

THE FANTASTIC BOND MOVIES

JOHN BROSAN LOOKS BACK OVER TWENTY YEARS OF JAMES BOND IN THE MOVIES.



It makes me feel very old when I realize it's nearly two whole decades ago that I saw my first James Bond movie. It was, of course, *Dr No* and I saw it one Saturday afternoon in one of my favourite cinemas in Perth, Western Australia (it was my favourite because it always seemed to be showing off-beat stuff, like sf movies and the few horror films that the Australian censor let through in those days; naturally, when I went back to Perth a few years ago I found the cinema, the Ambassadors, had been torn down).

It struck me at the time that *Dr No* was something out of the ordinary (it was certainly unusual for a British movie) and I guessed that

it and its intended sequels were going to be very popular but if you had told me then that almost twenty years later the James Bond movies would still be rolling off the assembly line, as popular as ever, I'd have been more than a little incredulous. Yet it's true — June this year sees the release of the twelfth Bond film (thirteenth if you count *Casino Royale* but who wants to?), *For Your Eyes Only*.

In the next issue I'll be discussing this film and talking to its director John Glen but first I want to take a trip down memory lane and look at the Bond series as a whole...

The decision to use *Dr No* as the alternative choice for the first Bond movie was to have

important ramifications for the rest of the series for it was, along with *Moonraker*, Fleming's most overtly science fictional work and it was this aspect that later came to dominate the Bond movies.

When I first saw *Dr No* I was reminded a little of Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, mainly because *Dr No* seemed to have much in common with Captain Nemo — both have an obsession with the sea, both have set up private kingdoms from where they can wage war on mankind (though Nemo has his submarine as well as his island) and they even have similar names (Nemo meaning 'no one' in latin). The impression that part of the

inspiration for *Dr No* came from *20,000 Leagues* was reinforced when I came to read the novel and found that Fleming had even included a giant squid in the story (though it didn't appear in the film). Of course the other main inspiration for the character of Dr No was Fu Manchu, as Fleming had been a great fan of Sax Rohmer's arch villain when a boy.

The film version of *Dr No* emphasized the science fiction element by concentrating on the futuristic technology. Dr No's rocket "toppling" beam was now powered by an atomic reactor which gave the makers the opportunity to provide the good Doctor with a spectacular underground complex filled with flashing lights and swarms of extras. Designed by Ken Adam, this sort of set was to become the trademark of the later Bonds, getting bigger and more spectacular with each film until they dwarfed everything else, including Bond himself. Significantly, when the makers ran out of ideas for Bond it was the plot of *Dr No* they returned to again and again. In effect, *Dr No* became the template for the Bond series...

But not immediately. *From Russia With Love*, for instance, bore little resemblance to *Dr No* and was fairly faithful to the original novel apart from the inclusion of SPECTRE which added an extra level of duplicity to all the double and triple crossing that the story revolves around. The futuristic technology of

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Dr No was conspicuous by its absence and the McGuffin had been reduced from rocket toppling to the stealing of a mere cipher machine. However this was the movie that started the trend in gadgetry that was to weigh Bond down increasingly in the subsequent screen adventures. In *From Russia With Love* it's simply a briefcase containing a folding rifle, knife, tear gas bomb and gold coins but from this small beginning the gadgetry turned into mini-helicopters and submersible cars.

The next movie, *Goldfinger* (my own favourite) saw the return of the future technology and also Ken Adam's futuristic sets (he didn't work on *From Russia With Love*), the most spectacular of which was the fantasy interior of Fort Knox — a huge, glittering vault piled high with stacks of gold bars (if you stacked real gold that high the gold at the bottom of the pile would go soft from the weight). *Goldfinger's* main weapon is an unlikely-looking laser gun with which he almost bisects James Bond then uses it to cut his way into Fort Knox in order to leave a "dirty" nuclear device inside — his intention being to destroy America's gold reserves and thus increase the value of his own gold. This is a more logical plan than the one in the novel which involved *Goldfinger* actually trying to steal the gold from Fort Knox — an exercise in

logistics that bordered on the impossible, as critics at the time pointed out.

If *Goldfinger* represents the peak of the Bond movies then *Thunderball* is the start of the decline. After the concise and economical narrative pace of *Goldfinger* the film version of *Thunderball* seems a sprawling, uncontrolled mess by comparison. There's just too much of everything in this movie. The basic plot, which involves SPECTRE hi-jacking a NATO bomber and its two H-bombs and holding the world to ransom — is a good one but it gets swamped under all the extra bits of business that the

makers threw in simply because they now had a big enough budget to indulge themselves. *Thunderball* was the first of the Bonds to feature set-pieces that didn't really progress the plot but existed as almost self-contained spectacles. As a result the film's pace flags drastically in certain places and overall it seems much too long (even after some scenes were cut it ran 125 minutes to *Goldfinger's* 109). Still, it remains a much more entertaining and original film than most of the subsequent Bonds and proved to be one of the most financially successful movies of all time.



