it (hi), all one could do was watch. Not in (much) superiority but, for one's own part, in bewilderment at how vicious it became, humanity and consideration of one human for another, gone. How apt.

Now easily (too easily) perceived as the go-between of two "bigger" Bond films, Quantum of Solace undoubtedly establishes that each unhappy Bond fan is unhappy in their own way.

Good.

As a (yikes) *two-hundred-million-dollar* exploration of grieving, granted it has more exploding eco-hotels than the works of Nanni Moretti but is Quantum of Solace, at heart, intended to make one happy? Did we think this was going to be *fun*? A direct sequel to a film in which Bond fails on every level other than working out how to dress himself and say hello, was it reasonable to expect better than "bleak"? Bond is not complete at the end of Casino Royale; all

that's been achieved is gathering of the crust of the external elements as he sailed its eighty-hour voyage. He's no more than Vesper's abandoned seashell (ooh). Nice suit, ghastly watch, cheeky quips, multiple Aston Martins coming out of his charming jug ears – unless one believes that's all that there needs be for James Bond, in which case there are four Brosnans right up your passage, we had yet to see how Eon would meet the greater challenge of visually demonstrating internal trauma but still do Car Gun Bang Boat Grr Plane Fight Knives Boom Kissy-Wissy.

Accepting Bond as “done” at the end of *Casino Royale*, bereaved and bonkers of brain (the curt call with M ready evidence of a lack of “cope”), makes him Martin Riggs, who was interesting for half a film, as was his hair. Yuck. A more airpunchy, cathartic exercise with Bond laying waste to his foes in ever more violent ways might have met with more short-term favour but instead, Eon chose to demonstrate – both in the story and (I would aver) in its execution – that nothing one could do would suffice, life's a devious business that cannot undo the illusions that mask joy and misery and the violent dramatics of Bond's own life come to seem very hollow.

We know a short story about that.

We were warned. They named the atypical Bond 22 after an atypical Fleming. True, that didn't bode a direct adaptation, rarely has, but nor does the (un?)finished film suggest the title was coincidence. An immorality tale, the short story demonstrates how beastly people are by dint of what they *are*, the decay of superficial love and onset of indifference inflicting more corrosive wounds than any grenade-lobbery could achieve. Write what you know. If I'd have been Anne Fleming, I would have smashed the raddled old blister round the noggin with one of the many bottles plucked from Gold-eneye's sticky floor, for that. I'll give you Victor bleedin' Ludorum,

yer ratbag. Hiding (“poorly”) an acidic, humiliating message to the Mrs and broadcasting to the world in a short story you know many people will read because it has “James Bahnd!” in it produced an unsolicited biography the existence of which shows that – indeed – humans are ‘orrible. The nasty old sod unconscious, cramming his drooping, ulcered mouth with the morning’s hundred cigarette stubs would also have been a justifiable manoeuvre for Mrs F., because the story doubtless spiked her own revelatory celebrity book deal, “Boys of the West Indies”.

An engaging writer, but the Bonds come littered with evidence that Ian Fleming wasn’t pleasant at all. *At all*. Ghastly man, really. The upper-middle class, eh? Urr. Pooh-ee. Unacknowledged / ignored as the fatal weakness in the continuation novels, the writers who have inflicted themselves upon us haven’t been sufficiently vile to produce Proper Literary Bond, although Kingsley Amis came close and you can read into that what you like because he’s dead. For the next opportunity for our £18.99’s worth of underwhelmitude, IFP shouldn’t look at the Man Booker longlist, but the roll call at Broadmoor. Charlie Higson? Nah; Charlie Manson. C’mon, it’d sell. If the next gimmick – and gimmickry is what Literary Bond is descending into – is a female writer, which Rose will prove the more thorny – Tremain or West? What we need is IFP ‘fessing up that the search for the next writer is on but they’ll only welcome expressions of interest from Total Rudey Orifices.

Given that written Bond is produced under licence from Danjaq S.A., if soliciting ladyparts to tell us “Bond hit the foreign man. The foreign man fell down” for 320 pages becomes the business plan, accepting some persons’ reaction to James Bond Film Product #22 as gospel should lead them to the collective doorsteps of all involved in emitting Quantum of Solace. An adaptation of an arid, bitter short

tale about the futility of what Bond does into an arid, bitter short film about the futility of what Bond could do (and thereby being close to Fleming in spirit if not in word / deed) produced something genuinely divisive and – insofar as the internet can record emotion beyond guilt at all the masturbating – either curious admiration or deep, deep hatred.

I'm not here to tell folks who don't like *Quantum of Solace* that they're mistaken, nor that they should not express such reaction with vigour. I'm sure they're smashing. I do crave indulgence to suggest that a more credible place to find oneself reacting to something trying to entertain is not in being unhappy – there are many things about which to be unhappy; that one didn't like a film is really not one of them, unless you're odd – but in being *unsettled* by the things it does and says and its curious rhythms. That, I think, was its intention.

We aren't used to being unsettled by Bond, unless Uncle Rog dresses as a Bad Clown or Mr Brosnan sniffs dead women, or speaks. The 1980s films rumble by on a time-passing, white noise basis but they're creative flatlines of nostalgic comfort-stodge, playing out repeat beats in boringly-filmed places, a subtext of moribund complacency. That *Quantum of Solace* and *Octopussy* are part of the same series is jawdropping, but at least gives hope that "Bond" is so sufficiently malleable to embrace both "styles" that it will go on for years yet. I admire QoS for that, but more for the fact that finally we have a film about James Bond. The harbour chase stuff, the 'plane shootout, the villain's scheme, the leper-abouts – just garnish; cress. They just don't matter. Fleming tells us. Eon tells us. Rather than succumbing to their previous (very wise) tendency to bury a vacuous "character" beneath stunts and watches and explosions and invisible cars, distracting your attention from worrying

about 007 being a slab of nothingness, here the focus is Bond – who he is, what he does, what he becomes – and the rest of it, such as the villain’s deliberately underweight grand plan, is incidental (bringing one back to the short story. *Fancy*). As the lickle chap says: misdirection. *Not* bad direction.

For (very) many this did not come off; fine. Super. The expectations meant that there had to be action bolted on and for many those episodes don’t work, for a number of potentially justifiable reasons, although if one takes the adherence to Fleming’s tale to its conclusion, they weren’t meant to. That’s possibly stretching it, given the time, money, effort and risk involved in setting off explosions and driving like lunatics, but I’d suggest it’s not totally unsustainable as a thought.

As far as pushing into new crevices goes, is it more admirable to have tried and failed rather than not have bothered? The flawed execution is one thing, but surely some (grudging?) respect is due for setting themselves a challenge so many films, so many preconceptions and clichés, in? “It’s not like the Bond films of old”. No, but those were *A View to a Kill*, for frick’s sake, and as challenging as a discarded shoe upended in an stagnant puddle. For what it represents perhaps more than for what it is, was there ever a Bond film more misunderstood? Were we intimidated by the Bonds suddenly getting too clever for their own good? Our own good? Did they finally go too far?

The contemporary criticism often had those who liked the film doing it no favours by asserting – often expressly – that those who didn’t were thick and had missed the deeeeeeep stuff about the elements and how eyegougingly profound it all was. I’m not sure its detractors didn’t get that: they saw those things and just didn’t like them. Fair enough: there are other Bonds to enjoy, that’s the beauty

of it. Few of those others, though, gave such opportunity for mis-conceived intellectual posturing (such as, er, this piece), from either standpoint. Perhaps that was it; although disunity of specific reasons to dislike it, a common negative was that Eon was overstretching and getting ideas above its station. Threatening “our” Bond with unwelcome, unnecessary pretension, going “art-house”. It’s as art-house as Terrahawks, frankly, but the scent of the accusation is not wholly untenable.

That stuff about the elements? Ever-so-precious, but that’s an example of misdirection; the film is actually about exploiting people, the human resource. The major characters all circle, using each other in some way, usually naughty. Bond’s not exempt, using Mathis as conscience just as Mathis uses Bond for redemption. There was a short story that was all about people using... oh, never mind. The fire / water stuff is just pictures, not meaning. Still, that subtext is up for discussion / abuse suggests, however, that in *A Short Film About Not Killing*, we are far from (say) *TWINE*, a film about... about two hours long.

