



A Decade in Review: The Best Spy Films, Part II (2004-2009)

Contributors

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Introduction

by Wesley Britton

While more substantial introductory notes are at the beginning of Part I, I thought a few brief observations seemed appropriate here in the conclusion of our overview of spy movies of the Twenty-First Century—so far.

After compiling all the submissions from Craig, David, Anders, Paul, Amanda, and myself, I noticed some trends that cast new light on the directions espionage-oriented films took this past decade. Part I began with reviews of movies that had been produced before 9/11, and it was clear that during the final months of 2001 and early 2002, studios, producers, and audiences were uncertain what would be acceptable in the new cultural climate. How escapist could quasi-realistic films like *Sum of All Fears* be when fact had caught up with fiction? However, by all accounts, audiences quickly rebounded from the events of one September day and script-writers found themselves looking to the new “War on Terror” as a touchstone to explore new themes in their stories. By the middle of the decade, the nervousness of 2001-2002 was no longer on anyone’s radar beyond a tendency to avoid overt plots dealing with Islamic terrorists.

Just as quickly, with the exception of the first James Bond releases, *Goldfinger* in particular, a little film called *The Bourne Identity* seemed to cast the widest shadow of any spy film ever made. It influenced everything, not only in the creative directions of film-makers, but in both critical and audience responses to productions whether or not they had any obvious connections to the realm of Jason Bourne. Before the stylistic approaches seen in the first of that series, for decades, only one fictional character was invoked time and time again in reviews comparing one spy film to another—007. Was any new spy release in the fantastical realm of the EON series or was it unlike the Bond of the moment, Connery, Moore, Dalton, or Brosnan? Suddenly, there was a new kid on the block. Bond and Bourne, Bourne or Bond, the comparisons had widened.

As demonstrated in the discussions below of *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*, the new series was now the new center of the spy film universe, going so far as to completely dominate even the producers of the Bond pictures. At the same time, the Euro-centric axis of the Cold War was moving further and further from center stage, with more topical settings in the Middle East and even Africa providing new questions for new scripts—how best should the new wars be fought? How do the new warriors have to adapt to duels where the enemies have no embassies, minimal technology, and goals quite different from the old East/West ideologies?

Such observations, of course, have been obvious for some time to many critics and movie buffs. Equally obvious is the fact that what critics hail doesn't always result in ticket sales or DVD rentals. So the discussions below, as with Part I, showcase a few movies about which most readers will already have their own opinions on the film in question. But many, if not most, of the choices reviewed here are likely to be releases much less familiar, especially those not part of the Hollywood mainstream. So, for the classics you've enjoyed already, we hope

you'll pick up some fresh insights here. At the same time, we hope some of these titles will become part of your viewing experience in 2010 and beyond.

Note: As several reviewers discussed *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Bourne Ultimatum* together, they are included as such here. All other films follow the chronological order established in Part I. Short biographies of all contributors are at the end of this article.



The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) **

The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) **

In various interviews publicizing the 2004 *The Bourne Supremacy*, *Matt Damon* claimed there had been no plans for a sequel after the release of the first Bourne film. However, he liked the script for the follow-up saying the first movie was a story of "Who am I" and the second, "How did all this begin?"

Shot in Moscow, Berlin, and Italy, *Supremacy* had nothing to do with the Ludlum book beyond the title and lead character. But critics still praised it as one of the best action-adventure releases of the summer. In this version, Bourne seeks to find out why his wife, Maria, was killed while the CIA tracked him down, believing he'd killed two agents in Berlin. In the end, Bourne and the agency alike learned he'd been framed and Bourne discovered the origins of his clandestine identity.

Earning \$53 million its first weekend, the film was said to be the highest-grossing spy film ever in its first week. (Wesley Britton)

The Bourne Identity represented a transition to a new generation of action movie. The two sequels, *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*, further extended this progression, in much the same way that 20th century popular music shifted from Tin Pan Alley song structures to rock riffs. *The Bourne Identity* took the premise of Ludlum's novel and expanded upon it. Ditching virtually every aspect of the original Robert Ludlum novels apart from the titles and the amnesiac central character, *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Bourne Ultimatum* reduce the story to a bare minimum. By the end of *Supremacy*, Jason Bourne has only reached the point the character arrived at by the last chapter of Ludlum's *The Bourne Identity* novel. Bourne has reached New York, the location where his final confrontation with Treadstone took place in the novel and discovered his real name, David Webb. And the entire narrative of *Ultimatum* represents the equivalent of a 'missing scene' from the preceding film, consisting of a series of events that take place between the Moscow climax and the New York epilogue, explaining what occurred in between. For all their frantic action sequences and pursuits in these two movies, the Bourne sequels offer narrow snapshots – instalments – in an open-ended saga. In this respect, they have more in common with modernist fiction than the hefty, Alexander Dumas-like mid-19th century-style novels of Ludlum. Their focus is on character – Jason Bourne trying to recover his past – and action, not narrative. (Craig Arthur)

For the sequel to *The Bourne Identity*, director Doug Liman was replaced by former documentary film-maker Paul Greengrass, who had impressed the producers with his TV film *Bloody Sunday* (2002). It is rumored that Liman was not rehired because of his frosty relationship on the previous film with the studio and the producers. Liman allegedly made a first cut of *Identity* that was too cerebral, necessitating filming of further action scenes, and allegedly never filmed from multiple angles which made it difficult to edit the film, especially

scenes that weren't working. It was the producers' desire to work with Liman that had resulted in the film in the first place. Impressed with his 1999 film *Go*, they had asked him what he wanted to do next, Liman replying an updating of *The Bourne Identity*.

Perhaps the hiring of a new director was a blessing in disguise, for *The Bourne Supremacy* is an almost perfect sequel. Greengrass's style is grittier, more immediate, and his film is darker and meaner, if no less gripping and intelligent. For many scenes he adopts hand-held cameras and over the shoulder filming, and his action scenes are cut from multiple angles and move so fast that whilst they are often undoubtedly difficult to follow, they work artistically because they give a palpable sense of the urgency and the emotion of the scenes. Bourne's fight with a fellow operative (Marton Csokas) in his Munich abode is brutally exciting to watch, bringing back fond memories of the train fight between Sean Connery and Robert Shaw in the James Bond movie *From Russia With Love* (1963). (In the scene where Bourne knocks out the CIA interrogator in Naples, Damon accidentally knocked him out for real!) The thrilling, pulsating car chase through the streets of Moscow that closes the film is filmed in such close proximity to the actors and other cars that it is a miracle none of the crew were hurt.

The film also bravely makes Bourne a darker character. Bourne now remembers one of the killings he perpetrated, and we get to see evidence of the man he was before his amnesia began. His sense of guilt and remorse make him a deeper character, but knowing of his past actions and also seeing his anger with Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles), we also see that he is still a man capable of great violence. He remains a dangerous man when pushed. It's interesting to note that the fundamental difference between the films and the Robert Ludlum books is that the films have a man believing himself to be a good man and finding he was in fact a bad man. The books have a man believing himself to be a bad man finding out he is in fact a good man. It isn't so common for the

movie version of a novel to be darker and more challenging than its literary counterpart.

