"How Safe Do You Feel?": James Bond, *Skyfall* , and the Politics of the Secret Agent in an Age of Ubiquitous Threat

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"HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL?": JAMES BOND, *SKYFALL*, AND THE POLITICS OF THE SECRET AGENT IN AN AGE OF UBIQUITOUS THREAT

JAMES SMITH

When examining the process of the banalization of warfare in our present society, where once-extraordinary responses to conflict and crisis become accepted and routine, the history of the modern state intelligence apparatus provides one of the most significant examples of such a transition. As writers such as Phillip Knightley (2003) have noted, over the course of the twentieth century perceptions and practices of intelligence gathering underwent a remarkable metamorphosis. At the start of the century spying was largely an ad hoc occupation. Dedicated state intelligence agencies did not exist until 1909, when the Secret Service Bureau of Britain was founded in response to a perceived German invasion threat, and the United States did not create a permanent centralized intelligence apparatus until the founding of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947 due to the looming Cold War. Yet by the latter half of the century such intelligence agencies had become an inextricable part of the machinery of world states, with advances in areas such as communications, computing, and satellite technology providing reach far beyond that available to earlier spies. In the political climate of the "war on terror," previously illegal intelligence methods such as abduction and torture became condoned by Western officials, and in the age of the internet, surveillance practices that were

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once limited to specific targets have transitioned into the routine and all-encompassing, such as the generalized harvesting of phone and internet metadata undertaken by the US's National Security Agency (NSA) and the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The expanding reach of the secret state now poses one of the greatest political and privacy debates facing the present time, with advocates insisting that such powers are necessary in order to engage with the asymmetrical terrorist threats and online battlefields of the twenty-first century, while critics argue that it offers a dangerous and undemocratic reconfiguring of the state's powers.

This article, through analysis of the 2012 James Bond film *Skyfall,* looks at how the world's most successful spy franchise has engaged with this contemporary paradigm of intelligence and cyberterrorism. *Skyfall* in many ways represents a high point for the Bond films, marking fifty years since the release of *Dr. No* in 1962, becoming the most successful Bond film of all time at the box office and being the subject of extensive praise and debate by reviewers and critics.[1] It continued the "reboot" of the franchise, which began with the remake of *Casino Royale* (2006) and carried through in *Quantum of Solace* (2008). This reboot, as most critics agree, successfully revitalized the Bond franchise, which until that point had been struggling to find relevance after the Cold War and was at risk of being eclipsed by a new generation of post 9/11 spy and surveillance narratives (Hochscherf 2013, 299–301). These included the *Bourne* (2002–) and *Mission Impossible* (1996–) franchises, star-studded political thrillers such as *Syriana* (2005) and *Rendition* (2007), and high-budget serial television productions such as HBO's *The Wire* (2002–2008), Fox's *24* (2001–10), the BBC's *Spooks* (also known as *MI-5* when released in the United States) (2002–11), and Showtime's *Homeland* (2011–).[2] This wave of narratives typically featured complex plots structured around conspiracies and political intrigue, incorporated topics of contemporary political relevance (such as terrorism, torture, or surveillance), and often depicted "realistic images of violent interrogation scenes" (315). In response, the generic alignments of the rebooted Bond underwent major shifts away from the fantastical and luxurious escapism of earlier Bond novels and films into a framework where Bond is instead promoted as "'gritty,' 'realistic,' and 'tough'" (Chapman 2007, 242), with plotlines now revolving around a "web of national security, traitors, opportunism, fragile alliances, complicit governments and transnational crime syndicates" (Hochscherf 2013, 306).

