SEAN CONNERY

Interview by Tony Crawley

On April 28, 1976, the news leaked in London about a rival to the official 007 films. By May 12, it was official. A full page advertisement in the showbiz Bible, *Variety*, announced the production of **James Bond of the Secret Service**, a Paradise Film production of a script written by noné other than Sean Connery, with Len Deighton and the project's producer, Kevin McClory. "One of the most exciting screeplays I have ever read," said an attached letter from top agent Irving Paul Lazar. Shooting was slated for February, 1977, in the Bahamas, New York and Japan. Paramount Pictures jumped in later with a distribution deal and the title, which had originally been **Bond and the Secret Service**, was finally trimmed to the zippier **Warhead**.

Since when . . . nothing!

Or nothing but writs flying to and fro, legal hassles and arguments galore, suits and countersuits. At one point, McClory, Connery, Bramwell Films and Paradise Films sought an injunction to prevent the making of **The Spy Who Loved Me**, due to an alleged copyright infringement, and similarly Cubby Broccoli, Eon Productions, Danjaq Films and United Artists rushed to court to stymie the making of **Warhead**.

In many respects, this was a re-run of 1964, when McClory having won the legal rights of the tale in 1963, was independently setting up **Thunderball** as the third Bond movie, and eventually made a deal with Cubby Broccoli and his then Eon partner Harry Saltzman to produce it together as the fourth Bond film. It appeared, therefore, that the tall, urbane Irishman was hoping lightning would strike twice and that all parties would get together again for another Bond party.

They didn't. As far as McClory's company was concerned it became a case, in more ways than one, of Paradise lost . . .

In the midst of all the high-level (and high-financial) arguing, United Artists then chairman, Arthur B. Krimm, issued a strong statement asserting that "no person, corporation or entity other than Danjaq and United Artists can use or grant rights to use the character 'James Bond—007' in any film which goes beyond the story of **Thunderball**, and anybody who proceeds on any other premise does so at legal peril."

And Krimm added a terse footnote. "No advertisement can change these facts."

"I agree . . ." responded McClory with his own terse footnote a week later: "An advertisement can state the facts."

Well, the facts were well enough known, but still a matter of protracted legal dispute (see panel for fuller details). Ten years after the event, the rights of **Thunderball** reverted to McClory for him to utilise in any re-make(s). United Artists may have forgotten that, but acknowledged it. McClory, however, disputed their interpretation of the facts.

These cannibalistic cinema manouevres were all very interesting and par for the course when one producer tries to rip off, legally or otherwise, the success of another in order to clamber aboard the gravy train. That's merely taking care of business. ►

THE WARHEAD FILE

Although Hollywood's expatriate Russian actor-director Gregory Ratoff (1897-1960) was the first film-maker to show interest in bringing James Bond to the screen, it was the suave, rich Irishman Kevin McClory who first started tailoring Bond for the movies. And in the scriptwriting partnership with Ian Fleming, himself.

Ratoff, a terrible old ham of an actor and not much better as director, bought the rights to Fleming's first Bond book, **Casino Royale**, soon after the 1953 publication. His movie plans came to naught but the tale turned up as an episode in a long forgotten tv show in 1954, which if nothing else, always supplies a quirky query for film quizzes. Who was the first James Bond? Barry Nelson, not Sean Connery, so there!

McClory says he learned all about the movie business through ear-phones as a £14-a-week sound-boom at Shepperton studios. He wanted to become a producer and to this end, he wrote an underwater thriller set in the Bahamas. He then met Ian Fleming and suggested they work together on a Bond scenario. It would be a simple enough matter to turn McClory's sea adventure into an original Bond yarn. Fleming agreed and they collaborated, in fact, on several Bondian notions together. Write Jack Whittingham joined them for what became **Thunderball**.

At the 1958 Venice film festival, Kevin McClory announced plans for this as the first as the first Bond film. Nothing came of it, and Fleming went on to use some of the script's narrative for his 007 novel, **Thunderball**, in 1961, without McClory's consent.

Also in 1961, Cubby Broccoli heard that fellow producer Harry Saltzman's film option on the Bond books was due to expire in 28 days. Cubby called Harry and Eon Productions was born. In 1962, they produced **Dr No** and the start of the Bondanza.

McClory's ambitions were being thwarted on all sides. He'd lost his film chance, and seen various of his ideas incorporated by Fleming in his book. McClory is a fighter, though.