The direction, then: grotesque attention-seeking. True, unlike (many) Bonds, the film-making is evident and shouts itself into view, rather than just setting up a camera and hoping for the best, might get it facing the right way, sod it, it’ll do. Maybe it is out of place to have look-at-me flourishes in Bond. Bond films, anyway – Fleming constantly mucked about with experimental structures and authorial voices, his wild imagination not limited to what he wrote, but extended into how he did it. Wildly underappreciated as a prose stylist, that Ian Fleming. Is *QoS*’s tinkering mirroring this? “Back to Fleming”, eh? As far as the films go, one wonders where the problem lies: that it is done only now, or rarely before? Nailing stylistic tics onto a series that has eschewed them in pursuit of cash probably was

wasted effort; a shame. Was it that they were bad, or that we weren't used to them?

The editing... the editing. I CANNOT SEE WHAT IS GOING ON!! Why is this vital – must you draw it from memory, or explain it frame-by-frame to an infirm imbecile? The editing starts shattered, shaky and agitated because Bond starts shattered, shaky and agitated, and steadily calms as Bond finds his solace, realises that rampant isn't making anyone happy, and by the end it is still. Style and story as one: basic stuff, really. More annoying is that no-one objects to how they cut Tosca around. Says much about the audience, none of it flattering. “Yes, but they're just copying Bourne”. Come now, what is Quantum of Solace other than pretending to be something one is not? Outwardly happy marriage, inwardly divided house. For Bourne, read Maugham. If Fleming can pastiche, why not Eon, and why not mimic something more critically lauded than you? Is there anyone who thinks the Bond films would have survived beyond 1969 – when they ran out of sufficiently *varied* and filmable Fleming narratives – without giving us Bond does Shafting, Bond does Kung Fu, Bond does... er... Bond, Bond does Star Wars, Bond does On Golden Pond (On Golden Bond? *Arf*), Bond does Superman, Bond does Lethal Weapon, Bond does Bond (again) Bond does Jackie Chan, Bond does Bond (again again), Bond does Jason Bourne? If they hadn't done this, it would have closed down decades ago. Once one fad's exhausted, another turns up to spin in a 007-y way, to take our money. Many saw The Dark Knight overtones in Skyfall; fair enough, as it's equally overhyped and confused.

Ah, you say, in that monosyllabic way you have (bless; are you seeing someone for that, though?), but did it have to be so sour, dour and alienating? Yes. Yes, it *did*. It's grippingly mean-spirited. To give us something where power motives shift beyond “this man is

foreign, therefore bad, please kill, don't flirt with Moneypenny and go and see Q, he's hil-air-i-ous" where the only tenable resolution with such shaky foundations must be peace rather than war: one can well understand how it enraged. There is payoff of the Vesper story but it's in recognising humanity rather than violence and I accept that this could be immensely frustrating if you're about three. They probably won't do it again, it shows other Bonds up as bloated balloons, but it's a more rewarding experience than the twelve seconds it lasts would suggest. I may have used that line before, in another context.

Of course, all this might be rubbish and we were conned into watching an unfinished, short film that escaped rather than got itself released, on which \$200 million was spent to questionable effect. I'm prepared to give it a pass, although that is an appalling amount of cash for the production of light entertainment about a fictional drought given that much less could ameliorate the effect of a real one. If the ideas and parallels I express are but wishful revisionism, at best the accidental product of rushing an underdeveloped film to an immovable unleashing date, I utterly accept that you don't have to like it.

But you really don't have to hate it, either.

Up to the 007th minute, we haven't had one of those gunbarrel thingies, so that's a bad start for some, and then things get jumpy, a worse start for more. Having been involved in a car accident in my time, I couldn't work out much of what was going on either, and things seemed a bit "spinny", so I'm happy enough with it albeit it tends to bring back counselled-away memories of treesmack interface braking solution F*** that hurt. The film's out of control because Bond's out of control etc etc and starting this way puts some distance between us and the film until it does calm down later – I'd

also suggest that was deliberate. Bond in this state is not a man to admire nor emulate nor be the subject of wish-fulfilment. It becomes more engaging when he *is*. At the outset, he's mad as hell, his girlfriend's just dead and he has someone locked in his boot. *Dear Slim, I wrote you but you still ain't calling / I left my cell, my pager, and my home phone at the bottom...*

Only when he values consequence – to himself and others – does the solace come. Yum. It's just the gift that never stops giving, innit?

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 QUANTUM OF SOLACE

So, we're about halfway through the dementedly blue / orange titles and it's time to be told that "Another Way to Die" is performed (well, sorta) by Jack White and Alicia Keys, whoever they might be, and written and produced by Jack White. More than welcome to it. It is rough and discordant and I suppose that could be kindly interpreted as intentional, exhibiting further the idea that Bond is messed up too. A smoother, more melodious "classically Bond" effort would not suggest it as strongly. It is certainly splintery, jagged and grrrrrrr but neither artiste is someone whose other works I have hunted down in the giddy anticipation of jiving to their grooves. It's a row, basically. Insofar as its nature is intended to fit the story's ideas, it seems to serve the same purpose as RoboMadonna from a couple of films back and be at odds with the expected. It may as well have the lyric "This one's going to be different" screeched at us; that would make more sense than describing James Bond as a "blinger", which is very, very, very horrible. I can see why they went this sort of route, but whilst I embrace much in the film that suggests the same idea, this I just don't like. But then I don't have to like it to accept it, as the bigger boys used to say, usually salivating.

A gun tumbles away, hugely meaningfully in its tumbly way. I don't know what type of gun it is, not being a cretin. "Shoot 'em up: bang bang" "sings" the female person and one stares unseeing (and ideally, unhearing) at the screen, lost in fond memories of Don Black and his willy euphemisms. Now the gun's made out of sand, which is doubtless telling us how transient and powerless all violence ultimately is, its gains mere grains. Might as well not bother with the film now, as that's basically the plot. It's in danger of taking itself just a bit too seriously, isn't it? Still, thematically consistent; more so than this bloody song, anyway.

The executive producers, producing executively, were Anthony Wayne and Callum McDougall and there's not a vast amount I can say here other than I suspect they're the ones who do a lot of the hard work although I'm still mystified about how, in so working, they could spend \$200 million along the way. The film looks smart and the locations are varied and novel but – c'mon – two *hundred* million dollars? No wonder economies went pop in 2008 if folks are blowing this amount of cash on delivering a film: how much was being spent on stuff that mattered? Like, well, me? Almost as much, if I'm honest.

Bond drops down from the left. Some have it in their heads (and saw fit to then type it onto our screens) that this is indicative of the political leaning of the film, particularly in its attitude to the Western powers, the shape-shifting of MI6 and the CIA, their political compromises and their corrupt, cynical attitude to Greene's scheme. James Bond as a concept, so the argument went, doesn't (and doesn't need) to deal in such stuff – it's better to have a fantasy where good and evil are clearly marked out to entertain us; look at how successful it has been doing just that. There's something in this view but a) it rather blithely ignores much of what Fleming wrote,

especially in *Casino Royale* (and, for that matter, *Quantum of Solace*) and b) it completely blithely ignores the point of Mathis banging on about how heroes and villains get all mixed up (a direct lift of a line delivered by *James Bond* in the novel *Casino Royale*) which is how Bond reaches solace acceptable to him by this film's end and c) it ludicrously blithely ignores forty-five years of making Americans look brashly idiotic and the British secret service a bunch of bedentured old fools who keep mislaying their submarines. Apparently that's better, somehow.

Doubtless trying to shake the awful row going on, Bond rolls around on the floor, grabs his gun and fires rather prettily in slow-motion. The square cufflinks are most questionable.