Skyfall takes this trajectory even further and engages with highly contentious contemporary issues such as the threats and opportunities posed by the ubiquity of the Internet and its flows of information, the

democratic accountability of intelligence services, and even the continued ability of fictional works such as the Bond franchise to depict the complexities of the intelligence apparatus and conflict in the modern world. Indeed, *Skyfall*'s grasp of this cultural and political moment was nowhere more apparent than in its choice of villain, Raoul Silva. In depicting this antagonist as a master computer hacker who steals MI6's closest secrets and leaks them on the Internet, *Skyfall* not only comments on events such as the whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks (which rose to international media prominence through leaks including the thousands of classified US State Department cables released in 2010), but also neatly prefigures the activity of Edward Snowden, the former NSA contractor who, several months after the film's release, leaked a trove of top secret signals intelligence material to the world's media. Through Snowden, unprecedented public light was shed on contemporary intelligence operations such as PRISM and XKEYSCORE, which are conducted by the United States in collaboration with the other "Five Eyes" intelligence partners (Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and allegedly render almost the entire content of the world's internet open to surveillance, information capture, and analysis.[3]

Skyfall's anticipation of what became probably the world's largest media event in 2013 was a fortunate coincidence, but it is certainly not inconsequential. The Bond franchise is commonly held to be the world's most widely disseminated fictional work and crucial in shaping public views of intelligence, contributing to the allure and mythology of the secret world as well as providing a prism through which its activities are reported.[4] Given that it is often suggested that fictional works "may be playing an increasingly powerful role in public conceptions of counterterrorism" (Brereton and Culloty 2012, 484), and that they provide important mechanisms for understanding rapidly evolving technologies of surveillance (Marks 2005, 222), *Skyfall* offers a prominent and influential cultural rendering of notoriously elusive intelligence areas such as cryptography, surveillance, cyber warfare, and signals intelligence. However, as this article will show, *Skyfall*'s mediation of these issues is far from a neutral process. Although superficially offering a modernized sexual and racial politics, featuring a Bond unfazed by same-sex encounters and a Moneypenny, played by the black British actress Naomie Harris, who is Bond's equal in the field, the surface-level politics mask the deeper ideological work of the film, which attempts a highly conservative mythologizing of the contemporary secret state and its growing reach in the world.[5]

This article therefore proceeds to address these issues across several levels. First, it analyzes how *Skyfall* constructs a vision of a vulnerable

world of ubiquitous security threats and cyber warfare, in which everyday IT infrastructure and transport systems are terrains of constant conflict, and how it draws upon prominent "hacktivist" figures when depicting the main enemy of this contemporary society. This article then examines how *Skyfall* engages with the current roles of intelligence services and the demands for their democratic accountability, and also how the film grapples with issues such as the recent complicity of Western intelligence services in extra-judicial rendition and torture. Finally, this article looks at the tension at work in the film as it attempts to reinvent Bond as a secret agent fit for a world of internet surveillance and online warfare, and how it draws upon a pastiche of prior screen heroisms and historical security threats in this reinvention. In doing so, this article contends that *Skyfall* is a powerful and troubling cultural intervention into the politics of the contemporary secret state and its relationship to wider society. Offering a vision of Britain isolated and under attack,[6] and a staunch defense of the secrecy and moral righteousness of Western intelligence services as they fight this battle, *Skyfall* attempts to recuperate the image of Bond as the invincible secret agent and counters the more skeptical visions that have come to dominate recent spy fiction narratives—but it does so precisely at a time when NSA leaks and government reports into torture suggest we should view the world of intelligence with greater scrutiny than ever before.

BOND IN A WORLD OF UBIQUITOUS THREAT

James Bond, at the moment of his creation, was a creature of the Cold War. In the first of Ian Fleming's novels *Casino Royale*, first published in 1953, the purpose of his gambling mission in a French casino was to ensure that, for the benefit of the UK and NATO, the "powerful Soviet agent" Le Chiffre was "ridiculed and destroyed" (2012, 16), and in the subsequent novels and films the agents of the USSR and its organs prove to be some of Bond's most persistent antagonists. The Bond franchise still inhabited a similar world long after the Berlin Wall had fallen, with the plots typically revolving around threats originating from the (present or former) Communist-sphere, with China, North Korea, Russia, and the territories of the former USSR all key locations in Brosnan-era films such as *GoldenEye* (1995), which featured a plot based around Bond's pursuit of a satellite weapon system stolen from Russia (Hochscherf 2013, 301).[7]