The Bourne Supremacy is an intelligently plotted, well-paced and lean action-thriller in its own right, and it manages to plausibly continue the events of the first film. Like its predecessor, it's a very loose adaptation of the novel it's based on. Tony Gilroy rightly describes the film as a 'reimagining' of the 1986 book. (*L.A. Confidential* scribe Brian Helgeland also did some uncredited work on the script.) One could easily watch it alongside its predecessor and not see the joins. The change in director and style simply makes one realize that the character has changed since the beginning of the first film, and that this is a new situation with some different characters. Most people I know who saw *Supremacy* before *Identity* (and I don't know why they did that!) preferred *Supremacy*, but there isn't a great deal in the difference of quality really. By necessity, the film lacks the more leisurely pace and character development of the first film, and Bourne is arguably a less engaging character (he is after all, out for revenge). But *Supremacy* manages the difficult trick of being the same (continuing the story) and different (new style) simultaneously, which few sequels achieve and that makes it a substantial, hugely entertaining picture.

Interestingly, the final scene, where Bourne calls Pamela Landy in New York, was added weeks before release as some preview audiences felt ending the film on Bourne's confession to Neski's daughter was too bleak. Since the Bourne/Landy conversation belongs properly in the next film, then one can regard the confession as the 'proper' finale, artistically and in keeping with the timeline of events. (It would have been great to end on the shot of Bourne walking away, the film hinting at Bourne's fate to always be a solitary man.)

As end-of-trilogy films go, *The Bourne Ultimatum* is one of the most superior, since it is probably the best of the series, and manages to resolve all the plot

threads satisfactorily, add some new dimensions to our moody hero, whilst also being a thrilling ride to rank against any of the best action films. It's also easier to follow than the second film, and relentlessly paced, although the plot or characterization is never sacrificed.

The Bourne Ultimatum is clearly in the mould of the second film. It's once again directed by Brit film-maker Greengrass, has even more of a documentary style than its predecessor, giving the film an even more palpable air of urgency and realism, especially in the high-flight car chases and fights. It again doesn't stint on revealing Bourne to be a flawed hero who has committed terrible acts and must live with the consequences. And the viewer once again is very much aware that at any time any major character might die.

But whilst one sensed the new style that was introduced in the previous film was the main concern of the producers last time around, the mostly positive response it received allowed Greengrass and his team to take things even further. In *Ultimatum*, the shaky hand-held camera and rapid editing (totaling a thousand cuts apparently) take us right into the world of espionage where important decisions have to be made in an instant and fights to the death are messy, nasty and unglamorous.

The conclusion of the film and also the events that occur in Tangier onwards (the rooftop chase in Tangier brings back memories of the hugely under-rated Timothy Dalton James Bond film *The Living Daylights* (1987), purposely echo the first film, bringing the series full-circle effectively, and making the series truly feel like one epic film instead of three separate entries. (Interestingly, the last scene from *Supremacy*, where Bourne calls Pamela Landy and finds out his real name, occurs in *Ultimatum* over halfway through the movie, meaning that one could see its presence in *Supremacy* as a flash-forward.)

Damon, perhaps giving his best interpretation of the character in the series (he effectively combines the humanity of the character from the first film with the relentlessness of the character in the second), is still suffering from the injuries he sustained at the climax of *Supremacy in Moscow* at the start of the film, and he looks pained, angry and moody throughout the whole film, which in an era of wisecracking action heroes is a refreshing change that helps to make the film more artistic and believable than most action films. (Although the fact that one of the world's most wanted men can walk through any Passport Control in any country serves the opposite!) The end of the film has cathartic but painful repercussions for the Bourne character.

All in all, a great film, and a great end to the trilogy (although wouldn't you know it...a fourth is already in pre-production). The fact that the film has some fantastic action scenes, some globe-hopping locations (including Moscow, London, Madrid, Tangier and New York) that open up the film, and some intriguing new characters (David Strathairn's murderous Deputy Director; Scott Glenn's CIA chief; Paddy Considine's newspaper reporter; Edgar Ramirez's assassin - Gael Garcia Bernal was originally approached - and Albert Finney's CIA specialist, for example) also add to a more full-blooded, involving experience.

For fans who can't wait for further Bourne movies and have already devoured the Ludlum novels (this film is loosely based on the 1990 book), you might want to try the current series of continuation novels by Eric Van Lustbader. It has so far run to five novels, the latest due for publication in 2010. (Paul Rowlands)

The Interpreter* (2005) *

Despite the fact two of the greatest modern actors headlined it (Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman), the undeniable qualities of *The Interpreter* slipped by audiences and most critics upon release. Which is a shame since Sydney Pollack's intelligent, slow-burning, quietly powerful drama/ thriller is something that could

have easily been produced in the '70's (in particular the films of Alan J. Pakula) and is actually one of the best films of the decade. It attracted some attention at least for it being the first film to be given permission to film at the United Nations building in New York, and for being unapologetically in support of the much-derided institution.

Nicole Kidman stars as an African-raised interpreter who works at the UN building. Returning to collect her belongings after a bomb scare, she overhears a conversation relating to an assassination plot. She starts to believe the intended victim to be the President of Matobo (a fictional African country). Indeed, the plot of the film is allegedly based on Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwe President and events that occurred during his reign. The fictional president is soon arriving at the UN to present his case against being indicted for war crimes in the International Criminal Court. Sean Penn and Catherine Keener are the Secret Service agents brought in to investigate and also to supply protection for the Matoban President when he arrives.

Penn himself is undergoing serious marriage problems (the nature of which gradually emerge) and connects deeply with Kidman, despite her status as a suspect.

She was involved in a Matoban guerilla group, her relationship with an opponent of the Matoban President and the fact that his landmines killed her mother and sister. Penn begins to feel very protective of her and empathise with her pain whilst prior to the Matoban President's arrival, events heat up.

It's a testament to the quality of the acting and screenplay (credited to five writers, including Steven Zaillian) that the drama and the believable relationship between Penn and Kidman is central but never detracts from the whole. In fact, sometimes the thriller aspects (including an 'explosive' scene set on a bus) seem to be intruding on the drama. Whatever happens in the final act, we know that Penn and Kidman's characters were fortunate to meet each other for

they will allow each other to heal. The unique and close nature of their bonding recalls Pakula's *Klute* (1971) and the scenes between Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland.

The Interpreter is a film that travels at its own pace and a film you have to let wash over you. Penn and Kidman are incredibly good, yet again reaffirming their status as acting giants. One senses that each actor's game was raised just that little bit higher because of the participation of the other. Pollack paces the film perfectly, knowing when to allow things to heat up and when to let things simmer gently. You come away being touched, remembering great performances

(Catherine Keener is of course her usual wonderful self) and thinking a bit deeper about events than is usual for a modern thriller. In an age of dumbed-down, badly written, noisy action thrillers, *The Interpreter* is a very welcome homage to films like Pollack's own *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) and Alan J. Pakula's *All the President's Men* (1976) or *The Parallax View* (1974).