The first person to play James Bond wasn't Sean Connery but American actor Barry Nelson. This was way back in 1955 in a CBS television production of *Casino Royale*. A segment of the *Climax Mystery Theatre* series it also starred Peter Lorre as the villain Le Chiffre but it didn't seem to make any impression with viewers at the time and was quickly forgotten (and as far as I know the show was transmitted live so no record of it exists).

The person most disappointed by this damp squib of a beginning for Bond's screen career was his creator Ian Fleming. From the start Fleming had high hopes for Bond as a tv or movie goldmine and only the year before CBS production, in 1954, three different film

companies had shown interest in buying the film rights to *Casino Royale* while the famous Hungarian producer Sir Alexander Korda had asked to see an advance copy of Fleming's second novel *Live and Let Die*. But all of this interest came to nothing and it was not until eight years later that the first Bond movie came to be made. In the meantime Fleming had got involved with an abortive project to put Bond on the screen that is still having repercussions today...

It happened this way: back in 1958 Fleming got together with a young film-maker called Kevin McClory and they wrote, with the assistance of veteran scriptwriter Jack Whittingham, an original screenplay for a Bond movie which they tentatively titled

The next Bond, *You Only Live Twice*, signposted the direction the series was to take in future. As script writer Richard Maibaum put it: "By Goldfinger we were getting wilder. The whole business was becoming larger than life. Then in *Thunderball* it became even more so. The production became enormous, more fantastical, almost comic strip. Since then there's no way of bringing them down." But the problem was that novel of *You Only Live Twice* didn't offer much that could be turned into a big scale visual extravaganza. On the contrary, it was a somewhat small-scale, sombre

story about a melancholic James Bond trying to recover from the death of his wife while on a minor mission to Japan. By the sheerest of coincidences he encounters his wife's murderer, Blofeld (of course), who is also feeling old and bored and has retired to Japan to amuse himself with a bizarre Garden of Death where the locals can commit suicide in a wide variety of off-beat ways. The book ends with Bond avenging his wife by killing Blofeld but losing his memory during the battle . . . M presumes he has been killed and the Times prints his obituary.

The producers solved the problem by



Opposite top: The British quad poster for the second in the Bond series, *From Russia With Love* (1963). Opposite below: James Bond (Sean Connery) crashes into action in *Thunderball* (1965), third in the series. Top: Bond surfaces after a short underwater swim, made possible by his all purpose, handy-dandy miniature aqualung. *Thunderball*. Above: James Bond (Roger Moore) takes on the supernatural might of Baron Samedi in *Live and Let Die* (1973).

James Bond, Secret Agent. Two years later, when the project had apparently fizzled out, Fleming made his annual trip to his home in Jamaica to write another Bond novel. Unfortunately it seems that he used the, *Secret Agent* screen treatment as the basis for the novel, which he called *Thunderball*.

When the novel was published in 1961 a legal battle began which lasted until 1963 when McClory was assigned all the film and tv rights to *Thunderball*, but by then two other producers, Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, had joined forces and bought the rights to all the James Bond novels (with the exception of *Casino Royale*, but that's another story . . .)

Originally Broccoli and Saltzman had also

planned to film *Thunderball* first but when it became obvious that the legal wrangle was going to tie up that property for some time they switched to *Dr No* instead. According to McClory this is why Dr No in the movie is a member of SPECTRE (in the novel he was a freelance operator), the organisation that made its first appearance in *Thunderball*. This is also the reason why you haven't seen either SPECTRE or the chief villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld in any of the Bonds since *Diamonds Are Forever* as both were points of contention in yet another legal battle that began when McClory announced his plans to remake *Thunderball* a few years ago (it was to have been called *Warhead*). It now looks as if it will never be made . . .

throwing out practically everything in the novel and keeping only the Japanese locale. For a plot they returned to Dr No for inspiration, with the result that *You Only Live Twice* is Dr No writ large. Once again something strange is happening to American spacecraft but this time they're not simply being knocked off-course but swallowed whole by a mystery rocket operated by SPECTRE. Bond again tracks the villain to his lair but this lair isn't just an underground laboratory but an entire hollowed-out volcano, courtesy of Ken Adam again.

You Only Live Twice is spectacular enough but not very exciting. Everything had got so big it was difficult to become involved in either the characters or what was going on. With this movie the last links with any sort of reality were severed and Bond entered the realm of pure fantasy. It was like watching a live *Tom and Jerry* cartoon . . .