It was written by Paul Haggis and Neil Purvis & Robert Wade, and the director, and Daniel Craig, and loads of other people who weren't on strike at the time and does come across as unpolished (although I would aver this as a strength; it hasn't been smoothed away). Those insisting that *Quantum of Solace* is a hateful and hate-filled adaptation of one of Ralph Milliband's works tend to point to this Haggis as the source of its leanings. Perhaps something in this, albeit P&W's depiction of aggressively hawkish Americans in *Die Another Day* doesn't suggest it was all his doing. Similarly, to propose that the British government is infected by *Quantum* and is prepared to do deals with unusual persons to keep the lights on seems wholly in accordance with where Sir Robert King and Gustav Graves (and for that matter, Sir Hugo Drax) were skipping along very merrily. Quite a few fingers, once shaved, are pointed at the Gregory Beam character and his motivations as unnecessarily criticising the UK and the USA's Axis of Kindly Innocence. This tends to ignore what the writers have happen to Beam at the end of the film and the suggestion that "everything's actually OK now that he's

gone, one bad apple” which is hootingly unrealistic and about as politically critical as twenty-odd films depicting the CIA as unmitigated twerps / MI6 as stunningly lazy and teeth-grindingly gullible / the hard-edged political reality of Sir Frederick Gray / having Bond apparently working for General Gogol all along. Unpleasant and shiftily as the CIA and the politicians on show in *Quantum of Solace* may be, at least they’re competent and know what they want.

The depiction of M is interesting, though. Fallible; open to question. Misconstrues pretty much everything Bond does; his “You were right” at the end has an unspoken “about one thing” following it, Bond basically being right about everything else that happens save for that one big Vesper-shaped error. He needn’t give M that solace, albeit the Governor’s theorem applies as much to Bond’s relationship between himself and M, as to the one with Vesper and goes a long way to explaining his motivation in the next film. Again, the criticism would doubtless be that prior Ms – or at least prior to Dench – were rocksolid, resolute, certain, but then that’s also why they were only on screen for about three minutes because that gets really dull. Here, the seeds of *Skyfall* are sown. Just as Bond has a couple of films to get to an “end”, so does M, this one and the next, an overlap. Would it have convinced as much that this M could have taken the coldhearted decisions about Silva – and Bond – in *Skyfall* without this film’s track-record of them? With the Bond / M trilogy settled, *Quantum of Solace* is worth re-watching as a *prequel* and seeing what one can derive from it. It won’t take you very long and I think it genuinely holds up.

I accept that some of the M characterisation arguably goes back to *GoldenEye* but that’s probably a different person, in as much as Jack Wade is a different person to Thingy Wassface, and Mr Wallace is a different person to Greek Priest is a different person to General

Chandler is a different person to Man in Audience at Pyramids is a different person to Bloke Reading Newspaper in Grotsome Hotel. If the Brace of Denches is actually the same person, then I suppose one could say this fondness for having her agents chew cyanide was well on display in (P&W's) *Die Another Day*. She could have passed it around, to spare us. Heartless bitch.

Sand speckles and all madly blue / orange again, here comes the bullet, an effect that might look groovy in 3D but then my judgment must be questioned as I've used the word "groovy". Perhaps not quite as novel as *Casino Royale's* titles, nor as ostensibly epic as *Skyfall's*, these are still a decent effort and get over their idea of a world built on nothing more but constantly shifting sands, very soundly. And look! A little red gunbarrel, presumably to appease the mad.

As produced by Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli, I'd venture this is the most interesting (for good or ill) of the Craigs, although in writing that I am reminded that whenever my mother describes someone or something as "interesting", she is usually only being politely devastating. It will probably be about as extreme as they will ever push things, given the reception, but wisely they did enough with *Skyfall* not to be expressly rejecting ideas from *Quantum of Solace* as spurned errors. It feels much more comfortably part of a whole now, easier to embrace as fitting into the picture rather than rejected as a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much loved and elegant friend. I'm not suggesting it still won't stand out in the series because of the things it does and the way in which it does them, and the architecture takes some getting used to, but in due course we may become accustomed to its differences and not force it to skulk in the parlour with a bag on its head whilst its more handsome siblings go to the Ball and find themselves willing suitors.

A bullet bursts the sun and shrieky woman goes BANG BANG BANG BANG (it is reminiscent of a Eurovision entry firstly in that it appears to have been translated into English rather than written that way, and secondly because it is godawful). Directed by Marc Forster. If I recall it correctly, the revelation that he wasn't wedded to the Bond series seemed to enrage those who were. Patently he must have seen *The Spy Who Loved Me* as that's all over this film, in a number of amusing ways that don't necessarily draw attention to themselves, a novelty given the fondness for suggesting that there's a DB5 around every corner. This Mr Forster seems to regularly cop a lot of such blame as is smeared along *Quantum of Solace*. He didn't know Bond! To some an error, but surely wisdom? Could one of the usual suspects have come up with something so outside the focus, so beyond the beat, of the fossilised routine? Why not allow them to try something different, escape the shackles of one's fans having liked the last one so much they want to see it over and over, and over and over, and over, forever, and not let you free? Ah, the internet, where Annie Wilkes can live on, hobblings on cue. Those bits in *World War Z* where the rampant zombies pile on each other in braindead attack; who knows *what* could have inspired Mr Forster?

Ah, a public spectacle that you know will be disrupted in some way; it's not so different a Bond film after all. The eventual parallel of the Bond / Mitchell chase and the thoroughbred stallions charging along is a bit of an obvious one and many were confused by how it was filmed; personally I became very distracted wondering how the hell Bond got a very big, wide car into Siena when the Palio's on. The chase in the crowd does give us something chewy when it shows us the passer-by being tended to once shot. You don't usually get that in a Bond. Consequences.

Ooh, bet that hurt, dumping Mr White in a chair. Gets to do very mad cackling soon, although this may be because he has landed on his bag. Big drip appears onscreen but I'm meant to be nice to Mr Craig, so let's just say he's looking very blue / orange. Very. Whatever's about to happen – and it duddn't look subtle, do it? – is going to happen in what looks very like General Gogol's office from, yep, *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Uncanny.

Judi Dench is behind bars! Meaningful and significant and goodie / baddie all mixed up and “art” and subtext and, ooh I dunno, stuff. Alternatively it's overdue punishment for that *Riddick* film. There's a big red light above Judi's door – either this is a take on the classic M office arrangement or is a very mischievous suggestion about her private life. If not literal, but liberal, this is definitely symbolic of how the intelligence communities whore themselves out. Definitely. It's just so thematically rich, yeah? Just so deep.

Hello to Mitchell – Bond's not particularly friendly or charming, is he? Probably the point. It's about two days / two years since his woman drowned herself and he's having such a rough time his shirt collar doesn't know whether it's inside or outside his jacket.

“The Americans are going to be none too pleased about this”. Just wait until they see the Gregory Beam character and his Wacky Moustache of Liberal Corruption of Bond. As we get to 0.07.00, Bond hitting the drink in a Fleming-y way, there's direct sequelising with the referencing of *Le Chiffre* – does anyone not a Bond fan really remember? Or care? – and we're about to have a little chat about Vesper, although notably Bond *cannot actually bring himself* to say her name until the very end of the film (although others do) and THAT IS BASICALLY THE IDEA, YEAH?

0.07.00

Perhaps all that's going too far but as my evenings are spent writing the offspring's A-level English literature homework, that's the sort of wide-eyed rubbish that deceives their "teachers".

Whilst we're on "teachers", what lessons does Bond learn from *Quantum of Solace* (apart from, bearing in mind how poorly some regard it, "Don't do it again")? When M bangs on about Bond having learned some sort of lesson by the end of *Casino Royale*, it's unclear what that lesson was (Don't trust women, least of all her?) and fails to recognise that it's in this one that the educational opportunities actually arise. Evidently it was too early to promote him, insofar as he was patently unprepared for just how nasty the world was.

Development – and why *Quantum of Solace* is "necessary" – sees Bond become less of a random killing machine (Mitchell, Slate) and more of a personal statement (Greene, Yusuf). For the first half of the film he's lashing out wildly and it brings no evident satisfaction and simply puts him on the back foot with his own people. Even when he's calming down (a bit), becoming wiser about things, piecing clues together and being less hideously violent, round about the Tosca scene (a totally deliberate choice of opera, no doubt), a retained penchant for thuggery still causes the death of the Special Branch officer. Even though Bond is not directly responsible, it's the consequence of his rashly throwing the chap off the roof. I'd suggest that as the major turning point. The results of his artless violence laid bare and the lowest point of his relationship with his own people. He has to change his approach, wholly. From this point on, all Bond's kills – and "not kills" – are directed and pointed rather than just carving his way through supporting artistes and making him *Feel All Bad And The Pain Still Ain't Going to Go Away*.