Sadly, the film proved to be the final film for Sydney Pollack, one of Hollywood's most accomplished film-makers. He died from stomach cancer at the age of 73 in 2008. Pollack also appears in the film in a supporting role. (Paul Rowlands)

Three Days of the Condor director Sidney Pollack emphasized intelligence in the creation of *The Interpreter* (2005) in which Nicole Kidman starred as an idealistic U.N. interpreter wanting to urge diplomacy instead of war as her own parents had been killed in her home country in Africa. At first renouncing the vengeful violence of her brother, she ultimately decides she's taken the wrong path, an ironic departure from most such projects. In DVD commentary, Pollack described the "arias" he used instead of gunplay to create drama, that is, intense dialogue and long monologues between the leads. This technique showcased a theme long explored in both espionage and non-spy projects, that of whether or not negotiation can supplant cycles of violence—and it seems idealism, while

noble, is rarely sufficient when dealing with evil intent. So this excellent offering is one that resonates with current and evergreen concerns and worthy of viewer consideration. (Wesley Britton)



The Constant Gardener (2005)

John Le Carre said of this adaptation of his 2001 bestseller, “There is hardly a line left. There is hardly a scene intact in this movie that comes from my novel. Yet I don’t know of a better translation from novel to film.” The fault of the novel is that it perhaps is a bit dry compared to Le Carre’s earlier masterpieces. The movie, however, compensates for the novel’s stylistic shortcomings. The film represents a younger, fresher generation of film-making, again much like Paul Greengrass’s Bourne sequels but vivid with the exotic colour and music of Africa. Although far more faithful to Le Carre’s novel than the cinematic adaptations of Bourne are to Ludlum’s books, the movie is a modernist creation. The story is stripped to a minimum – again like a simple rock riff, or in this case like the polyrhythmic African drumming on the movie’s soundtrack. The focus is on a snapshot of the central character’s Justin Quayle (Ralph Fiennes) and the rudiments of his attempt to unravel the corporate conspiracy behind his wife’s murder. Incidentally, when Quayle learns of her death, the scene takes place in a modernist office in the Kenyan British High Commission. We glimpse Quayle through the office windows as though the movie frames him inside the image on

Jarda's wall in *The Bourne Supremacy*. Again, another metonym for the form this movie takes. And this movie will partly provide the blueprint for 2008's *Quantum of Solace*. (Craig Arthur)

***The Matador* (2005)**

The Matador was released around the time that it had finally become clear that Pierce Brosnan was not going to be re-hired as 007 in the new reboot, *Casino Royale*. This film was a timely reminder that Brosnan was a terrific actor outside the franchise with a promising career outside the Martinis, Girls and Guns. The key to his excellent performance in this comedy thriller-drama is in his bravery. He plays an ageing, slightly overweight, slightly deviant contract killer who is going through a crisis over the morality of his profession and unexpectedly befriends a cheerful, happily married businessman (Greg Kinnear) whilst in Mexico City. Brosnan and Kinnear are a great comedic double act, and there is real pathos in the story that unfolds, generously laced with very funny dark humour, beautiful photography (*Die Another Day*'s David Tattersall) and a tightly constructed, perceptive, witty script from director Richard Shepard. Brosnan's character, Julian Noble (note the ironically chosen surname) is one of the greatest characters of the spy movie genre during the decade, and of course all the more impressive for coming from an actor who exuded superhuman cool in his four James Bond movies. Another asset the film has is a well-placed supporting cast who all deliver: Hope Davis, Philip Baker Hall and Dylan Baker. But its chief asset? Apart from co-producer PB? It's a helluva lotta fun. (Paul Rowlands)

Munich* (2005) *

Any non-fiction spy thriller released in the aftermath of 9/11 and dealing with Israel/ Palestine politics was bound to be controversial. *Munich* tells the

story of the Mossad operation to avenge the massacre of 12 Israeli Olympic athletes by Black September terrorists. Setting the technical achievements and politics aside, what is striking about Steven Spielberg's picture is its vividly realized and shocking presentation of violence - its great ugliness and what planning, carrying out and living with a murder does to one's soul. After the US's vengeful 'involvement' in Afghanistan and later Iraq, it was very prescient to consider the value of political decisions made from purely a vengeful mind-set. *Munich* is a powerful, absorbing and haunting addition to the spy genre, boasting superb film-making in every area and excellent acting from the likes of Eric Bana, Geoffrey Rush, Daniel Craig and Bond villains Michael Lonsdale and Matthieu Almaric. (Paul Rowlands)

(Editor's note: For an overview of the place *Munich* holds in film history dealing with Islamic terrorists, see "Before Munich: Black September on TV and Film" in the "Spies in History and Literature" files here at Spywise.net).

Syriana* (2005) *

From the writer of *Traffic*, this is a similarly ambitious drama interweaving multiple plot threads. *Syriana* is more intelligent, politically-minded and leisurely paced than most modern thrillers and offers no easy answers to the murky problems of US involvement in the Middle East. The film is notable for its insistence that corporate values virtually dictate US foreign policy and that corruption in trading is prevalent. The film takes a few watches to be fully understood but it's a rewarding multiple rewatch. An absorbing, thought-provoking and ultimately depressing spy drama with excellent performances from the likes of Oscar-winning George Clooney, Alexander Siddig, Matt Damon, Jeffrey Wright and Chris Cooper. (Paul Rowlands)

Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2005) *

Mr. and Mrs. Smith takes a simple premise - a married couple find out they are rival assassins who have been hired to kill each other - and goes all the way with

it. Doug Liman brings incredible energy and an improvised feel to a summer blockbuster. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, unsurprisingly given their romance which they maintain was after the film wrapped, have great chemistry with each other and Liman maintains a comic, action-packed and witty tone throughout. Vince Vaughn is very funny as Pitt's faintly Norman Batesish best friend. It's frenetic fun and never lets up for one second, and somehow works despite frequent shifts in tone (romance, sardonic marital comedy, shoot 'em up action movie). The film reportedly had a troubled shoot but none of it is evident in the final film (the director's cut has extra sex and violence). It's pretty superficial stuff but it manages to be quite a ride and it's nice to have a great romantic double act in an action movie instead of in an insipid romantic comedy. A pilot for a TV series was aired with Martin Henderson and Jordana Brewster, and Liman directing, but it didn't get picked up. (Paul Rowlands)



Casino Royale (2006) *****

A tremendous reinvigoration of the Bond series, with a new take. From the truly awe-inspiring opening footchase scene to the heartbreaking ending, the film managed to convey what a man with a license to kill might really experience! (Amanda Ohlke)

How long has it been since a Bond film has been lavished with so many accolades? Audience and critical favor clearly signaled EON hit on something hot--resulting in the historical number of 9 BAFTA nominations. Daniel Craig was the first Bond nominated for his role followed by:

THE ALEXANDER KORDA AWARD for the Outstanding British Film of the Year
ADAPTED SCREENPLAY: Neal Purvis/Robert Wade/Paul Haggis
THE ANTHONY ASQUITH AWARD for Achievement in Film Music: David Arnold
CINEMATOGRAPHY: Phil Meheux
EDITING: Stuart Baird
PRODUCTION DESIGN: Peter Lamont/Simon Wakefield
SOUND: Chris Munro/Eddy Joseph/Mike Prestwood Smith/Martin Cantwell/Mark Taylor
ACHIEVEMENT IN SPECIAL VISUAL EFFECTS: Steve Begg/Chris Corbould

These honors are but part of the response to what many feel was the best Bond of all.
(Wesley Britton)

The high tech, real time style has been slowly been drip fed into the Bond series. The first noticeable sequence was in *Goldeneye* (1995), where Bond, Tanner and M watch in real time satellite images from Sevrenaya, where General Ourumov has just stolen the 'Goldeneye' satellite. But despite this high-tech modern opening, it is just a precursor to the usual hands-on, Bond style mission. Equally, in the pre-credit sequence of *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), M and staff watch on as Bond completes a mission at an arms bizarre in the Kyber Pass. Once again, after having established a high tech, modern approach to espionage, it is then tossed aside for a traditional Bond style adventure.