One of the most significant aspects of the reboot of the franchise, therefore, has been the new seriousness and relevance given to Bond and the geopolitical space that he inhabits. As has been argued, the franchise

has now moved "away from the geopolitics of the Cold War with its opposing blocs, [and] it finally accepts a new world order of asymmetrical threats" (Hochscherf 2013, 299). Such a new world order is reflected in elements such as that Le Chiffre in the 2006 *Casino Royale* remake is now a financier of international terrorism, and that the plot of *Quantum of Solace* involves international criminal cartels and the corrupt struggle for control of natural resources in the developing world, as Bond investigates the Quantum organization and its control of the water supply in Bolivia.

Skyfall takes this process even further and becomes the first Bond film fully to integrate its narrative with an era where the digital revolution has fundamentally altered the nature of intelligence, threats, and conflicts. This era has been marked by the development of so-called "net-centric" warfare and surveillance strategies by military and intelligence services across the world, with vast flows of digital information now monitored as an intelligence source, online profiles and activities now subject to routine surveillance and analysis, and critical infrastructure now liable to hostile online attack or takeover. It is this net-centric warfare that Bond and MI6 now face in *Skyfall*. Unlike the previous antagonists representing SPECTRE, SMERSH, or even Quantum, who spend much of their time plotting for geopolitical domination and planning military strikes or sabotage, *Skyfall* depicts a world in which the hazards facing Bond are seemingly far more banal—but at the same time far more dangerous due to their ubiquity. "What I see frightens me," M states to a government committee, precisely because the threat cannot be distinctly seen, as it is the infrastructure of everyday life that is the terrain and weapon of this fight.

The plot and action sequences of *Skyfall* are driven by the loss of computer data and leaks of information, with control over communication networks and encryption keys becoming more significant than military command of any physical space or jurisdiction. Rather than fighting to stop any conventional armaments or doomsday device (as long loved by Bond villains), MI6 must instead contend with threats emerging from commonplace IT infrastructure and public transport systems, all liable to be turned into hostile weapons. It is, for example, a domestic gas explosion from hacked "safety protocols," and not military ordnance, that is used to destroy M's office and kill several MI6 officers. Satellite communication and digital cartography provide both highly valuable information and an almost inescapable system of control, allowing Bond to be guided around the world in real-time from the London MI6 headquarters but also making M's car untrustworthy due to its ability to be tracked—an updating of Foucault's famous dictum that "Visibility is a trap" (1977, 200), something that Bond eventually understands and uses

to his advantage when deliberately baiting his own trap by luring Silva with a trail of digital "breadcrumbs."

In this climate, it is the computer, not the gun, which provides the combatant with the weapon of choice. "I'll hazard I can do more damage on my laptop sitting in my pajamas before my first cup of Earl Grey than you can do in a year in the field," Q calmly states to Bond when they first meet, laying out the net-centric battlespace which threatens to render Bond's physical sphere of action irrelevant, a mere anachronistic "trigger . . . to be pulled." The full consequences of this battlespace are readily clarified by Silva: "Destabilize a multinational by manipulating stocks. Bip. Easy. Interrupt transmissions from a spy satellite over Kabul. Done. . . . Just point and click."[8] This "point and click" flippancy of Silva is all the more ominous due to the fact that it does not require the support of nation states or large-scale actors to make it viable. A computer and a personal grievance is now enough to make an individual a threat—the world of the asymmetrical antagonist largely resistant to conventional surveillance or policing techniques.