In December, 1963, he took Ian Fleming to court and won. McClory was awarded complete copyright of all the scripts he and Fleming had worked on . . . the film and tv rights to the **Thunderball** novel . . . plus £35,000 damages and £17,500 in court fees. Fleming kept the literary rights to **Thunderball**, but all future editions of the book had to carry the credit: This story is based on a screenplay treatment by Kevin McClory, Jack Whittingham and Ian Fleming.

Flushed with victory, McClory announced plans for the third Bond film—**Thunderball**—in January, 1964, while in Rome. Without or without Connery, he said, depending on any deal he could make with Saltzman and Broccoli, already preparing their third Bond film, **Goldfinger**, in London. McClory felt an arrangement was possible. But involved . . . It sure was. It took a year to resolve. In 1965, McClory and his Bahama corporation, Bramwell Films, and Broccoli and Saltzman's Eon arrived at a gentlemen's formula. They'd make **Thunderball** together. Which they did. And **Thunderball** proved the biggest 007 hit until **Moonraker** fourteen years later!

A vital clause in the contract stated that the copyright of the script would revert to McClory ten years after the film was released in Britain, and that he'd not produce any other 007 films in that time-span. McClory calculated everyone would forget that clause. And so, it seems, they did.

Ten years later, McClory jogged their memories. He announced **James Bond of the Secret Service**. His writers included himself, Len Deighton (author of the books leading to Michael Caine's Harry Palmer series) and . . . Sean Connery. "I knew that Sean didn't want to play Bond again, but he probably knows more about Bond than anyone else and he certainly has a vast number of ideas about what Bond can do. He's also a very good writer."

And as if to stick it to them, or Broccoli alone as Saltzman had since quit the Bond series, McClory added, "I've enough material to make not just one Bond movie, but two others."

That's when licenses to kill at the box-office hit various fans in London and Hollywood. All the more so when Connery emerged not merely as one of the writers but the star of the new project.

No way, said United Artists which distributes the Broccoli 007 films. According to then-chairman Arther B. Krimm, UA and Broccoli's Danjaq company alone had exclusive rights to Bond. No one else. The only exception to this was **Thunderball**, of course, since, yes, they had to agree, those rights were now McClory's again. But this exception, UA insisted, was strictly limited to the use of Bond in any **Thunderball** film remakes—but minus the right to use **Thunderball**, James Bond or 007 in the title of any such film re-makes. The character could be used in advertising and promotion but not in the title or titles.

McClory, ever the fighter, disagreed. Of course, he did. He couldn't be limited, he said, to a remake of a film which had not even been made when Ian Fleming had awarded the rights of **Thunderball** to him in the High Court. And anyway, he reminded UA, those rights were not just in the **Thunderball** novel but "also various scripts I worked on with Ian Fleming prior to the novel." The titles he listed included **Bond in the Bahamas, Latitude 78 West** and **James Bond of the Secret Service**.

Whether these were all scripts, or treatments or merely titles, and maybe alternate titles for what became **Thunderball**, has not been explained. Given the **Thunderball** underwater setting, and the fact that it had been scripted as the *first* Bond film, they sound all one and the same story to me . . . rather like Sylvester Stallone's innumerable versions of the **Rocky** script he carried from studio to studio in Hollywood). No matter, even titles can prove valuable in the film business.

And so the battle went on, in and out of court, until Connery got fed up with all the litigation (he was already involved in another leal row in Hollywood over his £100,000 fees for 1975's **The Man Who Would Be King**). Connery had had enough of lawyers!

Since when, Kevin McClory hasn't been heard saying much about the Bond film that never was. **Warhead** seemed to be shot down by legal missiles or Connery's eventual departure. It would not surprise me, though, if we yet hear of McClory and **Warhead** again . . .

The entire **Warhead** affair does raise a few other Bond queries. If McClory retained his **Thunderball** rights after ten years, which is fairly usual in film circles, whatever happened to producer Charles K. Feldman's rights to **Casino Royale**, which he made as a terrible farce in 1967. Feldman died the following year. His rights to that first Fleming book (unencumbered by any deal with Eon) could be part of his estate. All it takes is for some wily producer to buy the rights from the Feldman family and the entire alternate Bond saga could start making headlines all over again.

Oh yes, it *is* possible. Where, for instance, did Feldman buy his rights from . . . but the estate of Gregory Ratoff. ●

What was far more intriguing to the public who would eventually be buying the cinema tickets was that Sean Connery—who had quit playing Bond with a good deal of rancour—was back in the fold. If only as a writer.