Prior to *Casino Royale*, most Bond films had in place a formula wherein Bond met with M and received his mission instructions. Then once the mission was declared, he'd set about the task presented. But in *Casino Royale*, - and this is continued in *Quantum of Solace* (2008) - the mission is never really declared. M, who used to appear only at the beginning (and at the end, usually as a comic signoff), now appears throughout the whole film, working in real time alongside Bond. Each piece of information he gathers is passed onto to HQ, and equally each bit of new information gained by HQ is passed onto Bond. M and Bond are now working alongside each other. Once upon a time, Bond's most trusted

weapon was his Walther PPK. Now, in the 21st Century, it is his mobile phone and laptop. (David E. Foster)

Die Another Day had left the 007 team creatively run dry and at an artistic dead-end. Now, with the rights for Ian Fleming's first Bond novel *Casino Royale* fully available to them, the producers decided to adapt it as the 21st 007 adventure. They eventually made the difficult decision that what really excited them was also what would serve the story best - to film the novel as a 'reboot' to the series with quite a different interpretation of the character, and a new actor as James Bond. Almost as soon as Pierce Brosnan had helped to reignite the character's popularity and his future as the Bond of choice seemed certain, his era was all over.

For a series which for the most part had tended to play it safe, this was a bold step, and despite Daniel Craig being co-producer Barbara Broccoli's only choice for 007, the film's financiers, Sony, were sceptical about Craig's suitability. A year was spent auditioning around a hundred other actors (including *Avatar*'s Sam Worthington, in which he played a spy) before Craig was eventually given the go-ahead. His casting angered a small number of fans because they deemed his appearance (especially his blond hair) to be inappropriate for Bond. Unlike Brosnan he wasn't an obvious choice (his looks and his lack of experience in action films), but what he was was an actor who had proven on numerous times that he could live up to the task of any character he took on.

In the end, *Casino Royale* proved to be better than almost anybody could have hoped (even the filmmakers, who registered surprise at how it exceeded even their high expectations). There are many reasons but a credit in the main titles reveals the main reason - 'Based on a novel by Ian Fleming'.

There hadn't been a Bond film in 37 years - since the excellent *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*--that could claim to be truly based on an Ian Fleming novel.

For the many Bond films that preceded *Casino Royale*, the producers had created their own stories and even mined the short stories for creative ideas. But now the series had come full circle and the screenwriters (Robert Wade and Neal Purvis, with Paul Haggis) were able to adapt the original James Bond adventure for the screen. Ironically, *Casino Royale* is one of the slimmest Fleming Bond novels and it has a structure unlike any other Bond book. Ironically, CR is now the longest Bond film ever made at 144 minutes. The film's final two thirds is faithful to the book (from the moment Bond arrives at Casino Royale), whilst the first third is added plot.

The film breaks from Bondian tradition in a number of ways. There is no James Bond Theme until the end credits. The opening scene is in monochrome and is not a huge action scene at all. The main titles (inspired by the first edition cover of the novel) are very lo-fi and don't feature any of the imagery we have become accustomed to. Most notably, we see a Bond who displays poor judgment and makes mistakes. One of the themes of *Casino Royale*, and also its sequel, *Quantum of Solace*, is Bond's learning curve, his gradual ability to see 'the bigger picture' when making life or death decisions. The films are also concerned with the costs of being 'a blunt instrument', and the difficulty of maintaining stable relationships whilst being a spy. The irony of course is that maintaining one's humanity is not necessarily a prerequisite for being a good spy.

Each actor who has portrayed 007 has brought new and different facets to the character, and Daniel Craig is no exception. He brings a Steve McQueen kind of cool to Bond, and he makes him into a believable, three-dimensional character. We see that his Bond is tough, ruthless and relentless, but not quite as detached as he thinks he is. This gives Bond added depth. A brilliant quality about *Casino Royale* is that with each successive action sequence we learn more about Bond's character, none more so than in the gruelling (particularly for male viewers) torture scene where he somehow manages to get the upper hand mentally

despite facing certain death. Like Timothy Dalton (whose interpretation of 007, alongside Sean Connery's, shares similarities with Craig's), Craig's Bond is an unpredictable and dangerous man, despite his humour and considerable charm. Apart from his blond, craggily handsome looks and classless demeanor, Craig makes a great Fleming Bond. (Although look at Fleming's drawing of Bond and squint...and the resemblance is uncanny!)

Craig's excellence is matched by his supporting cast. Eva Green makes a perfect Vesper: elegant, refined and driven by something Bond is convinced he will never find. Their first scene together on the train sparkles with strong repartee courtesy of Paul Haggis and was clearly influenced by Cary Grant and Eva Marie-Saint's scenes in *North by Northwest* (1958). Mads Mikkelsen makes a surprisingly restrained and all too human Le Chiffre. His chilling quality is his ordinariness. I loved his cruel apathetic look when he sees that Bond has been poisoned. Jeffrey Wright is a classy choice for Felix Leiter and is very cool indeed in the part (he and Craig had already co-starred in *The Invasion*, 2008). And Judi Dench returns as 'M', despite this being a reboot. It would be slightly strange if not for the logic the filmmakers offered: nobody replaces Judi Dench. Very true! She has great chemistry with Craig, but given 007's newbie status and occasional recklessness, it's a more strained and spiky relationship than she had with Brosnan.

All in all, *Casino Royale* is one of the very best James Bond films, and time will probably prove that in a few years this will be the next generation's Goldfinger (1964). It garnered acclaim as a film in its own right as well as being accepted as a Bond film, and Craig as the new 007. It has all the excitement and action we need from a Bond film, it has the gadgets (though not excessively) and the humour (again, though not excessively), it has the opulence and Bondian cool. But it also brings new ingredients: a flawed 007, which makes the drama more dramatic and the thrills more suspenseful; better characterization, which doesn't

require the traditional suspension of disbelief and creates a world we can identify with; and real emotion, which ironically makes Bond more of a hero since he has to overcome situations we couldn't overcome, both physically and emotionally. It's also a film that is superbly edited by Stuart Baird. Interestingly, he also edited *Superman* (1978), which was also a three act story and required careful pacing. He achieves a similar feat here. *Casino Royale* knows when to move like the clappers (the action scenes are beyond the extraordinary standards of Bond: witness the post-credits extended chase scene just as one example) and when to slow down to let the characters and the plot breathe. Kudos also to Martin Campbell, who had already helmed Pierce Brosnan's strong 007 debut, *Goldeneye* (1995). His work here is the best he has ever done and he always manages to make every detail interesting. For example, consider that making a lengthy card game visually interesting is not an easy task. (Paul Rowlands)