It is not just the hijacking of infrastructure that poses a hazard in this climate, as the control of public opinion equally provides a site of asymmetrical warfare. The risk of negative publicity hangs over every move made by M, with the reactions of domestic civilian overseers to such media attention seeming to hamper MI6 far more than any activity by a hostile government. Crucially, Silva does not pass the list of NATO agents to a foreign intelligence service, but uploads them as part of a slick video to YouTube, a savvy social media strategy that inflicts maximum damage on his foes by destroying both their agent networks and their public reputation. The beneficiaries of this information respond in-kind: the video of the execution of an exposed NATO agent is broadcast on the BBC, with this very public spectacle far removed from the clandestine assassinations of prior eras, forcing the government into damage control to limit the political fallout. The cloaks and daggers, it would seem, have been removed from the modern spy game, whatever M's continued desire to fight in the "shadows." It is significant, therefore, that Bond describes his flight with M to the Scottish Highlands as not so much a physical journey as going "Back in time" to "Somewhere we'll have the advantage," and that when at Skyfall the gamekeeper hands him a knife and tells Bond that "sometimes the old ways are the best." As I will come back to later, this journey is part of the nostalgia at work in the film. But here it may also be read as an escape not so much from Silva as it is from the omnipresent technological and surveillance apparatus of modernity itself: a place where the cloak and dagger can again be put to

work, as is emphatically shown when Bond, the technological apparatus successfully evaded and destroyed, is finally able to sink the dagger into the unsuspecting Silva's back.

Raoul Silva, however, is of more significance than just a conventional monstrous Bond antagonist needing to be overcome, and this character presents one of the film's most significant and complex set of allusions and sources. Most obviously, there is the association that the actor Javier Bardem brings to the role. Bardem had recently played the relentless killer Anton Chigurh in the Coen brother's film *No Country for Old Men* (2007), winning the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. The casting of Bardem as Silva thus ensured that this new Bond villain carried with him allusions to one of the more memorable serial killers of film in recent years, imbuing the potentially benign figure of a computer hacker with an unusually sinister edge. Second, the decision to portray this cyber-terrorist with distinctive long blond hair seems to unmistakably allude to Julian Assange, the founder and public face of the whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks. This was commented on by reviewers and bloggers at the time. For example, the prominent critic Roger Ebert wondered whether we were "supposed to think of Julian Assange" when watching *Skyfall* (2012). In the UK, the reviewer in the *Telegraph* also drew attention to the fact that Silva's "nicotine hair flops queasily over his forehead in a way that calls to mind Julian Assange," suggesting that this engagement with the theme of "cyber-terrorism" made *Skyfall* "a Bond film for the Anonymous generation" (Collin 2012).

The linking of Silva to Assange, therefore, positions *Skyfall* not just as a work engaging with general themes of cyber-espionage and vulnerability, but one quite pointedly tapping one of the most prominent and divisive public debates concerning secrecy and security in recent years—a significant shift for the Bond franchise, given its well-worn formula of conjuring safely fantastical plots (albeit often with some general topical relevance). Assange and WikiLeaks are perhaps most famous for publishing thousands of classified diplomatic cables leaked by the US Army Private Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning. More recently, Assange has been the subject of allegations of sexual assault (amidst counter allegations that such claims were part of a dirty tricks campaign designed to discredit him), which has seen Assange trapped in Ecuador's London Embassy for several years as he seeks political asylum. For many, Assange is a hero of the contemporary Internet age, the most visible face of a new breed of online activists fighting back against increasing government and corporate secrecy: Amnesty International, for example, cited the role of WikiLeaks in providing one of the sparks for the democratic uprisings of the Arab

Spring of 2010 (Walker 2011). And even while various Western governments have strongly and repeatedly criticized the activity of WikiLeaks for the damage it was claimed to be doing to national security, few have moved beyond general condemnation, mainly because the publication of leaked information is a protected right in the United States. Only on the more radical fringes of the Republican Party and Fox News have claims about Assange gone further, with various calls for WikiLeaks to be nominated as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization" by the State Department, for Assange to be arrested and prosecuted for leaking secrets and aiding the enemy, even (in some of the wilder moments) for Assange to be deemed a high-value terrorist and therefore a legitimate target for US-backed assassination (Harnden 2010; McFarland 2010; Kuhner 2010).