At first there was no suggestion, beyond his name writ large among the writing credits in the Paradise ads, that the former and definitive Bond would be returning to a role he couldn't wait to leave after various recriminations abut money, not to mention the goldfish-bowl life it subjected him to. He had received £6,000 for kicking off Bond in **Dr No** (1962) and though the salary increased—£50,000 for **Goldfinger** (1964), plus a cut of the profits—he only ever got the price he felt he deserved on his farewell trip, **Diamonds Are Forever** (1971), one million bucks (then about £400,000) plus United Artists backing two films of his choice.

That **Warhead** was never made is hardly news. It's one of the great if-onlys in cinema. If Connery had come back . . . If a new Bond has been found . . . If Roger Moore could have survived such opposition . . .

Sean Connery, however, has talked little about it. But then he has never seemed overly happy in talking either (a) to the Press or (b) about Bond. Until Deauville this year. He was in the French seaside town to open the seventh annual American film festival with his sf debut, **Outland**—alias **High Moon**. I caught up with him direct from seeing the first of his five films in Deauville's retrospective of his work. It was the first time I'd seen **Dr No** in, heavens, nearly twenty years. (Yeah, sure, it's slow now, and my goodness Ursula Andress was dubbed in it. It still worked. Less gadgets. More action. And there was Connery again, plucking a hair from his then full head of hair to paste across a door-jamb with spit, to check if anyone rifled through his things. That had impressed me in 1962 as a real spy's trick . . . until seeing a jealous housemaid doing it to check on adulterous lovers Gerard Philippe and Danielle Darrieux in the French film of Stendahlos **Le rouge et le noir**, made in . . . 1954).

Connery, today, looks as if he's plucked many a hair out. He's 51, two years younger than Roger Moore, and in the best of health. He bristles with health. He'd flown to Deauville direct from the Swiss locations of his new film for Fred Zinnemann, **Maiden, Maiden,** in Pontresina. That's his third film since **Outland** and he needed, he said, to make some mental calithesnics to discuss **High Moon**. Bond, though, proved no such problem . . .

***Starburst**: Does **Warhead** still exist as a property that*

►

could be made?

Sean Connery: No . . . Well, yes, it does. But there's so many legal entanglements that they haven't resolved yet.

What prompted you to work on the script when, as you stated at the time, you had no intention of playing 007 again?

What happened was I was doing **The Wind and the Lion** (1975) in America. Kevin McClory had the rights, after ten years, to go and do another reproduction on the similar theme of **Thunderball.** The ten years were finished. He came to see me—this was just before the January of the tenth year. I said I wasn't interested in doing it. He asked would I be interested in contributing in any way . . . with the experience that one had with the six previous ones I'd done. I thought about it and said, it depends who you've got writing it.

Enter: Len Deighton . . .

(He nods). I have a lot of respect for Len, so I said: Okay, as an exercise I'll do it. I worked with Len Deighton. We did a screenplay. McClory had all sorts of angles and so many people were wanting to contribute to making the picture, with funds and what have you. There was no problems, financially.

So, what stopped you?

I was under the impression that it was totally clean. Free from any litigational problems. When we started to talk quite seriously about the possibility, it became so complex. Och! the lawyers came out of the woodwork by the hundred and because there was a lot of money involved *(the budget was stated to be about nine million dollars, with four for Connery)* it started to get all snarled up. The legal factors were harder to go through than to make the film. Then, the publicity started to work on it and I said: "That's enough!" And I walked away from it. That's really where I left it . . . nearly two years ago.

It's ten years since you left Bond, nearly twenty years since you started the series. Time supposedly heals all wounds. In hindsight, did you enjoy making the Bonds?

Yeah . . . The trouble with them was that they got progressively longer to do, which made it more and more difficult to even consider other work. Due to bad planning and what have you by the producers. I found I was being well deprived of the parts I could be doing which were more interesting for me and, in the end, that's what the longevity of an actor is about. The more diverse the parts you can play, the more interesting and stimulating and fun it is to do, and in turn, the wider the experience so there's even more things you can play.

The final straw was **You Only Live Twice**, (1967), the second last one I did. That took six months of my time—after two or three postponements which meant it was almost a year out of my life. It was a very erratic schedule with no consideration whatsoever for choice of any other subjects for me. I could never give people a firm date of conclusion. Therefore, any other film that would have been more interesting and rewarding, artistically for me, one was pushed out of. That was really the major fault.