While the movie's centre-piece poker game is no match for the excitement of the baccarat game in the Ian Fleming novel and, playing le Chiffre, Mads Mikkelsen lacks the omnipotence and menace of Fleming's original creation. But the embellishments on the novel are by in large an improvement – especially the relationship with Vesper – making *Casino Royale*, like *Goldfinger*, one of the very few instances where a Bond movie is better than what Fleming envisaged. The sequence in Venice does not appear in the book and yet all the events following the death of le Chiffre remain faithful to the finale of the novel. You can see Fleming's chapter titles in scenes of the movie. "The White Tent" when Bond wakes up in hospital; "The Black Patch" when Vesper notices Gettler (Richard Sammel), with one black lens in his glasses, on their trail in Venice. But as a symbol, Venice, and in particular the collapsing house, provide the perfect metaphor for Bond's doomed relationship with Vesper in a way that conveys the intent of the novel in a way the novel fails to do. But most of all, as suggested by the metaphor of the construction site chase early in the movie, this is a film about Bond's character under construction and Daniel Craig imbues Bond with a

grittiness and psychological depth not seen before onscreen, even in the excellent performances given by Timothy Dalton in *The Living Daylights* and *Licence to Kill*. (Craig Arthur)

Mission: Impossible III (2006)

The success of the third installment in the *Mission: Impossible* franchise is due to one man: JJ Abrams. From the exuberance of his spy-themed TV series *Alias* (2001-06), it was obvious *M: I 3* was going to be great fun but he surprisingly manages to cut to the core of the characters and also mount incredibly

vivid action scenes. The scene on the bridge where Cruise and his team are ambushed, whilst reminiscent of *True Lies* (1994) and in the spirit of a similar scene from *Clear and Present Danger* (also 1994), Abrams shows great instincts for action directing and throws you right into the thick of the chaos, not just viscerally but emotionally. The action scenes are not as frequent or original as the first two films but they are arguably more memorable. John Woo and James Cameron would be impressed.

Abrams also opens up the doors to IMF and lets us take a peek inside, demystifying the franchise and making it more realistic. He also allows Cruise to create

a real, fully rounded character as Hunt this time. The real revelation of the film is Abrams's concern for characterization and real emotion. Philip Seymour Hoffman is brilliantly controlled as the master villain who constantly outwits his enemies because he is simply more intelligent (it's his sex drive that gets him into trouble). Abrams likes to put his characters through the mill, and thus the audience too, and he is also skilled at creating ticking-clock tension a la Hitchcock (who would seem to be one of his heroes). The rest of the cast is fun, particularly Laurence Fishburne's hard as nails but human IMF chief (with a nice line in sardonic dialogue), and Simon Pegg's nerdish computer whiz (a part originally owned by Ricky Gervais from UK TV's *The Office*...and

a role similar to Marshall Flinkman from *Alias*). Michelle Monaghan (*Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, 2005) and Keri Russell (Abrams's first TV show, *Felicity*) bring both spunk, naturalism and beauty to their roles, and both would now make credible action heroines. Maggie Q is an incredibly beautiful face to watch and she went on to taunt Bruce Willis in *Live Free or Die Hard* (2008). Billy Crudup (*Watchman*, 2009) appears as Hunt's supervisor.

Fans of *Alias* will no doubt notice the similarities to the show - in fact it references the series as much as it does the previous Mission pictures and TV series (1966-73). There is the cliffhanger opening torture scene taken from the middle of the story (see the very first *Alias* episode), glamorous locations (Berlin, Shanghai, Vatican City... but here they get to actually visit them for real), cute but gutsy (and frequently tortured) women (Russell, Monaghan) and a surly boss (Fishburne). Not forgetting some daft title cards ('Berlin, Germany'...really? I had it confused with the Berlin in Zimbabwe!)

All in all, a great action film and spy thriller (and more importantly, Mission film!) which fuses the best elements of its predecessors, with the fun elements of *Alias* and a little more humanity. It's a great sequel arriving at about the time the franchise should have been getting tired and not hitting its stride.

Abrams would later revitalize the *Star Trek* franchise with his 2009 reboot, and after Cruise's antics on the Oprah Winfrey show angered the head of Paramount, we might not get another Cruise Mission. Despite its labored birth (David Fincher and Joe Carnahan worked long and hard on different versions of the movie, and it was almost made with the latter directing and Kenneth Branagh, Scarlett Johansson and Carrie-Ann Moss co-starring), *Mission III* is a great end to the trilogy if no more films appear. (Paul Rowlands)

The Good Shepherd (2006)

Twelve years in gestation (Francis Ford Coppola, Wayne Wang, Philip Kaufman and John Frankenheimer were all attached at different times) and a personal mission to get filmed by Robert De Niro for nine years, the undeserved fate of *The Good Shepherd* was a lukewarm reception. The lengthy, dense drama attempts to tell the birth of the CIA and is based on real characters and events. It also attempts to portray the personal costs of serving a life in counter-intelligence.

Like *Spy Sorge*, its chief asset is as a history lesson, and it is also timely, in its themes of absolute power corrupting in a post-9/11 world. The strong cast is headed by a very different Matt Damon as 'the good shepherd' of the title: a man who plays a huge part in the creation of the CIA as we know it today but at a terrific personal cost. The film itself is as subdued, quiet and emotionally detached as Damon's character. *The Good Shepherd* isn't a very modern picture, but it is literate and intelligent and presents the world of espionage in a Le Carre fashion. It won't be to everybody's taste, and is certainly flawed - it is difficult to sustain a long film with such detached characters and a detached tone - but the story it tells is an important one, and it tells it well. Damon is impressive in the lead but it takes some getting used to to accept his demeanor in the film, and whilst Jolie is her usual terrific self, her casting is unconvincing. Luckily De Niro has peopled the supporting cast with a number of terrific performers - Michael Gambon, Billy Crudup, Joe Pesci, John Turturro, Alec Baldwin, William Hurt, Timothy Hutton and De Niro himself). De Niro hoped to make two sequels: the first covering the building and knocking down of the Berlin Wall (1961-89) and the second covering Damon's character's life from 1989 to the present day. The film's mediocre box-office may have quashed his plans, which is a shame. (Paul Rowlands)

***Black Book* (2006)**

Black Book is a Dutch-language WW2 spy thriller that brought director Paul Verhoeven acclaim equivalent to that of his earlier non-Hollywood work. It deserved

all the praise it received. His customary outrageousness is evident in this tale of a Dutch Jewish female (Carice Van Houten) who infiltrates the German High Command by sleeping with a Nazi commander (Sebastian Koch), but it is more restrained and adds humour, sexuality, excitement and colour to what could have been a drab, traditional tale.

Black Book might be a lower-budget Dutch movie but Verhoeven stages it as a Hollywood picture. It has the effect of making the story larger than life which must have been how it felt to those living during WW2. He coaxes a captivating and brave central performance from Ms. Van Houten, who completely leads the film throughout since we see events through her eyes. There's an underlying seriousness that runs through the picture that's been missing from Verhoeven's Hollywood pictures, and the misery of being a victim of war and the danger of espionage is clearly drawn.