Skyfall thus does update Bond for the "Anonymous generation" of hacktivists, but does so in a far from celebratory nature. In linking the villain to Assange, *Skyfall* gives prominent fictional life to these previously fringe views that reduce Assange's activity to a form of terrorism—and the depiction of Silva as a sexual predator who targets trapped victims (whether Bond or Severine) further embellishes the hostility of the caricature, by leading the audience to make inferences about Assange's alleged crimes. In this ideological rendering, the leaker of information becomes the sexually deviant enemy of the state, driven by a maniacal desire for revenge rather than any higher notions of transparency or democratic duty. In this way *Skyfall* becomes a powerful and highly conservative articulation of much wider contemporary debates, mimicking as it does the security rhetoric that transforms civil protest into national security threat. As activity only a few months after *Skyfall*'s release clearly showed, the implications of this debate were only just beginning. When troves of information from former NSA contractor Edward Snowden began to appear in worldwide media outlets, politicians and intelligence officials again made claims about the damage being done to intelligence operations and the assistance that Snowden's actions were providing to hostile countries and terrorist organizations, to the extent that intelligence chiefs even publicly joked about putting Snowden on a "kill list" for the difficulties he had caused them (Kiss 2013). In this case such calls for assassination may have been bad-taste banter, but *Skyfall* can be seen to have already played this fantasy out, killing Silva as punishment for his crimes, and safely characterizing hacking as a "renegade" activity practiced by an external enemy rather than something sponsored by world intelligence agencies on a vast scale. However, as Alpert has noted, the irony is that for many in the audience the leaker, not the secret agent, actually now represents the hero of the age and the guarantor of public freedom. In trying to portray such campaigners

as a "nominal villain" (2013, 3), *Skyfall*'s response to current debates over whistle-blowing becomes one of the more authoritarian voiced.

"ARE WE TO CALL THIS 'CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT'?"

That, in broad outline, suggests the configuration of the externally directed threats presented in *Skyfall,* as it portrays Bond and his world as under attack from this new online adversary. However, this represents only one element of the risk Bond faces in the film, and throughout *Skyfall* equally dangerous (if unintentional) threats to MI6 are depicted as coming from the British state itself. MI6 is beset by attempts by politicians and bureaucrats to open up its closed world to public scrutiny, with the actions of Bond and M investigated and criticized by their own government, to the extent that both risk being forced into retirement mid-operation. This attention to themes such as secrecy, openness, and accountability again positions *Skyfall* as a work responding to contemporary discourse about the role and function of secret intelligence in a post-9/11 world, and indeed marks it out as one of the most pointed attempts by a cultural work to intervene in this political debate.

To an extent, an antagonistic interaction between Bond and his superiors in the Whitehall bureaucracy is nothing new, as Bond often chafes against the orders of M (particularly in the Dench-era), and often shows little regard for many of the other high offices of the state.[9] At the end of the film *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), for example, after Bond has prevented the Soviets from obtaining the missing ATAC missile guidance controls, a phone call from the Prime Minister is left for a parrot to take while Bond frolics with the "Bond girl" Melina Havelock on a yacht. But this is always within defined (if unspoken) parameters, more akin to a cocky star student irritating his stuffy teachers than any serious political dissent. In the earlier eras of the Bond franchise, whatever his occasional disillusionment, the overwhelming picture is that of Bond as a loyal servant comfortably integrated within the heart of the British state.[10] In Fleming's *Moonraker*, first published in 1955, for example, it was stated that Bond would venture into the field only "two or three times a year" and otherwise lived as "an easy-going senior civil servant," with a Civil Service "Principal Officer" salary of "£1500 a year" and a routine involving "elastic office hours from around ten to six," "evenings spent playing cards in the company of a few close friends," and "weekends playing golf for high stakes at one of the clubs near London" (2006, 10–11).

In contrast, *Skyfall,* continuing the political trajectory evident in *Quantum of Solace* where Bond acts as a seeming renegade for much of the

film, portrays a highly antagonistic relationship between these organs of the state, with M and Bond regularly required to account to civil servants and government ministers and actively resisting this intervention. Oversight from such officials is a "bloody waste of my time" according to M, and accounting to Parliamentary committees is likened to "standing in the stocks at midday." Mallory, the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee and main overseer of MI6, is dismissed as a "bureaucrat" by Bond, someone lacking the field experience to understand the real nature of secret intelligence. This antagonism, though, goes both ways: Mallory forces M into retirement after the loss of the list of agent names, the opposition party takes the position that MI6 are a "bunch of antiquated bloody idiots fighting a war [they] don't understand and can't possibly win," and in public inquiries government ministers openly ridicule M for the "monumental security breaches and dead operatives for which you are almost single-handedly responsible."