Which is the point of Camille, so engrossed in revenge Bond can see how encompassing it gets, to the point where, revenge obtained,

she beckons death rather than continue on, consumed by fire rather than vengeance. Loose, lost, hollow and purposeless at the end of it. May as well dig those two graves Uncle Rog talked of. The dead don't care about vengeance etc etc. Where Camille is left is absolutely spot on. Her story exposes that Bond's little, *little* world of Vesper and MI6 and the horrible things that have happened within it happen everywhere and there's really *no way to stop it*. Time to step onto the world stage, Jamie. The bigger picture is that the world's a mess and you may as well walk along, smiling. Revenge has encompassed Camille to the point of weariness, such hopelessness exploited by Greene, rather than concentrating on stopping naughty men doing bad things with whatever it was, water or something. Revenge just isn't worth it and will never make such an enormous pain heal, so why chase it down? Don't become like Camille, move on, achieve as good a solace as you're ever actually likely to get and will keep you sane, say her name one last time and throw the necklace in the snow. A hopeless game; play on, play on. Off Camille goes, all done, on a train, just as Vesper came in on one. Cyclical, That's probably coincidental but I rather like it.

M's assessment of Bond being out solely for revenge and blinded by it is amusingly placed just after a scene in which it's bluntly spelled out that Bond observes that revenge *isn't* worth the candle because it actually won't stop anything. It's not the Anti-Bond; it's the Anti-Licence to Kill, for which we can be most grateful, give it a cuddle; maybe a bit of tongue.

Responsibility and consequences. Bond's deadly charm, a neat inversion of what has frequently been used as an attribute, means death for poor little innocent, inoffensive Fields, drowned in oil in much the same way as Camille is drowned in orange paint. Although the seduction of Fields may look more of a "Bond" style encounter

after the depth (pun!) of the Vesper relationship, it's going too far the other way; he doesn't even bother to find out her name until after the deed is done. Palpable guilt. No solace in such encounters. *Why her?* Possibly best to try to draw a balance in future, but still not get too caught up in events; leave the innocent out of it, seduce those already corrupted by events or (more darkly; Bond might be healed, never said he was "nice") the girl with a wing down and therefore complicit in the risks and / or rushing headlong into danger. The sort of woman who hangs around floating casinos, that'll do. Otherwise, you'd only be wasting good Scotch.

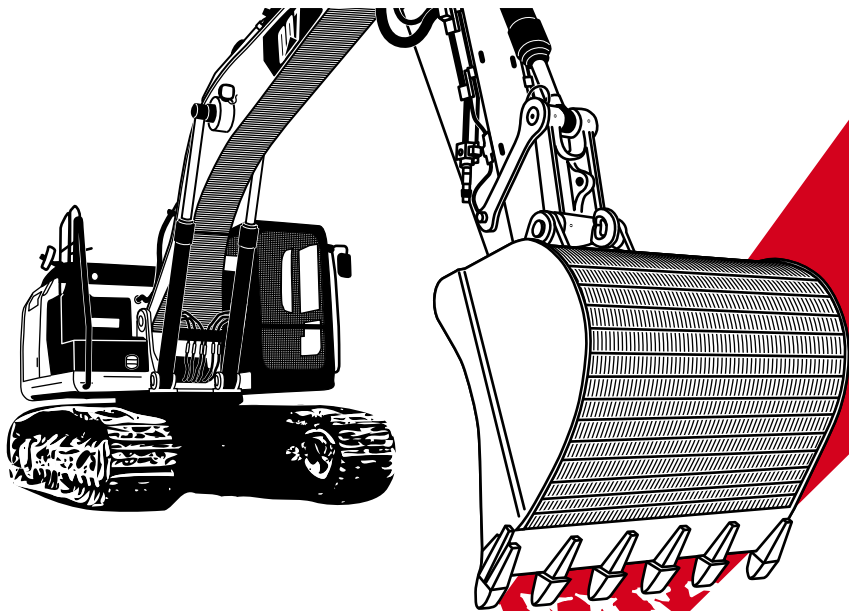
Could it have been (superficially) strengthened by a more powerful villain? I rather like Dominic Greene; shifty, spineless, a bit lazy, quite appalling teeth, offhand, dismissive, no physical power beyond a few choice barbs and lots and lots of money. He doesn't seem all that bothered about his plan, either, just another scheme; very funny. Patently his murkiness is wrapped up in the idea of the ultimate hopelessness of Bond's role in trying to fight such folks: the sands just shift, perspectives change, did you not watch the title sequence? As for Quantum, they don't want to take over the world, because they already have. That's the "point"; one of the funnier ideas within this depiction of "the aftermath" – here we have Bond fighting on after the world has already been conquered by the baddies. No point getting too het up about things; just smile and walk on. Some remain upset that there's no evident resolution of Quantum but I hope there never is. I rather like the idea of it being part of the same government that sends Bond out to kill for it. *The heroes and villains get all mixed up.* Mathis expresses this and ends up being dropped into a bin by his pal for his trouble; some were surprised. Some saw the point. Some wondered why that Obi-Wan McGregor kept telling that Pinocchio lad that he would be the death of him. Could it all have been significant? *Oh, do tell.*

Other than implying the uncontrolled fate of the characters involved, however, I still don't know why the freefalling bit's there. Not everything has a meaning, surely? Sometimes it's just "Bond film" whereas for the most part it's a "James Bond film" and that's not insignificant this time around.

Bearing all of this stuff in mind, the Yusuf encounter, on first viewing superficially underwhelming as a climax, plays out entirely appropriately; Bond can destroy a man without killing him. He can choose not to kill. For Bond there would no satisfaction, lest he become as lost as Camille, and the wider responsibility to his duty means it is better to keep the man alive. Releasing Greene and Yusuf from the consequences of their actions by killing them is to give them satisfaction, but not Bond. Arguably, brutal violence is replaced by a peculiarly moral sadism, but you have to have been through it to come to this conclusion. Every now and then a trigger has to be pulled, or not pulled; it's hard to know which, in your pyjamas.

James Bond, eh? He also makes quiche.

JAMES BOND WILL RETURN IN THE 007TH MINUTE OF
SKYFALL. JACQUES STEWART IS A DIRTY MONEY,
HEAVEN SENT HONEY, TURNING ON A DIME. WHEN MRS
JIM FORGETS TO LOCK HER MAKE-UP AWAY, ANYWAY.



SKYFALL

SCIENCE FACT! #23

Bond's response to Silva's sexual advances is actually - science factually, actually - a reference back to his being expelled from Eton for an incident with a maid, whose gender was never stated.

This is the end. Beautiful friend.

Hold your breath and...

No, don't. Asphyxiation might be your jolly – not judging (I am a bit) – but you'd be tucked up in dead before you finished this; it has girthbloat. If bidding for oblivion, bore yourself to death reading it. Still, I don't want your sticky end on my hands (fnarr). The guilt I'll cope with, via the medium of indifference; it's that I've always found grinding my heel into an upturned face far more satisfying. Or, as I age, paying someone else to do it. It's murder on the knees.

Judi Dench snuff movie *Skyfall* is where we start. A billion-dollar Bond behemoth, so one little prick on the internet (hi there) isn't going to burst it. Still, all that tremendous, oddly heartwarming success (albeit having had no stake in the film beyond "going to see it") does lead me to contemplate blockbusters. Or, more precisely, Blockbusters.

For those blessed with ignorance, Blockbusters was a tiffin-time British quiz programme of the 1980s, broadcast via the harlotry of commercial television, aimed at a beteenaged audience. One could tell that because of the prizes, habitually a "programmable" ZX Spectrum (48K "ram", no less), a box of coloured pencils or a cultural weekend in tropical Cannock (go for the pencils). Doubtless a modern equivalent would have to dole out fake tan, mobile telephones or Tablets. Can't help feeling tablets in those days were more fun: when one dropped them, it wasn't the machine that got itself shattered. Halcyon days. If only I could remember them.

