

James Bond makes 'Quantum' leap to nonstop action thrills

Contributed by Tim Riley
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QUANTUM OF SOLACE (Rated PG-13)

With a title borrowed from an Ian Fleming short story, "Quantum of Solace" seems designed to prove that a story is somehow unnecessary to realizing a James Bond movie.

Surprisingly, there are three writers credited to crafting the screenplay, when it's obvious that a graduate student at film school, possessing knowledge of James Bond lore, could have managed just as well.

"Quantum of Solace" tricked out by its aggressive video game sensibilities, is so heavy on action that there's hardly a moment of respite. You may have heard this elsewhere, but it bears repeating that James Bond is now almost indistinguishable from the Jason Bourne character.

Forget about Sean Connery, Roger Moore or even Pierce Brosnan. Daniel Craig is the James Bond for a new generation, even if he comes off as a possibly grittier version of Matt Damon.

Craig's James Bond can still wear the tuxedo with elegant grace, but this guy's tougher than Steven Seagal in a dozen martial arts films. He delivers the goods with the brutal efficiency of an almost robotic assassin.

Steeped in its revenge story, "Quantum of Solace" presents agent 007 as an unstoppable killing machine, indestructible in pursuit of his mission. But just like his boss, M (Judi Dench) the head of the British Secret Service, you may question exactly what his mission is about.

Picking up where "Casino Royale" left off, the opening scene has Bond being pursued by a carload of baddies, probably because he's got Mr. White (Jesper Christensen) stuffed in the trunk of his Aston Martin.

Not exactly a sentimental guy, Bond is nonetheless anxious to track down the criminal mastermind behind White's sinister organization, knowing that it may enable him to exact revenge for the death of Vesper Lynd. As you may recall, Vesper is the woman he fell in love with, despite good reasons to be wary of any romantic entanglements.

After an interrogation of Mr. White and an unexpected betrayal in a secret location in Spain, Bond is off to Haiti to track down an MI6 traitor.

In a case of mistaken identity, Bond is introduced in slapdash fashion to the beautiful but feisty Camille (Olga Kurylenko), who has her own vendetta agenda, but one that coincides with Bond's plans.

Camille leads Bond straight to the bug-eyed Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), a ruthless businessman who hides under the cover of his environmental credentials. Al Gore will be none too pleased at how this green planet advocate abuses his trust.

Linked to Quantum, Greene has sinister plans to take control of vital natural resources in Bolivia for his own gain, primarily by forging a deal with corrupt General Medrano (Joaquin Cosio), itching to stage his own coup d'etat.

The scheme turns out to be barely more evil than the theft of water from the Owens Valley in "Chinatown." Whatever happened to ominous plots for world domination? Bond villains, like Ernst Stavro Blofeld and Auric Goldfinger, used to have ambitions that matched their outsized egos. Now we have some creepy environmentalist telling a gathering of gullible rich folks to support his green initiatives.

Pared down to the shortest running time of any Bond film in history, "Quantum of Solace" expends its energy mostly on an almost nonstop sequence of car chases, fights, running across rooftops, explosions, airplane chase and more fights. Especially when Bond dashes across tile roofs in hot pursuit, it seems like another chapter in a "Bourne" movie.

With all the chasing and fighting, there's little time for Bond to display much personality. Though the consummate tough guy, Sean Connery always had time to drop a few witticisms. Humor is almost nonexistent in this all-business affair.

It's comforting to know that Bond still has some of his bad habits, though they don't seem to include smoking or drinking martinis shaken not stirred. Still, he manages time to seduce the very attractive Agent Fields (Gemma Arterton), while going undercover as part of a teachers' group that apparently hit the lottery jackpot.

Sadly, Fields' most memorable moment is a tribute to "Goldfinger." Not so memorable is Bond tailing bad guys doing business at the avant-garde Austrian opera house. Nor does he have any truly memorable scenes with the sexy Camille, who appears stripped of any real personality. Oddly enough, there's zero chemistry between Bond and Camille.

I have enjoyed every single James Bond film, all 56 or 57 of them if you count the Woody Allen spoof. Despite a few misgivings on style and substance, I find "Quantum of Solace" another worthy entry, though for reasons far different than the early Sean Connery ones. The action and the stunts are absolutely breathtaking, and Daniel Craig is the definitive contemporary Bond.

Nevertheless, a few things amount to letdowns, the most egregious of which is the worst Bond title song ever, even more dreadful than the one by Madonna.

DVD RELEASE UPDATE

I am wondering when the DVD market will reach the saturation point. If you don't want to watch current TV shows, Paramount Home Entertainment is pushing old series at a rapid clip.

This week alone brings at least four oldies, including "Star Trek The Original Series: Season Three," now remastered for the first time.

"Odd Couple: The Final Season" allows the last look at Tony Randall and Jack Klugman as the two comic

misfits, one a slob and the other a fussybudget.

Wouldn't it be great to have an acting career working on location in Hawaii? The enduring popularity of "Hawaii Five-O" continues with the release of its fifth season.

Not exactly in the vintage category, all eight seasons of "Charmed: The Complete Series" features some beautiful women as sibling witches. The Deluxe Edition has a suggested retail price above \$300, and I am curious about the volume of sales for this type of product.

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