That *Skyfall* chooses to focus so much time and attention to these antagonisms is far from incidental, and indeed suggests one of the most significant aspects of *Skyfall*'s engagement with the shifting political role of the secret state. One of the great ironies of the Bond franchise is that, despite James Bond's position as the most recognizable spy in the world, the agency that he ostensibly worked for, Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, more commonly known as MI6), was officially denied by the British government for most of the twentieth century, successive governments adhering to the policy that intelligence matters were beyond almost any form of open scrutiny, the agencies funded by the "secret vote" and not discussed in public or Parliament. The result, as Christopher Andrew wrote, was that the British secret services attained "the status of an unmentionable taboo exempt from any process of rational public or parliamentary debate," with even major scandals such as Kim Philby's defection protected from parliamentary scrutiny on the grounds (as Prime Minister Macmillan stated) that it was "dangerous and bad for our general national interest" that such matter should be discussed (1986, 697).

The ending of the Cold War saw many of these previous assumptions stripped away, with the UK's intelligence agencies forced to reevaluate their positions, resulting in MI5 and MI6 finally being acknowledged in 1989 and 1994 (respectively) with Parliament's passing of intelligence legislation. This shift was followed with a sequence of publicity activity by these newly accountable services, including the heads of the intelligence services now being publicly named, a move by MI5 and MI6 to prominent new headquarters in London, the services openly advertising on general employment websites, and the authorizing of official histories by Andrew

(2009) and Jeffery (2010). From its previous status as unmentionable by politicians, "intelligence" became a routine power to which politicians openly appealed, particularly in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the Blair government published dossiers of intelligence assessment in order to justify its plans.[11] Equally, though, this new visibility brought with it unwelcome side-effects for many in the secret state. For example, former intelligence chiefs have worried about the burden that these new demands for accountability are placing on the services (Rimington 2002, 280), and a wave of inquiries held to probe intelligence flaws and controversies (such as the Chilcot Inquiry into the invasion of Iraq, launched in 2009 and whose report is still pending) have thrown an uncomfortable limelight onto the activities and practices of agencies previously accustomed to operating behind the scenes. Moreover, public trust in intelligence services has probably reached its lowest point since the Cambridge spy revelations of the 1950s, as suspicions linger over the faulty intelligence that led to the Iraq invasion (despite overwhelming public opposition), and the revelations of Snowden and others show the secret state's participation in activities such as dragnet surveillance.

It is into this climate that *Skyfall* intervenes. Mallory, seemingly the embodiment of this current political trend towards transparency, insists to M that "We can't keep working in the shadows" and that the secret service must be democratically accountable. However, the weight of the narrative is clearly against Mallory's position, and marks a key differentiation between *Skyfall*'s political vision and the current trends in secret state narratives. In such narratives, whether the *Bourne* films or TV series such as *Homeland* or Channel 4's quirky *Utopia* (2013–), it is typically renegades or outsiders who become the protagonists of the narrative, fighting to expose the conspiracies or cover-ups that lurk at the heart of the Western political and intelligence establishment. In contrast, despite the "grittyness" of the reboot, *Skyfall* does not portray any deeper corruption or conspiracy at the heart of the British state, only a small-government conservative dislike for bureaucratic meddling. Bond ultimately remains the loyal servant of the crown, as emphatically conveyed by the close of the film as Bond surveys the iconic London skyline and a flying Union Jack. *Skyfall* therefore staunchly defends the role of secret intelligence as a vital weapon in the fight against security threats, and criticizes the naivety of non-combatant bureaucrats and civilians who seek to question such powers, suggesting secret agencies are rendered vulnerable and ineffective if subjected to public scrutiny or bureaucratic interference.