Plus the typecasting, I suppose.

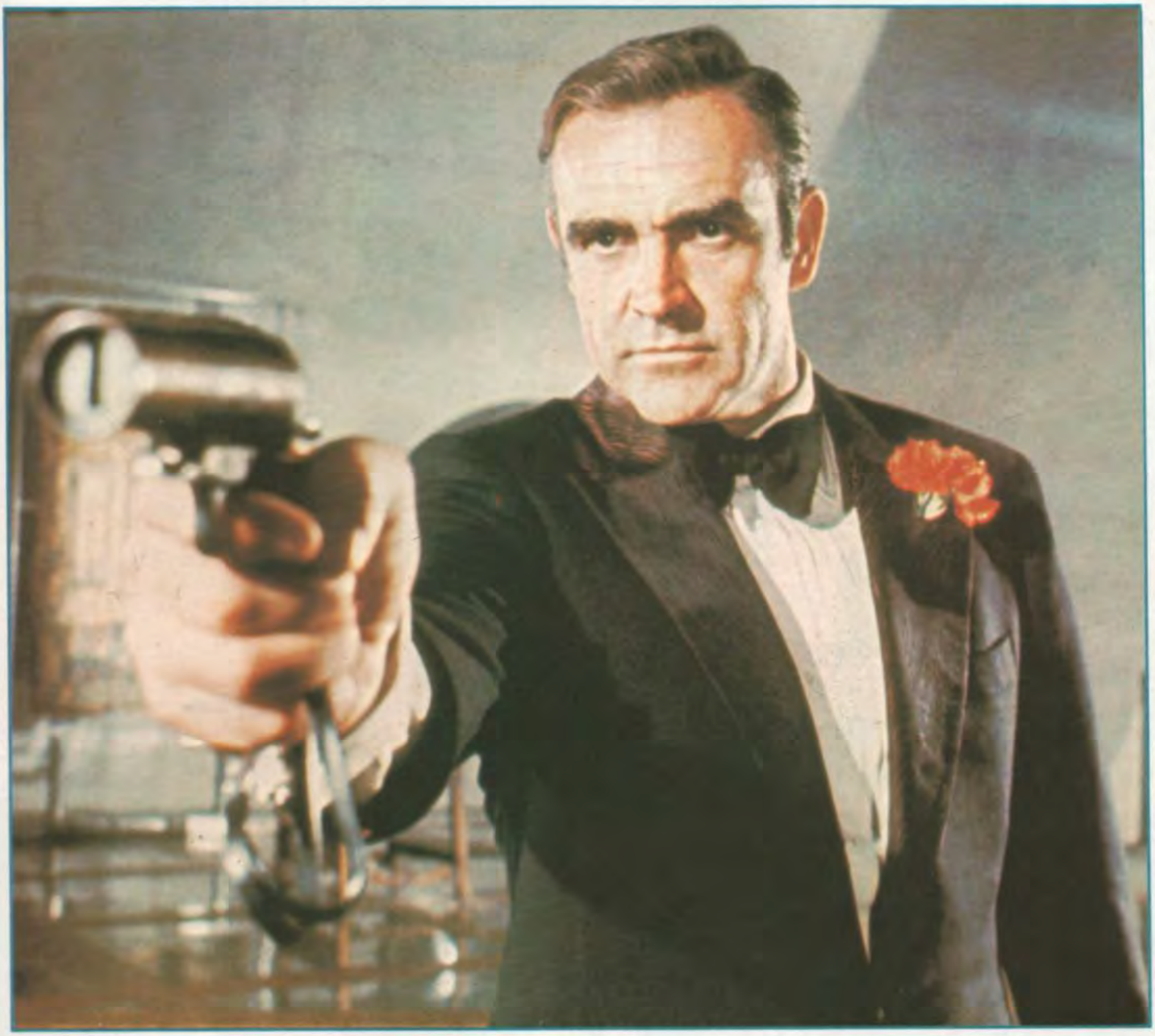
Well, that was part of it, too. I *was* getting other parts I wanted as I was doing the Bond films. But, if you consider there's only twelve months in the year, and if one film takes six months and the people who are supposedly producing it are that stupid that they cannot programme it properly, then it doesn't leave any flexibility within the year to be able to give a commitments to a picture like, say, I did a couple of films with Sidney Lumet. **The Hill** (1965) took seven weeks, **The Anderson Tapes** (1971), seven weeks too—and gave me the satisfaction of good, concentrated work and results. I would rather do three or four interesting films within the year, or that six month period, than do one that . . . I'm not certain about.