I'm sure – this is the internet and this is what happens – someone with insufficient life to lead will screech that Blockbusters has been revived on various digital channels, hosted by Walid Jumblatt or Gabriela Sabatini or Your Mum, but it's the original version that I want to waste your time reading about, the iteration hosted by Bond manqué Bob Holness. That's Bond manqué, not Bond monkey (insert your brilliant *Daniel Cregg is an Ape* observation... [here]).

Bob, star of the South African radio production of *Moonraker* ("Munrikker"), all demento-teeth and avuncular spectacles, would fire down questions from a plinth above which loomed a vast polystyrene God. Most eccentric. The adolescents selected letters – like the Commandbond.net ABC game, but worthwhile – and James Bond would flick one out, along the lines of "What H can you wear on your head and rhymes with cat?" so the viewers – the unem-

ployed, the unemployable, all types of Scouser really – weren't unduly alienated and could celebrate their communal GCSE. Winning a game inserted one into the Gold Run (both a filthy euphemism and a metaphor for vile capitalist avarice), striving to win two ping-pong bats for one's "youth club". Then it all ended with the underwashed audience performing a hand jive, which gave teenagers something energetic to do with their hands because otherwise they'd be totally at a loss.

Of itself, the involvement of the late Mr Holness rips open a field of speculation about shows that could be fronted by other Bonds, but beyond suggesting The "Actor" Pus Binbag in close proximity to The Weakest Link, you'll be glad I deleted the rest of this pathetic idea. Slightly more on point (slightly), one of the highlights of the show would be one of the juveniles selecting the appropriate letter with "I'd like a P please, Bob". Oh, how we laughed, so much so that our childhood teatime plates of swan rissole would wobble from our bescabbed knees or off the back of the supine junior boy one used as a pouffe. Back then, one didn't usually have broadcast into one's pliant mind relentless pissing references, or at least whenever John Craven's Newsround wasn't being deadly serious and telling us that one couldn't catch AIDS from loo seats, rendering them safe to lick. There was a more sinister variation – "I'd like U please, Bob" – but even in those pre-Yewtree days we all recognised that particular fusion of the traditional and the modern was a bit, y'know, urr. Which was often the answer, oddly enough.

So – let's play Blockbusters!

"I'd like a P please, Bob!" (Oh grow up, 007). "Right: what P are things into which you can put your hands and Macau casino chips which, if used, would have clobbered the story of Skyfall completely?"

Pockets. Not of resistance: Skyfall as a big ball of billions, it was hard not to be overwhelmed. Might as well lie down in its path, let it snowball over one and roll along with it, embrace its momentum gleefully numb even if mystified about why it was so highly regarded. However, if Mute Colin Farrell had put that casino chip in his pocket and it had dropped over the edge with the rest of him, rather than amazingly fortuitously leaving it lying around for Bond amazingly fortuitously to somehow work out its amazingly fortuitous significance, where would we have got to? Much depends on Bond finding that chip and hitting on precisely the right conclusion about it. I suppose the argument is that his having spotted Severine he could just have followed her (and isn't this a bit more likely anyway?). Might have given the fortuitously amazing Berenice a little more to do.

A lot of ~~The Bond Identity~~ Skyfall relies on amazing fortune. Too much. I wholly accept that Bonds are not noted for their impermeable plotting. Anyone seeking total narrative coherence, rather than simply an entertaining time, is off their chump, and yet Skyfall's ludicrous, innit? Bond amazingly fortuitously survives his skyfall (no idea how) and amazingly fortuitously makes it back to London without any visible means of support where amazingly fortuitously in three months or ten years (or however long it is Baldemort whines about) M – for whom bells toll, amazingly fortuitously – has instigated no investigation whatsoever into either 007's whereabouts or, more competently, those of a man Agent NoName has seen getting into AN AUDI and through a sniperscope and could therefore readily identify. M, whose competence is justifiably questioned, would seemingly prefer to wait on the off-chance that Bond amazingly fortuitously turns up despite having written his obituary and boxed up his stuff (she adopted his alcohol), and amazingly fortuitously Bond

bears no grudge despite hearing everything that was going on whilst in Turkey and should really mash M's head in with that ghastly bulldog that amazingly fortuitously M appears to have inherited from John Hurt's Control. What's M been doing in all that time? Plainly her fitness for office should be doubted; made weak by time and fate and shocking complacency, and the booze. At least Bond can dance and drink and screw, 'cause there's nothing else to do. Amazingly fortuitously, I'm not going to imagine The Dench M doing any of those things. Except the drinking, the imagining of which doesn't take any effort. SIS going up in smoke twice under M's regime? To lose one building is unfortunate; to lose two is humiliating incompetence. Don't fire her: *burn her*. Here's a plan: shove the old bag off to Scotland, she usually scuttles there when HQ goes bang; this time, dispatch her with a rogue agent you're not too keen on and then send after them that bloke you secretly released from his cell, to wipe them out. Keep it off the record and see to it that there are no witnesses. Then seize power and split your soul into disconnected fragments and chop yer nose off, or something. No, that sounds too much like a realistic plot.

Subsequently, in a flavour of fortuitously-liness labelled "amazing", Silva is / allows himself to be captured (bit unclear, but he didn't seem to be making progress towards "getting to M" otherwise), so amazingly fortuitously everyone can forget about the Not-The-Noc-List from that point on and amazingly fortuitously he can muck up Q's computer in some sort of computer way it's better not to scrutinise too deeply and amazingly fortuitously Bond cracks the code with a bit of pub-quiz level knowledge about the London Underground but too late because amazingly fortuitously Mr Silva escapes at the optimum moment to amazingly fortuitously encounter a couple of his acolytes carrying his disguise and amazingly for-

tuitously blows up a bomb that amazingly fortuitously he either a) had time to plant despite not evidently having a load of explosive “conveniently to hand” or b) remembered where he had placed n years previously, an explosion that brings down upon Bond a train that amazingly fortuitously happens to be coming along (and in the interests of good taste, amazingly fortuitously happens to be completely empty despite it having been rush-hour two minutes previously).

In another corner of this Forest of Absolute Madness, just at the point when the whole purpose of spies and all their silliness / the James Bond series and all its silliness is under direct threat and question, amazingly fortuitously giving the more dull-witted viewer insight into what the previous ninety minutes have patently been about, amazingly fortuitously along comes a) deeply meaningful poetry and, just in case that passes you by, b) Silva! and Bond! and guns! to prove that this decrepit pantomime still has merit.

‘Mazing.

Amazingly fortuitously, Bond’s Q-branch kitted car doesn’t have a tracker in it and amazingly fortuitously the crackpot plan of leaving Bond and M alone is endorsed by Nu-M who amazingly fortuitously seems to consider an incompetent agent appropriate as a PA. Amazingly fortuitously, Skyfall is kitted out with just the right sort of stuff to dispose of multi-goons and a big helicopter gunship, including Sixties icon ~~Sean Connery~~ Albert Finney who amazingly fortuitously happens to still be kicking around the house despite it patently having been abandoned decades previously which amazingly fortuitously is a very clear metaphor for the Bond series having abandoned its roots over time and let itself decay so amazingly fortuitously all the old cack gets blown up and they start again which amazingly fortuitously is the point of the enterprise, ac-

knowledging the past but not afraid to move forward. Amazingly fortuitously Bond escapes drowning (without explanation – again) although amazingly unluckily M gets killed, somehow, and Silva gets himself stabbed in the back a second time (o-ho!) but it's all OK really because amazingly fortuitously Nu-M has a fresh mission for Bond rather than, say, arresting 007 on the spot – or at least hauling him away ignominiously for scrap – for unsanctioned actions leading directly to his predecessor's death and amazingly fortuitously this utter, utter nonsense and good fortune made Eon an even more amazing one.

Considerably less fortuitously, M is now named Gareth.

P also stands for Piffle, then. You're entirely at liberty to observe that it's colossal hypocrisy for a piece such as this to accuse something else of incoherence, but then P is also for I know (the P is silent: try that as a lifestyle choice, poppet).

"I'd like another P please, Bob!" Ah; the inevitability of time. Getting up so frequently at night used to mean more pleasurable escapades. "So: what P doesn't really matter?" Plot. Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and pay the money over. Persona, Purpose, Power, Psyche and with a slightly smaller p, patriotism. These are why the film is rather tremendous – and hilarious in its relentless pumping of these themes until one feels defiled and discarded – even if seeking to impose order on its surface story is a hopeless endeavour. Of course, "trying to find sense in uncertainty" is A BIG THEME so let's be nice and say that the baffling chaos of the narrative is yet another level of "oh, very clever" among other ideas arising less amazingly fortuitously.