That said, Verhoeven also shows the intoxicating excitement of life during wartime where emotions are always heightened. Erotic, beautifully made, exciting and thought provoking, *Black Book* demands to be seen. (Paul Rowlands)



Breach (2007)

A compelling take on the Hanssen case. Shifting the viewpoint to a young man who at first finds much to admire in Hanssen brought the viewer into the case in ways that a straight telling wouldn't have. I especially appreciated the attention to detail in the materials removed from Hanssen's car during a quick search—they were in harmony with the real materials that now reside in the FBI's historical collection. (Amanda Ohlke)

***Eastern Promises* (2007)**

Eastern Promises reteams actor Viggo Mortensen and director David Cronenberg, who collaborated so brilliantly on *A History of Violence* two years previously.

If anything, this is an even better film. Set in London, in the Russian criminal underworld, the tale begins after a young pregnant girl dies from stab wounds in hospital. Midwife Naomi Watts finds a diary on the girl and her investigations lead to a Russian crime family and their enigmatic, stone-faced driver Viggo Mortensen. It later transpires that Mortensen is in fact an undercover agent of the FSB and reporting to Scotland Yard.

The film is so brilliant for a number of reasons. It feels like a very British, very London gangster picture, and yet Cronenberg is Canadian (it was written by the British Steven

Knight though). The relationship between Mortensen and Watts is beautifully, delicately handled. The depiction of Russian criminal family life is fascinating, especially their use of tattoos to tell a person's criminal life story. One feels like we are peeking into a forbidden world. There is a real sense of moral outrage at the treatment of women in the film that was also there in Knight's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) script (which dealt with the fate of immigrants in London), which serves to make it all the more real. The juxtaposition of an empathy for everyday life and the grotesque almost comic violence of gangster life is an interesting artistic choice and proof of both Cronenberg's growing preoccupation with the

former and his continuing interest in violence. The film features Mortensen's best performance so far. He brings so many levels to his seemingly cold, impassive character. Armin Mueller-Stahl and Vincent Cassel deliver great supporting performances. Oh, and watch out for a fight scene set in a spa in which a naked Mortensen tries to avoid getting knifed. It's brutal, it's strange, it's bold and it's exciting. (Paul Rowlands)

The Lives of Others* (German: *Das Leben der Anderen*) (U.S., 2007) *

Oscar winning German film brilliantly captures the effect that a culture of permanent suspicion and total surveillance had on the average citizen, and it also poses the intriguing question of what happens when a surveillant begins to sympathize with his target. (Amanda Ohlke)

In terms of surveying the great damage done by espionage to people's lives and being a realistic spy drama, the Oscar-winning (Best Foreign Film), German-language *The Lives of Others* is definitely one of the greatest. It's East Germany, 1984. An agent of the GDR (Ulrich Muhe, who also appeared in *Spy Sorge*, 2003) is tasked to do audiosurveillance on a playwright (Sebastian Koch from *Black Book*, 2006) who his superiors suspect has pro-Western sympathies. The playwright has an actress girlfriend (Martina Gredbeck) whom his superior covets and it becomes clear that this is the real reason for the surveillance. The agent soon becomes sympathetic to their plight.

The Lives of Others is a devastating film in that it accurately portrays what life must have been like for people in East Berlin before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Powerless, paranoid, suffocated and open to all kinds of abuse by those in power who abused their position.

It brings a new dimension to the Cold War spy story. Whereas the likes of Le Carre and Deighton depicted Cold War life in a realistic but entertaining way, this is what it must have been like for those not involved in espionage but under it. It's

a fascinating, subtle, compelling, superbly acted film and if, yes, it's ultimately depressing, then hey, it was a depressing era for its victims. (Paul Rowlands)

Rendition (2007)

Rendition received quite a cool reception from some quarters upon release. Many people questioned its factuality and its depiction of realism. The truth is that Rendition is not intended as a 'realist' piece of cinema. It is a morality tale, questioning the path that the West was taking in its 'War on Terror' campaign. If you look at the characters played by Jake Gyllenhaal and Meryl Streep, their character names hint that this is simply a fable to make you think about what is going on: Gyllenhaal's character is named 'Freeman' and Streep's is 'Whitman'. When you consider that the story is about the arrest and removal of an Egyptian born American to a foreign country under suspicion of terrorist acts, then names like Freeman and Whitman almost slap you in the face with their blatant symbolism.

What makes it work is the central performance of Omar Metwally as Anwar El-Ibrahimi; the aforementioned Egyptian born American. El-Ibrahimi's journey as a harrowing one, and while at times that may make the film hard to watch, it also makes this film one of the most powerful in the last ten years. (David E. Foster)

Lust, Caution (2007)

Similar in plot to *Black Book*, this Chinese-language drama/thriller was Ang Lee's follow-up to the acclaimed *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). Set in 1938 Hong Kong, Tang Wei is a young University student opposed to the Japanese invasion. She soon becomes involved in a plot to seduce and murder Tony Leung (*In the Mood for Love*, 2000), who is an agent and recruiter for the Japanese puppet government. The pair carry on an affair for an extended period of time, all the time Wei developing feelings for him while her cover is as a well to do lady having to bear scrutiny. The film's love scenes were so erotic and graphic that

the film had censorship problems in both the US and China. Its historical setting is fascinating, as is the relationship that the two leads develop. Newcomer Tang Wei is excellent in the lead role, and Leung exhibits the great controlled cool and charisma he is famous for. More than just a sexy film, *Lust, Caution* is another spy film that shows how espionage can become even more dangerous when emotions, particularly love, are involved. Typically from Lee, the film is slow, deliberately paced and exquisitely made. It's one of the most interesting spy films of the decade. (Paul Rowlands)



Taken (2008)

Liam Neeson is a retired CIA 'black ops' operative, estranged from his now remarried ex-wife (Famke Janssen) and aiming to build his relationship with the teenage daughter (Maggie Grace) he barely saw during his marriage. He reluctantly agrees to let her travel to Paris with a friend, and his worst nightmare comes true. She is abducted in her holiday apartment whilst on the telephone with him. Neeson's character, as he explains to her kidnappers, has 'a very special set of skills' and he cuts a swathe through the city of Paris as he hunts down the Albanian slave traders who are readying to sell her to Middle Eastern clients obsessed with virginal white women. He has 96 hours to find her.

Taken is the very best film written (with Robert Mark Kamen) and produced by Luc Besson outside his own directorial ventures. Like Neeson himself, the film is lean, mean and incredibly efficient. Neeson is fantastic casting. He's perfect at

playing troubled, soulful lead characters who are capable of ruthless direct action when it is considered just. His despair at his daughter's plight is palpable, and once we see his incredible fighting skills in full flow, we know how dangerous he is and yet how his emotional investment might make him make mistakes. Being French-produced, it doesn't see the point in creating a travelogue of a movie, and takes us to the underbelly of The City of Light. Taken is a gripping, violent (watch out for the excruciating torture scene), thrilling, one-and-a-half hours. Although it's firmly in the spirit and style of the BOURNE trilogy, it manages to stake its own ground through Neeson's human acting and the relentlessness and crisp pace of the movie. It's one of the most satisfying action thrillers of the decade and well worth a viewing (or five or ten) for Bourne or Bond fans. (Make sure you get the Extended Cut, as the US release version was edited to get a PG-13.) Director Pierre Morel previously directed *District 13* (2004) for Besson, and a sequel to Taken is currently being prepared. (Paul Rowlands)

Body of Lies* (2008) *

I'll admit, I didn't really warm to *Body of Lies* as a piece of entertainment, but I admire the film's professionalism, and once again, presented front and centre is intel and communications. It is interesting to note that Ridley Scott, the brother of Tony Scott, who directed *Enemy of the State* and *Spy Game*, directs this film.