Even the long-awaited confrontation between Bond and Blofeld lacked sparks, despite a lively performance by Donald Pleasence as Blofeld. Of course Bond was no longer out to avenge his wife's death because, as far as the movies were concerned, it hadn't yet happened (the producers had planned to make *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* first but changed their plans when Connery announced he would only appear in one more Bond).

Reversing the sequence of the books the

Unfortunately, On Her Majesty's Secret Service was undermined by the fatal miscasting of George Lazenby as James Bond, a bizarre choice.

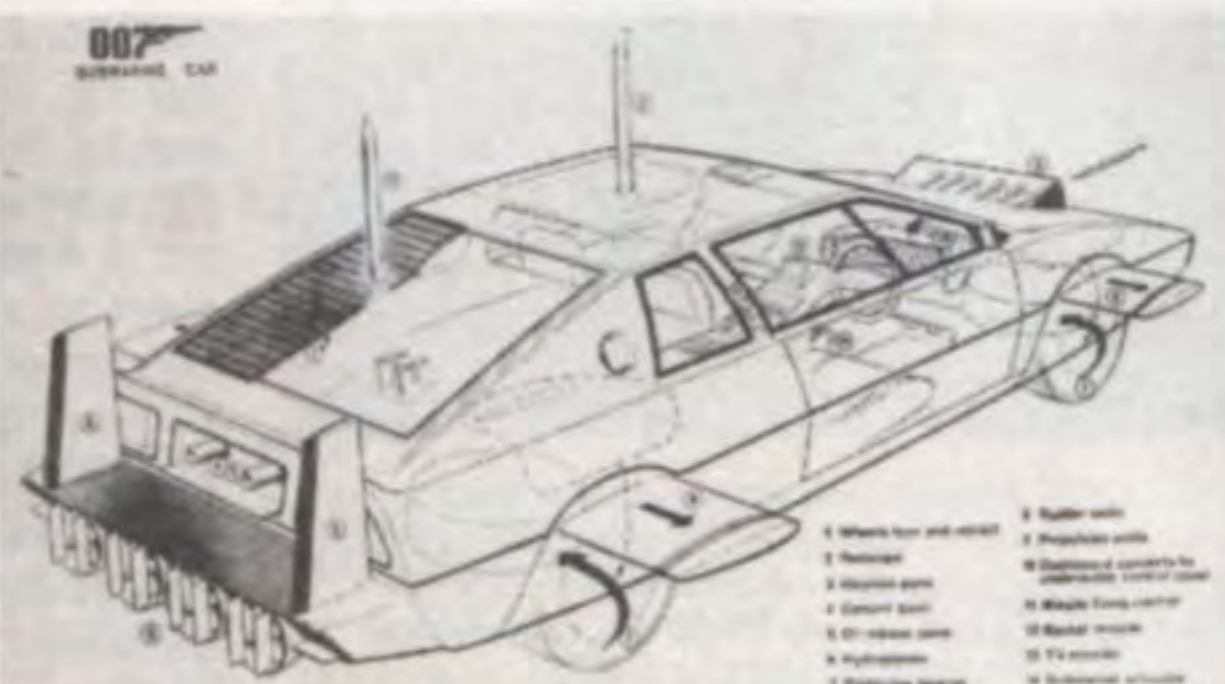
next Bond was *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* but for some curious reason, though they'd met in the previous film, Bond and Blofeld don't recognise each other. Actually OHMSS was a brave attempt to bring the series back down to a more human scale and it followed the plot of the novel pretty closely. It still had a science fictional theme, with Blofeld planning to unleash germ warfare onto the world from his Alpine headquarters, but it was nowhere near as far-fetched as *You Only Live Twice*. Unfortunately it was all undermined by the fatal miscasting of George Lazenby as Bond, a bizarre choice that will remain One of the Great Mysteries of the Cinema (however the action sequences, directed by John Glen, still look superb).

Sean Connery returned for the next one, *Diamonds Are Forever*, but even he wasn't able to save the movie which was a throwback in style to *You Only Live Twice* and had an incredibly confused and shambling storyline. The diamond smuggling plot of the novel was clumsily grafted onto yet another of Blofeld's schemes to hold the world to ransom, this time using a laser mounted on a satellite.