Identity figures large, its absence / removal causing conflict – be it personal or physical – and, in the struggle for its resurrection, true

value and purpose emerge. It plays out on several riotously chewy levels, applying to Bond, all of the major characters, the Bond series and Britain “herself”. With the struggle between the traditional and modern being identity’s battleground, sometimes express, more interesting when subtle, it’s amazingly fortuitous any sort of story could hang on and propel us towards the statutory concluding explosions. True, some of this search for persona material is text: Bond, his obituary written and his flat sold, is without identity and (literally) washed up, struggling to pass muster. Q has to prove himself to Bond. Ms Harris’s character doesn’t get a name until the last minute. Old M is about to have her persona taken from her and Gareth has his removed, subsumed into The Establishment by the end – at least Bond doesn’t call him “Gary”, thank God – and, albeit it’s abandoned as a plot point, the true identities of the MI6 agents has considerable significance early on.

Most amusingly hardwired into this idea is Silva, demanding recognition of his true name and, for all his ostensible “modernity”, loses to Bond because he cannot release his past, be it his childhood island or his Hong Kong trauma, whereas Bond simply uses his to his survival advantage and then, never really caring for it, blows it up. The only prison that can hold Silva is his history (ooh). His devotion to it, his obsession with it, his belief that it gives his crusade purpose and meaning, stays his trigger hand at the end of the film, inactive and uncertain, leading to a newer model creeping up on him to deliver a fatal wound. Britain / China. Silva / Bond. Old Bond films / post -2006 Bond films. Amusing, yes. Subtle: no. In Silva’s past mistreatment by M’s justifiable expediency, Bond sees his future – the man’s name’s even James, for frick’s sake.

What Silva does is of no real consequence – who knows / cares what happens to the list of agents? – it’s who he is and what he

represents that presents the challenge. This is a fair old shift from villains with tighter schemes but, deft one-liners aside, anaemic characterisation (Stromberg, Drax, Kamal Khan, Zorin: them lot). Insofar as “Bond learns from his journey” (yuck) it’s that one doesn’t have to set old and new a-clash; one can actually be both, balanced correctly, the challenge Eon faces every three years or so.

Which brings the next level up: a series struggling for identity and analysing itself, its last effort having been considered by many to have been a fall from Casino Royale’s great height, landing dead in the water. After fifty years, what can the Bond series do? What’s it for? Worn out in going through the usual tests and surely all played out by now; why not stay dead? Abandon the past completely and one risks another round of the reaction to Quantum of Solace, that it’s just too different and not immediately recognisable as a Bond. Drive oneself on legacy alone and it’s just another indistinguishable Bond film cruising complacently on its history, nothing creative save for the accounting.

Similar to GoldenEye in its touching on James Bond’s place in a changed world but whilst GoldenEye only toyed with that for about forty minutes of unsure fumbling, and didn’t know what to do with it, beating a swift retreat into the usual routines, this one follows it right through to the end. Skyfall gets by in being an exemplary statement of balanced resurrection, whereas GoldenEye revered the legacy too much and ended up trapping Eon creatively for the decade to follow. GoldenEye is nostalgic, not letting go, surrounding itself with ancient bric-a-brac and tat, in denial. Think on your sins. Skyfall accepts fate, and avoids nostalgic by going *elegiac* instead. There’s more than one obituary being written, here. Three Craig films in and much has been reworked and refreshed,

and we're ready to move forward again. GoldenEye reinforced the absurd post-colonial anachronism; Skyfall seeks to engineer a more modern mythology. We have to be realistic – this is not 1962 any more. *Enough*. Enough of “back to Fleming” or “this one's more in the vein of From Russia with Love”; it's time to look forward, with pleasure.

Still, one cannot ignore the past and the factors that have given you the opportunity to make twenty-three of these films and grasp lots of lovely money. Roll out the DB5, Dench M, Q, Moneypenny, the SIS building. However, in walking this teetering tightrope, one can blow them up or kill them off or remould them to be contemporary, Eon using its past to its advantage of giving us nice little moments without heading into Die Another Day's blunderbuss of totally purposeless background references, which by comparison look now not so much as celebrating the series but holding it in contempt. Skyfall is the film Die Another Day could have been – the early beats of a dishevelled and discredited Bond getting himself back in order once he's had a nice shave are weirdly parallel – had Die Another Day not been smugly self-indulgent claptrap, holding up a mirror to James Bond not to stare back bleakly, Craigly, in self-doubt, but in self-love, a two hour winking session in its pathetic juvenile bubble.

Some of how Skyfall manifests its nods to the past are huge fun, and testament to witty production design – the new / old / new M office, a traditional environment from which new adventures will emanate (which seems to be the point of the preceding two hours), Q's flashy computer lab in some sort of ancient sewer, the Conneryesque grey suit (with it being an oddly tight fit presumably another allusion to the constraints of the legacy). Some of it is too arch, with all that guff about exploding pens as unsubtle a rejection of the Brosnan

years as GoldenEye's pre-titles was of Dalt-Ton. Equally, is making John Steed Bond's superior officer a way of referencing A View to a Kill in all its glory (the "I" is silent)? I do hope so.

Nu-Q, Nu-M, Nu-Building Nu-Moneypenny and – once the Aston Martin is blown up, Skyfall burned and his past gone with it, Bond himself – are traditional creatures of the future, embracing but not crushed by the past. Transition is complete. For the film to have started – and persisted – with questions over fitness, age and purpose and for it to end on a positive note is an achievement in the articulation of its ideas. Where the Bonds go next will be most interesting; balancing tradition with fitness for purpose isn't going to be easy but if Skyfall leaves us with one hope, it's that the series has taken stock and repositioned itself to embrace the brave new world, rather than ignore it.

A world that includes Britain, but it knows not how. In being a bit beaten-up, gnarled by experience, falling back on its history, binge-drunk and searching for contemporary purpose, Bond as representative of Britain has never been more explicit, a statement of how woven into the culture of the nation Bond – the character, the series – has become over 50 years, which of itself is a recognition of the contribution by the Broccolis to the life of the country generally; they have achieved more than just produce light entertainment for profit. Other film series may have been more impactful on technological or artistic development of cinema, Star Wars tends to be the example, but I doubt you'll find another one so connected to the psyche of a country. New Bond films are big news stories for the British press. No other series of films gets similar coverage. That, rather than the artistic merits of any one individual Bond film, is worth commemorating. At the film's conclusion, Bond, the series and the flag stand, and face it all together,

equals; more than equals – one and the same – British bulldogs singed by what they have been through, but on they go.

Without doubt this is at a more challenging level than the clod-witted superficially patriotic attitude of the Moores and the Bronans in requiring us to swallow Britain as a major world power with the childish argument of “look, it just is, *shurrrup*; here comes a sex pun to ‘amuse’ you”. All that achieves is a reaction that such a knee-jerk proposition is preposterous and fatuously simplistic and reactionary, totally undermining it. Skyfall bothers with a more complicated depiction, accepting that everything isn’t all sunshine and wacky Snooper dogs, raising a chunky question about the point of defending and maintaining a realm when a) the threat isn’t from other nations that can be attacked back, or even found, and b) the psychological and physical costs of defending the nation are potentially horrific. Nameless “Not Moneypenny, Honest” is lucky: she gets out. Both Ms. Bond and Silva, the exposed agents and the poor sods in the flag-draped coffins all suffer in their ostensible upholding of – what exactly? Perhaps ultimately it’s better to be loyal to people – Bond to Ronson, Bond to both Ms. Nu-Q to Bond – and human, humane, attributes see you through, when the consequences of not being so loyal or compassionate, being dehumanised (if not voluntarily) leads to big trouble. There’s an ambiguity to the ending, however crowd-pleasing it appears to be, and it’ll be fun to see where the idea gets to, next time around.