During key scenes in *Body of Lies*, in Jordan and the Middle East, field agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) is in constant contact with his controller, Ed Hoffman (Russell Crowe), who is located in the United States. It almost seems comically incongruous, if the events portrayed weren't so serious, as Hoffman goes about his normal life with family and children, all the while there is a micro receiver/transmitter in his ear. In real time, at home or at work, Hoffman is virtually in the field – in another continent - alongside Ferris. (David E. Foster)

Despite the powerhouse teaming of Leonardo di Caprio and Russell Crowe (in his fourth Scott picture), *Body of Lies* proved to be yet another 'war on terror'

movie that underwhelmed both audiences and critics (although to be fair it has out grossed most similarly themed movies and did make a healthy profit, despite a mediocre advertising campaign). In actual fact, its one of the best things either the two actors or the equally brilliant Scott have ever made.

The film (based on the 2007 David Ignatius novel) stars Di Caprio as Roger Ferris, a CIA operative specializing in the Middle East. At the beginning of the film we get to see his morality versus the morality of his superior, Ed Hoffman (Russell Crowe). Ferris promises a life in the USA to a 'martyr' who is having second thoughts. Hoffman insists that cutting him loose now that Ferris has gotten all the information is the best thing to do, arguing that if he hadn't had a last minute change of heart, the asset wouldn't have had any qualms about killing innocent people. Letting him go will enable them to see who kills him. It's an important scene in the film for it sets up the final scenes and one of the central messages of the film.

Di Caprio's romance with the captivatingly beautiful and natural Golshifteh Farahani (a respected actress and movie/ pop star in her native country of Iran) is quite touchingly handled. It helps that their scenes have humour and that Di Caprio is allowed to express the natural charm that otherwise his character doesn't exhibit. The relationship between the two, which slowly builds on trust and respect and upon Ferris adapting to the conventions of her culture, shows that the professional relationship between him and Hani Salaam (Mark Strong) has the strong potential to work well, if only Hoffman would understand what it takes to work in the Jordanian culture or indeed any Middle Eastern culture.

Ed Hoffman represents US foreign policy in this picture. In one scene (where Ferris hilariously kicks him off his chair - a scene created by the actors), Ferris lambasts him as fat and hungry for power. He wants to win the 'war on terror' at any cost but doesn't know how. As Hoffman himself explains, all

the technology at his disposal is useless when your enemy goes to ground and refuses to use any technology to communicate. He is forced to rely on Ferris's skills and judgment but his distrust, impatience, racism and lust for power will not allow him to simply let Ferris do the job. Ferris is thwarted at every turn by Hoffman and, in the end, he and Hoffman pay dearly for their arrogance and hotheadedness.

The messages of the movie would seem to be thus. You cannot defeat an enemy you can't or are unwilling to try to understand. The CIA cannot operate in the Middle East without working alongside other security services in the regions. To work alongside these services, tact, trust, respect and cultural understanding is required. The only thing original novelist David Ignatius seems uncertain about is the fate of the martyr. It seems morally wrong to throw him to the wolves, especially since Di Caprio had promised him freedom in the US and even though such an action will increase CIA intelligence and further the 'war on terror'. But Crowe's words do uncomfortably ring true. The 'martyr' is not revealing what he knows out of conscience but out of fear for his death as a 'martyr'. There are no easy decisions in war, only ruthless ones.

Body of Lies is a typically well-made Scott production that was mostly filmed in Morocco but is set in the Middle East, and its choices of locations within the country show both the ugliness and beauty of the Middle East. The film boasts a real sense of location and a sensitivity to its people in the script. It's an edgy, exciting, sometimes brutal thriller that takes an unflinching look at the limitations and fatal consequences of US policy in the Middle East. The picture deserves a better reputation, and indeed, critics seemed to want a more bombastic and colourful movie, whilst ignoring the film's many assets. Special mention must go to Mark Strong's brilliant performance as the head of the Jordanian SIS. (Paul Rowlands)

Vantage Point (2008)

Vantage Point is a pacy, compact, exciting thriller that brings *Rashomon* (1950) to the spy genre. The assassination of the US President in Salamanca, Spain is seen eight different times from the POV of a different character. As we watch further stories, we begin to piece together what really happened. Vividly shot by Amir Mokri, the fact the film moves in the style of Paul Greengrass's Bourne sequels is not surprising: he and director Travis collaborated on the 2004 TV film *Omagh*. The film isn't as deep as it could have been given its intriguing gimmick, but on the other hand it looks great, moves fast, is never boring and has a great international cast that includes Dennis Quaid, *Lost* (2004 - present)'s Matthew Fox, Sigourney Weaver, William Hurt, Forest Whitaker, Ayelet Zurer (*Angels and Demons*, 2009), Eduardo Noriega (*Open Your Eyes*, 1997), Edgar Ramirez (*The Bourne Ultimatum*, 2007) and Said Taghmaoui (*Three Kings*, 1999). There is also a fantastic Bourne-esque end car chase. (Paul Rowlands)



Quantum of Solace* (2008) *

As Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Volumes 1 and 2* take a very different approach in terms of style and form, each contrasting and complementing the other, so *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace* are very different movies and two halves of the same story. And we must remember that *Quantum of Solace* is meant to complement *Casino Royale*. *Casino Royale* is very traditional in its narrative structure and makes few concessions to action for action's sake. For instance, the car chase is over before it begins, capitalising on the tension created by its

structural absence. The movie's length runs to 139 minutes, the longest Bond movie ever, and the emphasis is on the sprawling story, Bond getting his double-O status, his casino duel with le Chiffre and the subsequent romance with Vesper, rather than the action sequences. *Quantum of Solace* deliberately contrasts with this, borrowing its structure from *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *The Constant Gardener*. *The Bourne Ultimatum* provides a 110 minute missing scene that revises our impression of the ending of *The Bourne Supremacy*; so the opening scenes of *Quantum of Solace* revise our impression of the Lake Como epilogue of *Casino Royale*, suggesting that Bond's confrontation with Mr White (Jesper Christensen) takes place perhaps months, perhaps even two years, after the death of Vesper (and so, just as the final scene of *The Bourne Supremacy* really belongs in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, the final scene of *Casino Royale* really belongs as the start of *Quantum of Solace*).