This is nowhere more obvious than when M is dragged into her own public inquiry, ordered by the Prime Minister after the fallout from the

online leaking of agent names. For much of the inquiry, M appears to be the helpless victim of this uninformed interference, reduced to enduring the ridicule of government ministers who berate her for the "monumental security breaches and dead operatives" that have occurred under her watch. Importantly, it is not just M's individual leadership that is called into question, but the necessity of secret agents themselves. As a minister tells her, "It's as if you insist on pretending we still live in a golden age of espionage where human intelligence was the only resource available." This sentiment suggests that the very existence of Bond's sphere of action is under threat from the political realm, which would prefer to deal with the safer areas of diplomacy and automated intelligence gathering rather than the unpredictable world of physical action and conflict.

Skyfall's real significance, though, is in the way that it offers an emphatic defense of the secret state against such interference, not only deflecting calls for accountability and oversight, but positioning the secret intelligence officer, not the politician or citizen, as the true defender of democracy in this time of ubiquitous threat. M delivers a rousing speech in reply to the ministers, its gravity emphasized by the fact that it is intercut with scenes of Silva as he guns down security guards. As M tells the inquiry:

> Well, I suppose I see a different world than you do. And the truth is that what I see frightens me. I'm frightened because our enemies are no longer known to us. They do not exist on a map. They are not nations. They are individuals. Look around you. Who do you fear? Can you see a face? A uniform? A flag? No. Our world is not more transparent now. It's more opaque. It's in the shadows. That's where we must do battle. So, before you declare us irrelevant, ask yourselves, how safe do you feel?

This speech is the climax of several threads of the film, and presents an important ideological manifesto to consider.[12] Not only does it present an eloquent defense of the intelligence establishment as it stands, but it strives to bolster it through the construction of a new, modern mythology. Here, where danger has become all-encompassing and routine, the role of the intelligence community is justified in paramilitary, and indeed apocalyptic, terms: the talk of enemies "no longer known," and of doing "battle" in "shadows," seems to borrow heavily from J. R. R. Tolkien's language (Mordor, after all, is the land where shadows lie). There is mention of transparency, but its use is twisted and reinvented in this discourse. Here, it is the *world* that lacks transparency, not MI6, a neat inversion of the normal terms of debate: in this "opaque" world order, MI6's lack of transparency is actually promoted as its greatest asset. M's address is completed with a reading from a poem, the ending of "Ulysses" by

Tennyson, with the poem's discourse of weary "heroic hearts" unyielding due to the strength of "will" mapping onto a long-running vein of British national mythology, with similar discourse featuring, for example, in Churchill's famous wartime speeches.

In this context, delivered by an embattled M to the politicians who seek to curtail her service, this staunch rebuff ties into a clear narrative. Britain is under constant (even if unidentifiable) attack and suffering from declining strength, sold out by politicians who do not understand the threats that now pervade everyday life, and it is only through the unyielding and unrewarded work of those privy to the true dangers of the world that it survives. This is emphasized as Silva erupts into the room. The politicians are reduced to cowering figures on the floor during the gun battle, and it is Bond and Moneypenny who step up to take action and rescue them. And it is through showing his military credentials that Mallory gains the legitimacy needed to lead the service (Wight 2014): taking a bullet for M and shooting one of Silva's henchmen, Mallory proves he has not forgotten his prior life, which is revealed to have been serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the "Hereford Regiment" (probably an allusion to the Special Air Service, the British special forces regiment based at Hereford).