The question is enhanced by the choice of locations, which initially looked sparse for a Bond but work splendidly in the idea’s context. Bond moves from a decayed empire in Turkey to a new one in China, fitting into neither particularly well, being seriously injured in the one and resorting to disguise and still struggling in the other. Old colonial days haunt the loss of Hong Kong, bits set in Macau

(OK, not one of ours, but still in the Venn diagram of “pathetic fallacy end of eras / decay of power”) and it comes to a head in a place at risk of going if the SNP gets its way. The original idea of filming in India would still have fitted, of course, into “end of Empire” – or at least, end of M-pire (b-bm!).

If one takes London to exemplify the persona of Britain (Skyfall and Scotland have a different narrative purpose about facing the past and not being afraid to dismantle it), what we get is a tour around tradition, predominately set in and around grand old buildings, with a splash of modernity but not yet Shanghaied into an alien futurescape, a nation stuck between the fates of Turkey and China and run by self-conscious, self-doubting, introspective committee. The Dench and The Gareth bickering – the conflict of the traditional and the modernist again – presumably is some sort of comment on the uncertainty of government by a coalition of conservative and progressive. By this I’m not suggesting anything about how Eon Productions is run; I’d get terribly told off. The new M is a pivotal representation of such resolution as we get to the exploration of a contemporary national identity: ostensibly traditional surroundings and values but a realistic, undeluded pragmatist about future predicaments to be faced, which brings one back the careful balance struck with the character of Bond himself, and the newly purposeful stewardship of the series after so many, many years. Ancient yet modern, like using a clapped-out gameshow from thirty years ago as the context for reviewing a minty-fresh film.

About which...

“What P could be viewed as an unwelcome addition for a film that some would assert takes itself just a smidge too seriously?”. Is it Poetry, Bob? “Not quite: the answer on the card is Pretension, but as the one is evi-Dench of the other, I’ll allow it.”

Big of yer. Given what it's about – the reluctance of an aging ruler to remain in power, finding himself duty bound to – and what we're told of her refusal to let go, it seems odd for the Dench M to quote Tennyson's Ulysses; the coherence of the storyline suggests she'd be better off reciting Joyce's. Taken in the round, ultimately Judi's passage – an Eton quasi-reference? – is another deft choice: Ulysses concludes not so much with wanting it both ways, which could be an accusation levelled at the film with its stance one step in the past, one in the future, but accepting that as his lot in life and being dutiful in so doing. That is closer to the film's conclusions about its series, the country, its hero. The original choice of ode

There was an old lady called M

Who once betrayed Mr Bardem

He's all bent... on revenge

...I think... maybe... dunno...

De dum de dum oh look isn't that Albert Finney pretending to be Sean Connery? Blimey; what a total nothing role. Aren't his Labradors smashing, though? That's not a euphemis-M.

might not have proved as emotionally chunky dictated over Bond thundering along as fast as his little legs will carry him, contemporary unyielding mythical heroism charging about to save the edifices around him. Albeit breaking into verse is a very, very odd thing to do at a parliamentary inquiry, rather than being jarringly out-of-place for a Bond as some have suggested, it's suitably true to the series' legacy: recite a poem, death by bullet. Did Tracy Bond die in vain? Or has she lived at all yet? My brain hurts.

Other Bond films may have a more superficially amusing time poking fun at themselves as daffy old rubbish and one can under-

stand the criticism that Skyfall can appear glum. Surely the old ways are the best? This one bothers to explore whether that's completely true. Its conclusions are satisfying ones; not wholesale rejection, but a recognition that they can stifle success if you cling onto them for life. Having resorted to one's childhood, tipped the nod to the ancient Scottish retainer and applied a Scorched Earth policy, there's now something worth being resurrected for; lots to do, time to move on, the grand old vessel undergoing deconstruction rather than destruction. The Temeraire fights on. The empire strikes back.

Up to the 007th minute we've had a groovy new MGM logo that'll bankrupt them again but we haven't had a gunbarrel to beckon us in, enraging imbeciles (with apologies to actual imbeciles) who didn't appear to grasp the magnificent idea of playing a different type of call to prayer over the start instead. Better not to dawdle; I can only conclude that such persons are beyond rescue. *I must lose myself in action, lest I wither in despair.* Equally demented is Bond's searching for a ripped out hard drive by picking up a bugged laptop and looking underneath it, unless this is yet more comment on his questionable fit in a modern-shaped world.

As he doesn't see fit to introduce himself to his lady companion, one might leap to the conclusion that they have already been introduced. It would appear not. Who knows what her name is? She does seem to know the names of a lot of types of car, though. Perhaps she likes a good ride. Still, it is odd and it does make the penultimate little scene of the film very clunky. Not with my meagre power to undo it now, but had Bond jumped into the Land Rover and said something along the lines of "Morning, Moneypenny", wouldn't that have raised a warming smile or two? Even if they wanted a big surprise at the end, still don't get why they don't reveal the "Eve" bit earlier. Although, oddly for the series by this stage, they don't bother to name Istanbul, either.

Oh, loads of stuff goes flying, including oranges. On the blue / orange-ometer, there's plenty in the Shanghai foyer (which I suspect is actually in London, I think I recognise it) and a fair old wodge of blue when Judi do bad word. The bike chase is meaty fun, although how Bond's motorcycle bounces backwards then forwards from a bridge seems to defy both physics and sense. Similarly, it appears that the anniversary homage for this 007th minute is to make me watch Octopussy Redux. Damn them.

This is really bugging me now. What *is* her name? Is it Shortribs or Sheepshanks, or Laceleg?

0.06.00 – 0.07.00 SKYFALL

Rumplestiltskin gets after “them”, and it's for God's sake. Two blokes in front of her scatter: it is unclear why unless she's doing acting at them. That's slightly unfair but there's something a bit too declamatory in much of the delivery, although being fairer, Ms Harris is given an awful lot of crude exposition to hurl our way. One hopes this improves next time around, as much for her sake as ours. It probably doesn't help that in the other secondary female role, Ms Marlohe delivers something utterly devastating.

There's an awful lot of shaky-cam here and... am I a film too late for that? No-one seems to mention it.

Right, here comes Bond, running along and jumping down to the flat bed. Are those turn-ups he's wearing? Hmm. In all other respects the suit looks an inch too tight but it's also too long? Not sure that helps silence those who would assert that Mr Craig is ickle. The suit does lend itself rather nicely to the Connery gun-pose in the titles, though.

Ooh, isn't he scowly? I wonder why? “Not as tall as some others” actor chasing down a computer disk thing with agents' names on it

and a big, physically impossible scene on a train... it may have just dawned on him that we've all seen this before, and it didn't make any more sense back then. It may also have dawned on him that he's forgotten his rubber mask and exploding chewing gum. I suspect we don't really go in for that sort of thing any more.

And now Bond's trying to take a shot with his little gun. Whilst on a train. At a moving target. The man's an idiot, no wonder he keeps missing. At least Anono-Eve hits something when *she* fires.

The background geography seems... unlikely. Istanbul is huge. I suppose that's why they technically haven't said it's Istanbul. Quite where else it could be is unclear, given those shapely minarets a few moments ago. Although as Cornwall could pass itself off as North Korea, I suppose those were the ancient mosques of Bourton-on-the-Water, weren't they?

It might just be me, but didn't the immensely verbose Farrell-o-like abandon his gun at the market? I accept this could be a different one, but whilst on the point (and because this happens after the tickery-tocknock gets beyond the end of the minute) – was it just me or did anyone else think that the bullet Bond eventually levers out of himself was the one [Name: classified] shot him off the train with? As an incident, that has *significantly* more prominence than Bond getting a bit shot up in the digger cab in a few seconds' time. Fine, yes, we can all see he gets hit by something, and there's blood on his shirt when he does that terrifically funny leap into the carriage, and he clutches at his shoulder from time to time – but, still, The Bloody Shot is The Bloody Set-Up for what passes as The Bloody Plot. I know that later on there's some brief dialogue about hitting a rib or two, but that just seems so offhand as ultimate payoff for the film's critical incident. It may just be further evidence that whilst great care and attention has been paid to what Skyfall *means*, what *happens* is considerably more

slapdash. That's a shame. It's holding me back from truly embracing it; it's a distracting blemish. I like it; just don't yet love it.