Quantum of Solace is the epilogue to *Casino Royale*. It sets up the denouement, Bond's getting even both with White and Vesper's boyfriend, Yusef (Simon Kassianides). And yet the film goes off on a daring tangent. White is sprung from Mi6 custody almost immediately following his capture and the story follows a different tangent – Dominic Greene and the Quantum's organisation's attempt to control the water supply of Bolivia. Yusef only appears as a brief coda at the end of the movie. We discover he is a pathetic sleaze-ball rather than an omnipotent mastermind and Bond lets him live. And even when the movie goes off on its South American tangent, the Quantum-instigated downfall of the Bolivian Government and the water plot very much happens off screen. Bond does not really do anything to stop it, aside from killing Greene. And he does not even kill Greene, just leaves him in the middle of the desert without any water: poetic justice rather than a plot denouement. But then the movie version of *Goldfinger* should not work either. Bond effectively blunders his way through the movie. He is captured early on, fails to warn the CIA of *Goldfinger's* planned attack on Fort Knox and despite managing to kill Odd Job inside the vault in Fort Knox is unable to defuse the atomic bomb. That is left up to the bomb disposal

experts after Pussy Galore alerts the authorities. But these audacious efforts to ignore the expected conventions make both *Goldfinger* and *Quantum of Solace* stand out from the run-of-mill Bond movies. They should not work but they do.

Quantum of Solace owes a lot to *The Constant Gardener* as well— a third world corporate conspiracy plot (pharmaceutical test in Africa, water in South America) with British Government complicity (compare M's meeting with the Foreign Secretary in *Quantum of Solace* with similar scenes between the diplomats and other Government representatives in *The Constant Gardener*.) But as with *The Constant Gardener*, this is purely the background for Bond's journey inward in much the same way it was for Justin Quayle. The journey is not even much of a journey, but rather Bond exposed to circumstances, learning to trust his own instincts.

The circumstances are a series of action sequences but these sequences are all themed around the four elements, water, air, earth and fire, while M inhabits the realm of the ancient fifth element, aether, inhabiting her new high-tech office, communicating with Bond via telecommunications. Quantum inhabits this ether-element also, communicating via electronic earpieces during the performance of Tosca in Bregenz. It is perhaps no accident T.S. Eliot's masterpiece of modernist poetry, 'The Waste Land', is also structured around these five elements, each section of the poem representing one element. *Quantum of Solace* represents Bond in an Eliot-like wasteland following Vesper's death. Hence the desert climax represents the desert in Bond. But he does not emerge from the desert as a result of action but in modernist fiction's manner of epiphany. He simply realises that M was right about Vesper. She did not betray him.

And so too, cinema audiences emerge from a turbulent decade that began with the unreal action sequences of movies such as *Mission: Impossible 2*, *Charlie's Angels* and *Die Another Day*, not to mention spy movies like *Enigma* and *Spy*

Game, that while not divorced from reality were set apart from us in time, set in the past, insulating audiences from the events they depict. "I have no armour left," Bond tells Vesper in *Casino Royale*, "You've stripped it from me." And so spy movies this decade stripped the armour off themselves, reducing themselves to their bare bones. *Quantum of Solace* represents the culmination of this metamorphosis. (Craig Arthur)

QOS became the first direct sequel in the Bond series and immediately replaced *Licence to Kill* (1989) as the most controversial James Bond film. Many found this a disappointing and sub-standard film, citing the plot as weak and confusing, the villains unmemorable, the action confusingly edited and Bond as no more than a blue-collar cold-blooded killer.

After the death of Vesper in *Casino Royale*, we saw Bond locate Mr. White (Jesper Christensen), an associate of Le Chiffre's, and shoot him in the leg. What we thought had happened a short time after his last conversation with 'M' in ROYALE, is now clearly something that has happened some time after, since QOS begins with an amazingly filmed, close-to-the-knuckle car chase with Mr. White in the boot of Bond's replaced Aston Martin (it was destroyed in the previous film).

QOS is like a '60's film in that the style is the content. The abundance of frenetically edited, dizzyingly shot action scenes is meant to mirror Bond's new sense of purpose in hunting down Vesper's killers (technically she committed suicide, but you get what I mean) and his uncertain mental state. Some complained that Bond stumbles into a plot unworthy of a Bond film and doesn't even have a mission. This, folks, is intentional and I found it exciting and new. It all fits into Bond being told by 'M' to look at 'the bigger picture' and since his torture at the hands of Le Chiffre, trying to do just that. Like in the books, Bond is a detective in this film. He isn't sure what's going on, and still has to rely on his not always perfect instincts and judgment and decide who he can or cannot trust.

He struggles with his instinct for revenge throughout the film but never succumbs to it, finding his 'quantum of solace' (the title stems from a W. Somerset Maugham-ish short story from the 1960 *For Your Eyes Only* collection and describes the measure of comfort that needs to exist between people for a relationship to continue) from helping Olga Kurylenko's Camille to get her own revenge. They are like a mirror to each other, making their relationship (never consummated) one of the most touching and unique in the film series. In her Bond sees what he could become: a person consumed by revenge. By the end of the film he has realized that 'I don't think the dead care about vengeance'.

It's also ironic that in this film it is Bond who is seeing 'the bigger picture' and not 'M', or the British Government or the CIA. They are all being duped by the Quantum organization into believing that in exchange for allowing a coup d'etat in Bolivia, they will get oil. They will get nothing.

Quantum of Solace is a relentlessly paced film in the spirit of Paul Greengrass's Bourne sequels, but when the film slows down, one has to pay attention. Director Marc Forster, helming his first action film, wanted the film to 'move like a bullet' and it certainly does. It now replaces *Tomorrow Never Dies* as the best action pic of the series (highlights include a rooftop foot chase, and an aerial chase followed by a freefall). The plot feels like something straight out of Eric Ambler, and Forster manages to create a sense of menace and dread to the film. Roberto Schaefer's cinematography is the most vivid since Ted Moore's work on the early Bond films, and Forster homages *Goldfinger* (1964) and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) a few times throughout the movie. The gradual introduction of Bond in the pre-credits sequence evokes George Lazenby's introduction in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969). It's a film that surges forward breaking its own new ground whilst tipping its hat to the series' iconography. It's a real thrill ride of a movie courtesy of its breathless pace and the twists and turns of the all too timely plot. (Paul Rowlands)

***The International* (2009)**

German director Tom Tykwer was responsible for fantastic arthouse pictures such as *Run Lola Run* (1998) and *Perfume* (2006) and so was not an obvious choice

to helm a commercially minded conspiracy thriller like *The International* (aka *The Bank*). In the tradition if not style of *The Parallax View* (1974) et al, Tykwer's film concerns a corrupt banking institution and an obsessed Interpol agent (Clive Owen) who is determined to bring them down after a colleague is ruthlessly murdered. He is joined in his quest by Manhattan Assistant DA Naomi Watts. Beautifully photographed by Frank Griebe in the spirit of Ted Moore's work on the early Bond pics, the film's story doesn't always convince, but the conviction in Owen and Watts's performances, the globe hopping locations (Berlin, Milan, New York, Istanbul) and a superbly put together and nail bitingly suspenseful shootout in NY's Guggenheim Museum help us to forget our misgivings.

Tykwer chooses interesting locations in the international cities, giving the locations a familiar and yet unfamiliar feel. *The International* is an enjoyable ride that moves with the momentum of a Bourne movie and with the style of a Bond movie. It also makes one think. A little. (Paul Rowlands)

Contributors

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To see companion “Decade in Review” articles on spy literature and television, check out the offerings in the “Spies in History and Literature” and “Spies on Television” files here at

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