

Bond Beyond 2021: Exploring the past, present, and future of 007

“Well, I understand double 0s have a very short life expectancy... so your mistake will be short-lived.”

James Bond (Casino Royale)

With an impressive 27 films (officially 25), spanning nearly 60 years, few movies or characters could ever match the iconic reputation that James Bond commands. Nowhere else will you find more iconic one-liners that stood the test of time. During this long journey, seven extraordinary men have stepped onto the role and into their Aston Martins, with an eighth soon to join this list, now that Daniel Craig's final outing as the super spy in *No Time To Die* has hit theatres.

It always does feel like the end of an era when a Bond actor hangs up his dinner jacket for the last time, and with it, comes the trepidation of what looms over the horizon for the character, and in fact, the whole series as a whole.

Dr. No

When Brosnan took up the role of Bond, the stories he was meant to portray were mostly “business as usual,” carrying over all the tropes, womanising tendencies, over-the-top gadgets, and outlandish villains that we had all come to expect from the Bond franchise at the time. There was a constant whiff of “Cold War era propaganda” about the entire length of Pierce Brosnan era films, something it was supposed to be rid of after the Moore and Dalton era Bonds. While his first outing in *Golden Eye* did manage to revive interest in the character, by the time he left in *Die Another Day*, the franchise had become about as cringe-y and clichéd as the Dom Torreto family memes in a pre-social media era. Plus, writing in weak female characters whose only talents were their jaw-dropping beauty and adding to Bond's womanising conquests really hasn't aged well.

You Only Live Twice

Bond's 21st entry seemed doomed from the start, because how do you write yourself out of something as nonsensical as *Die Another Day*? Also, when Daniel Craig was first announced back in 2005 as the new agent 007, the world hit back with relentless undeserved criticism, with slurs like James Bland, or the Blonde Bond (the last one being particularly senseless as the well-received Roger Moore was also blonde). Critics pointed out that Craig was not a leading actor, and had doubts whether he could shoulder the responsibility of portraying James Bond in all his “elegance.”

As fate would have it, the success of this new Bond film relied indirectly on Christian Bale and the reboot of the Batman franchise. Just like 007, Batman has also gone through a sour phase for a while, but using the “Gritty Remake Approach,” 2015's *Batman Begins* breathed new life into the character and the franchise. Because of how well that worked,



the same was applied for *Casino Royale*, the first proper cinematic exploration of Bond's origins.

As for Craig's perception in the media, well, that changed very quickly once paparazzi pictures of one of Bond's scenes leaked to the press. Almost overnight, opinions softened and some people were ready. For those who weren't, well, the premiere of *Casino Royale* in 2006 and its resounding success fixed that.

The Spy Who Loved Me

Five movies later, it's safe to say Daniel Craig has cemented himself as one of the best on-screen Bonds ever, and if you ask me, he IS THE best James Bond bar none, and perfectly represents how James Bond was supposed to be. I guess this is as good a time as any to dispel the myth that James Bond is supposed to be this handsome suave charmer. According to Ian Fleming's books and his own description of the character, Bond is supposed to look cold, ruthless, cruel good looks: a brute in a suit, if you will.

So why did Craig's Bond movies enjoy such meteoric success? First off, they went and removed every nonsensical trope that plagued Bonds of old, and showcased a Bond whose secret weapon was himself and his own strength. No longer do we see a Casanova going from continent to continent, going 'shaken, not stirred' and wooing women, and occasionally doing outlandish missions with zero risk. This is the first cinematic portrayal of a more emotional and grounded Bond: a vulnerable 007, susceptible to mistakes and complexities that are part and parcel of having and being driven by emotion. His drinking tendencies have now been rationalised as something he does to cope with the enormous guilt of a man who is forced to exercise his “license to kill.”

The second improvement his movies brought were rich and diverse character development. No longer were women just made to be eye-candy and conquests for 007. Every Bond Girl had a serious backstory and displayed proper motivation. Quantum

of Solace was basically two different, yet similar stories unfolding; one of Bond's, the other of Bond Girl Camille Montes, portrayed by Olga Kurylenko. Both were about revenge for the death of their loved ones, and both decided to work together to bring them down. His movies also brought about welcome changes to long-time favourite, if under-utilised, character Eve Moneypenny. In older films, she was mostly a pretty secretary, there for Bond's entertainment. In *Skyfall* however, she is a field operative of equal calibre as Bond himself.

Little known tidbit: The famous scene of Eva Green's Vesper Lynd in the shower early in *Casino Royale*, in shock after witnessing a murder, was supposed to be akin to old Bond flicks where she would be served up as eye-candy for the audience. However, Craig insisted on changing the scene and creating the much more tender and realistic scene of Bond sitting under the showers with Vesper and calming her down.

The World Is Not Enough

With Craig's final movie now out, it's that time again; where will the franchise go from here? And who will be the next Bond?

Addressing the first one shouldn't be too difficult, as the series has ended on a much more positive note than *Die Another Day*. Every new Bond brings with it a shift of perspective to better reflect the current world. Craig's era of Bond showcased the darker aspects of these covert government agencies, as well as corruption in higher governing bodies. Something Craig's Bond should have done away with however were portrayals of disfigurements. It's 2021; eye scars or facial deformities should not be associated with villains. Going forward, the franchise can integrate present-day problems like misinformation, rise of far-right, cyber warfare and climate change.

The issue of who the next Bond will be is a trickier prospect, and one that will invite strong opinions for and against my opinions. Unlike any time before, there have been talks to “reinvent” the character with a person of colour, or even rewrite Bond as a female character instead, as it is apparently alluded to *No Time To Die* (haven't seen it yet). I have been given strong arguments as to why it can, and should happen, as 007 is just a code, among perhaps 8 other codes for agents in the double 0 program. But it's not so cut-and-dry. 007 may very well be a code, but James Bond and 007 are inseparable at this point, and violating that is destroying the formula. The original novel and Bond's inspiration clearly described a male operative in the British Royal Navy in his 40's. And the last 60 years has been spent building up the man and the world he lives and fights in. This formula was absolutely perfected with Daniel Craig's portrayal of the super spy. Why tamper with it now and throw away all that rich history and story, just to please some people and appear “politically correct?” We are in 2021, an era where stories can be expanded upon via expanded universes. Why not write a brand-new female character as strong as, or stronger, than Bond's, rather than simply