A blonde lady in a blue top is scowling at her computer. This I suspect is because the monitor is facing the other way. Clot. There's quite a bit of blue / orange on the monitors; wouldn't that be terribly difficult to read? Unless it's a homage to the Commanderbond.net website's colour scheme in which case it's perfectly legible. I think one of them may be posting about what film they saw today. It would appear to be *Mission: Impossible*.

"She's going out of range". Hang on, they've only been on the train for thirty seconds. Is this all foreshadowing of how inadequate Britain is in coping with "stuff that goes on these days". Presumably. Tanner looks vexed. He, like I, is trying to work out which school that tie is. Galaxy High (guess). Having seen Mr Kinnear's Iago, he's a bit wasted as Basil Exposition in this nonsense, but I suppose it's precisely because he gets to be Basil Exposition in this nonsense that folks queue up to see his Iago (who, for the avoidance of doubt, is not a talking parrot, God help us).

"We're blind here." Slightly unfortunate comment given the contemporaneous press reports about Dame Judi's health but glossing over that really tasteless observation, I do apologise, it's not as if they were *watching*, is it? "What's going on?" You may well ask; you might need to pose that a number of times through the duration of the film.

"Get me CCTV, satellite, anything." Anything? Some more dignified lines? A talking parrot? Slightly more purpose than waiting for 007 to get about halfway through the next set of gymnastic exercises before telling him the next chunk of your best estimate at the story?

Meanwhile, Bond is very cross and tropical Cannock's finest export (Stan Collymore a close second) is getting a big advert. On second thoughts, it might be Brownhills, a town even more revolting than its euphemism. Across a load of cars – what type are they? *Do tell* – Bond spies Thingy and there's requisite gunfire and Bond's still a rotten shot. Why there's any significance to his inability to hit the target later on is beyond me. If this were the first Bond film you'd seen, you would be wondering how they could juice fifty years out of brave-but-stupid. When you subject yourself to *The World is Not Enough*, you'll find out that they did.

Bond, exasperated, throws away the handgun. A bad workman always blames his tools.

It's now Colin Farrell's turn to frown, but that's probably because he's trying to remember his extensive dialogue scenes later in the film.

Righty-ho, we're not at home to Mr Grumpy (Short) Pants any more, are we? Bond's only gone and got himself an idea. Up into the cab he clambers, and here comes Secret Squirrel in her Land Rover, which is a handy vehicle for the rough farm tracks of suburban Istanbul. Bond starts to manoeuvre the digger and is about to get shot (not that you'd notice) and...

0.07.00

"It's rather hard to explain." No kidding, lovey.

They were VW Beetles, apparently.

This nonsensical exercise started back in 1962 2012 in seeking to establish what, if anything, the 007th minute of the Eon Bonds told us about the series. Through shameless contrivance I think I reached a few conclusions, some more credible than others, but I'm

a bit stumped with Skyfall. Other than showing us that fifty years on they can still produce highly entertaining outrageousness, this minute alone doesn't do much – however, it's only one minute of two-plus hours that speaks volumes, rather admirably. Speaks them in a garbled and slightly irritating manner, granted, but that it says its things at all is the real achievement. Brings me back to Scousers, somehow.

Even without contemplating its ideas, there is much to enjoy in Skyfall. The casino scene between Severine and Bond is chillingly magical on both sides, one of the most compellingly sad things in the series, testament to a shift in the producers' revised outlook, creating roles that are capable of being *acted* rather than simply *filled*.

Mr Bardem is a hoot in the role of “Alec Trevelyan with a more credible background and a more consistent English accent”, Bond's brother from an adoptive mother, a mother who seems to take Joan Crawford as the role model, an odd little family coming to grief where Bond's real one is buried. Fancy that. All this quasi-parenting at the end of a trilogy – what is this: Return of the Judi? Is M the villain? I don't think so – the decisions she takes in relation to both Silva and Bond's fates are the appropriate ones at the time. It's just that history catches up with us all, eventually. Perhaps she just didn't know when a trigger didn't need pulling.

Interesting reaction – and not just at the Ecuadorian embassy – to the oddly-haired predatory computer hacker sleazebag touching Bond up, a HEAVILY FICTIONAL scene that suggests nothing about nobody, honest. Bond's response? Well, just goes to show 007 can disarm someone even when he's tied to a chair. Interpret “dis-arm” any way you wish.

There are some oddities. Bond's reaction to the death of Severine seems to come in for criticism, even if it is logical insofar as the mindgames between him and Silva play out. Some seem uneasy at Bond letting an innocent die, although the character's innocence is dubious given her complicity in a plot to shoot a man in the head with a very big gun. Unlike Agent Fields, a true innocent, Severine was in the game, if not on it any more. I suspect it's probably something to do with wanting to see more of Ms Marlohe. Really can't disagree; she can shake my cigarette any time.

What is Albert Finney actually *doing* in this? Really?

And why doesn't it make any sense?

Still, there's two seconds of Huw Edwards, and 150 minutes of Daniel Craig and he gives tremendously good value, does he not? I assume there are a number of folks who would still regard him as unsuccessful, but they may be mistaking the actor for the character; third film in a row when Bond's measure of overall success is, at best, "mixed". Others would latch on to having suddenly leapt from Bond as a newborn to a knackered old crock without adventures in between. The argument reminds me of a rather sharp aphorism Bond quoted about America, to the effect that 007 has progressed from infancy to senility without having passed through a period of maturity. *Au contraire*; this is the start of his maturity. He has now put away childish things. Normal people usually put them in a box in the loft rather than through the medium of arson, but, well, y'know...

What we have had is a re-reboot, a shedding of the skin. It's time to move on. The dead don't care about vengeance. It's the circle of life.

Skyfall? *Done.*

This is the end. Hold your breath and count to ten.

THUNDERBALL

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

CASINO ROYALE

MOONRAKER

TOMORROW NEVER DIES

DR NO

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

SKYFALL

Let's say that the rest are all at number 11. It's "kinder". If pressed to justify the choices, these 10 exemplify what the series can *do*, the directions it can go, how malleable "James Bond" is and that permits us confidence about it continuing; it is open to these different styles. Where these ten stand are at ten distinct destinations: patently all Bond films but equally patently all different. The other 13 or 14 may have better individual moments in them or more outrageous stunts or prettier women or more fiendish villains or, I dunno, shinier watches or more significant carpets but they're just part of a series doing things these primary ten do. They're making up the numbers and a Bond series of these ten alone doesn't miss them.

Yes, I *know* Goldfinger's not in that list. Comes of exemplifying everything, I guess.

James Bond will return in 2015. Hand in hand – that's *not* your hand, is it? Terribly sorry – we will stand tall, and face it all together. And then pick it apart, until it crumbles.

JACQUES STEWART WILL RETURN IN
THE 007TH CHAPTER. THE SAME, BUT BOOKS.
OLD JOKES; NEW TRICKS. IF I CAN BE BOTHERED;
I'M QUITE LAZY. SCIENCE FACT.
ABOUT WHICH:

*IT LITTLE PROFITS THAT AN IDLE KING,
BY THIS STILL HEARTH, AMONG THESE BARREN CRAGS,
MATCHED WITH AN AGÈD WIFE, I METE AND DOLE
UNEQUAL LAWS UNTO A SAVAGE RACE,
THAT HOARD, AND SLEEP, AND FEED, AND KNOW NOT ME.*

Ta-ta.

*"What a load of crap. Next time, mate,
keep your drug tripping private."*

A person on Facebook.

"What utter drivell"

Another person on Facebook.

*"I may be in the minority here, but I find these editorial
pieces to be completely unreadable garbage."*

Guess where that one came from.

*"No, you're not. Honestly, I think of this the
same Bond thinks of his obituary by M."*

Chap above's made a chum.

This might be what Facebook is for.

That's rather lovely. Isn't the internet super?

*"I don't get it either and I don't have the guts to say
it because I fear their rhetoric or they'd might just
ignore me. After reading one of these I feel like I've
walked in on a Specter round table meeting of which I
do not belong. I suppose I'm less a Bond fan because
I haven't read all the novels. I just figured these were
for the fans who've read all the novels including the
continuation ones, fan's of literary Bond instead of
the films. They leave me wondering if I can even
read or if I even have a grasp of the language itself."*

No comment.

THE 007TH MINUTE



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