How do you feel the Bonds have developed since you quit Her Majesty's Secret Service? **For Your Eyes Only** *seemed to try, at least, to revert to your style, more direct physical action.*

I'd agree about that. I went to see it last week in San Moritz . . . or Pontresina, which is about the same. It was very kinda pacey and modern and it's obviously a huge success with all the people going to it, which I think is very good both for the film industry and for Roger.

But . . .?

But my reservations about it, for *my* choice, it's too flippant in the sense of humour. For the sake of a couple of very—I think—cheap jokes, they spoiled a lot of very good sequences. For example, in the very beginning there is a very good sequence in a helicopter, Roger going around in a helicopter being



remote-controlled by Blofeld. But then to throw it away with a pay-off like picking up Blofeld and dropping him down a chimney gets a cheap laugh—and credibility goes out the window. For me.

That's my view. But I'm obviously wrong for the film is fantastically successful. That's the direction it's gone in—one that I don't appreciate.

You must have thought you disposed of Blofeld in 1971 anyway. Other other examples . . .?

There's a very, very good sequence of a car chase. You see three or four villains in a car with guns. They come alongside Roger—and he gives them a wave! Well, there's nothing to stop them blowing him away if they wished. So it defeats the whole purpose of the car chase. You take that wave out of it and it suddenly becomes quite realistic and thrilling and another dimension—from my point of view.

Do you have an explanation for the continued success of the Bond films?

Yeah, I think that the basic theme, which is still there, goes back to how one person wins through, however extreme and high the odds are, and whether they're mechanical, sexual, weather or whatever. The lone person has to resolve it. With the assistance now, of course, of lots of hardware, as they call it.

You'd prefer more of the loner and less mec' i-calia?

Unless you can explain the hardware in humanistic terms, as we did in **Outland**. In terms that I could understand!

Given such parameters, would you ever consider playing James Bond again? John Glen, who could obviously do with your input, has been saying around Europe that he'd be happy to have you as his next Bond.

That's quite magnamious of him. I don't know John Glen. I wouldn't certainly get my feet wet in that direction again unless I could do it my way.

Which is . . .?

To be totally in unconditional control. That covers quite a few different ingredients. For example, as I said, my major complaint on the second last one I did was that it was six months, almost a year of my time, due, really, to appalling bad planning. When I did my last one, **Diamonds Are Forever** it was mainly on *my* conditions. It's interesting that it was the first one I ever started and finished on time!

How come?

Because one imposed such a heavy penalty on delays. I think I'm certainly as intelligent as any businessman I've been involved with. There's nothing succeeds more than impressing businessmen with a heavy financial penalty. That, they understand. *(Or they did after **You Only Live Twice** on which Connery is said to have picked up £170,000 in overtime penalty-payments alone; more than treble his Goldfinger salary).*

The other things, like the legal aspects of it, would have to be totally clean. No possible injunctions or any of these boring legal aspects which for me are more energy-reducing than anything else. I wouldn't want to waste a lot of time and energy fighting legal hassles, which is in no way conducive to a good film.

Obviously, one would have to be involved from the beginning of the project, in terms of its conception, writing, ideas and where it would go. To give a parallel answer, in the case of **Outland**, I liked the usage of the hardware, in that I could understand how O'Niel used it. Like in the instance with conglomerates in the film, they get bigger and bigger and it's invariably one person who has to come in and turn it round and resolve the problem. If I were doing another James Bond film, one would want to get closer to that kind of concept, which it was originally. With as much humour as possible.

Is this your philosophy about film-making in general?

Yeah. My philosophy about the basic vision of a film is that there is the A-stage and the B-stage. A is the first stage: when you've read and believe what the concept of the film is, get together and make that film, look at it and think, "Yes, we've succeeded with A". Then, the B-stage is where it goes out and critics and the public have their shot at saying whether it's a success or not. So it's two definite stages and in the second one there is only a certain amount you can do about it. So many elements can be against you, like timing, the climate, people are not ready for that sort of film, or they don't see in it what you see in it. Many films that I thought at the A-stage were successful, and no matter what the critics or public said, I still think were successful—but they didn't go and see it. And there's quite a few of those I've been in.

Next month: Sean Connery discusses **Outland**, a new futuristic Hollywood film, and his entry into the sword and sorcery stakes.