The space age element was absent from *Live and Let Die*, the first of the Roger Moore Bonds, but again it had little to do with the original novel. As with *Diamonds* the plot had



Top: Behind the scenes on *You Only Live Twice* (1967). Sean Connery is coached on the finer points of Kendo. Above: Scaramanga (Chris Lee) and James Bond (Roger Moore) begin their duel to the death in *The Man With the Golden Gun*. Right: The plans for the submersible car from *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977). Above: "Q" (Desmond Llewellyn) instructs Bond in the workings of the car. Opposite: A stunning piece of trick driving from *The Man With the Golden Gun*.



to twist itself into knots to accommodate the action set-pieces and didn't make much sense. There was also an extra emphasis on broad, slapstick humour — mainly represented by the redneck lawman Sheriff Pepper (*Clifton James*) — that was to prove a foretaste of worse to come.

Sheriff Pepper popped up again in *The Man With the Golden Gun*, a film that concentrated more on laughs than any of the previous Bonds (the comic highpoint came when Pepper was pushed into a river by a baby elephant). Of all the Bonds this one is probably the least memorable without even a major action set-piece (like the boat chase in *Live and Let Die*) to fix it in the memory. Ironic that it was directed by Guy Hamilton, the man who directed *Goldfinger*.

Realizing the series needed a shot in the arm the one remaining producer, Broccoli (Saltzman had sold his share of Bond by then), decided to make the next one, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, a real blockbuster. As the plot of the novel didn't lend itself to such a treatment (and Fleming had anyway stipulated that it should never be filmed) Broccoli and his writers simply rewrote the film version of *You Only Live Twice*. Instead of spacecraft being swallowed up by the villain's mystery machine it was nuclear submarines, and instead of a hollowed-out volcano the villain was using the interior of a super-

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tanker as his base of operations but the design was remarkably similar, even down to the control room with its steel shutters.

But despite all the similarities *The Spy Who Loved Me* works much better than *You Only Live Twice* and is surprisingly entertaining. The special effects in particular are very impressive, as are the second unit sequences (*Spy* marked the return to the series of John Glen). However with this film the series did take another step into the realm of pure absurdity, mainly with the character of Jaws (Richard Kiel). He provided some good visual jokes but it was a mistake to make him completely indestructible. You can't have two indestructible characters in a Bond movie (Bond himself is the other one) otherwise you remove all sense of reality (not that there was much reality left in the series by that time).

As *The Spy* proved a big hit with audiences Broccoli decided to repeat the formula with *Moonraker* and the result was the most science fictional, lavish and absurd Bond of all. It's a pity it went the way it did because the original novel would still make a good Bond movie even today. The plot is certainly big-scale enough, involving a scheme by Sir Hugo Drax to obliterate London with a nuclear missile but Broccoli and his people didn't agree, saying that it was much too dated a story (call me old fashioned

but the nuclear destruction of London seems unpleasantly topical).

Moonraker looks marvellous — Ken Adam's sets are more mind-boggling than ever and the special effects by Derek Meddings are brilliant

but overall it's something of a dud, the best moments coming in John Glen's pre-credits sequence. Its biggest fault is the reliance on slapstick humour to provide the entertainment, added to the decision to turn Jaws into a sympathetic character which just made him seem even more absurd.

It was a financial success but apparently not as big a success as Broccoli had hoped because he then decided to make an abrupt change of direction with the series. With the next Bond, *For Your Eyes Only*, he and his writers returned to Fleming's actual work to provide the source material. As the original book was a collection of short stories it wasn't possible to film it as is but the plots and characters from two of the stories, *For Your Eyes Only* and *Risico* have been interwoven together. The latter story concerns Bond investigating a heroin-smuggling ring in Greece and getting mixed up with two Greek gangsters, Colombo and Kristatos, one of whom turns out to be a sympathetic character while the other one is the true villain (in the movie Colombo is played by Topol and Kristatos by Julian Glover — guess which one is the real villain).



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The former story is about a girl, Judy Havelock, out to avenge the murder of her parents by a Cuban gangster. Bond has also been sent to eliminate the man (the Havelocks have been old friends of M) and the two of them are obliged to join forces to get their target. In the movie Judy becomes Melina Havelock and is played by the beautiful Carole Bouquet. She is still out to avenge her parents though the identity of her target has changed. Linking these two plots is an added thread concerning a sunken British spy ship containing a vital secret transmitter that must be kept out of the hands of the Russians.

According to director John Glen *For Your Eyes Only* is a return in style to *From Russia With Love*. Ken Adam's lavish sets are again absent, along with all the space age paraphernalia of *Moonraker* (though there is an underwater battle involving futuristic submersibles), and, most reassuring of all, Jaws won't be popping up either.

It remains to be seen if the movie really will be similar to *From Russia With Love* (I have my doubts), and if it is it will be interesting to see how the new, younger generation of Bond fans react to such a drastic change of pace after *Moonraker*.

But more on this, as well as a look at the making of *For Your Eyes Only*, next month . . .