Skyfall's discourse here taps a distinct conservative nerve—one could point to countless newspaper columns warning of the West's under-resourcing of its military and intelligence services, particularly in the wake of the recent history of interventions and turmoil in the Middle East. Indeed, *Skyfall* joins a long lineage of popular fictional works seeking to warn the sleeping public about covert threats. An array of Edwardian spy fictions from sensational authors such as William Le Queux, for example, shrilly warned the British public and politicians about the legions of German spies at work in Britain, using similar language in order to conjure a massive and unknown danger, the ensuing spy mania actually seminal to the founding of MI5 and MI6 (see Andrew 1986, 67–137). But just as these Edwardian novels warned of a spy peril that did not in fact exist, here too it is important to understand what *Skyfall*'s mythologizing obscures. Whatever the lament about vulnerability and decline, Britain still spends the world's fifth-largest military budget, estimated to have been US$61.8 billion in 2014, and is still the "special partner" of the vast military apparatus of the United States, which dwarfs any other in the world at the cost of US$581 billion a year (IISS 2015). Equally, while *Skyfall* might show M and her service as being under attack from the political establishment and external foes, the reality is that since 2001 the budget, personnel, and influence of Britain's intelligence community has rapidly expanded (see

Andrew 2009, 813–29). And while M speaks of unknown enemies, and of working in darkness and shadows, this obscures just how panoptic the vision of the contemporary Western secret state really is. As one of the Five Eyes intelligence powers, the UK is a partner in the most extensive and sophisticated intelligence operations that the world has ever seen, providing unprecedented surveillance coverage, whether from monitoring digital communications, satellite imagery, or human intelligence.

In other words, far from being besieged in the dark, M's position, in reality, has never been stronger—and as Snowden has shown, it is actually state powers that are more likely to be launching cyberattacks than the shadowy lone wolves that *Skyfall* depicts. Of course, despite this, the world's societies continue to be vulnerable to terrorist attack. At one point during the writing of this essay, I had a newsfeed open on my computer as the January 2015 Paris attacks unfolded, in the wake of which the current head of MI5 Andrew Parker warned that he could not guarantee that similar plots could be prevented, but nonetheless suggested it might be necessary to grant MI5 further powers (Parker 2015). But this logic in itself is indicative of the fact that the secret agent and intelligence apparatus cannot be the only or final actors in this struggle, and that the battle in the shadows that *Skyfall* advocates is a symptom of, not a cure for, these conflicts.

"BUT THEY MADE ME SUFFER. AND SUFFER. AND SUFFER": TORTURE AND COMPLICITY

If *Skyfall* therefore participates in a new, conservative mythologizing of the contemporary secret state, it also defends the intelligence sphere against other issues that have recently threatened its legitimacy. Given *Skyfall*'s attacks on notions of transparency and civilian oversight, the film is forced to tiptoe around the issue that, more than any other, has led to demands that the burgeoning post–9/11 Western security apparatus be subjected to greater accountability and political control. This is the acknowledged fact that Western intelligence services were complicit in extensive programs of rendition and torture. As has now been clearly laid out with the official 2014 release of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's "Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program," from 2001 until 2006 branches of the CIA ran a network of secret prisons around the world, where abducted terrorist suspects were transferred in a process known as extraordinary rendition. Here they were subjected to "enhanced" interrogations, including physical assaults, humiliation, sleep deprivation, and simulated drownings (the notorious

waterboarding techniques), which led to at least one documented death of a prisoner in CIA custody.

While attracting less international attention than the CIA, there is mounting evidence (including from court cases, testimony, investigative reporting, and academic research) of the extent to which sections of the UK's intelligence community were also involved in facilitating and condoning rendition and torture during this program. It has been convincingly shown, for example, that a blind-eye was turned towards rendition flights that passed through UK airspace and stopped at UK airports or territories such as Diego Garcia.[13] Equally, there is growing evidence concerning the assistance UK agencies provided in rendition operations involving individuals such as Binyam Mohamed, despite continued denials and attempts by the British government to suppress such evidence from appearing in the US Senate reports (Norton-Taylor and Cobain 2014). Other whistleblowers have also pointed to the fact that UK intelligence agencies routinely accepted intelligence information from countries where torture was known to be used during interrogations, again suggesting that the UK was implicitly condoning such acts, against its clear obligations under international law.[14] But although an inquiry (the Gibson Inquiry) found evidence that the UK's agency were involved in renditions and mistreatment of suspects, it was scrapped before its investigations could be concluded, its findings largely overlooked and its unanswered questions still not addressed by any official body (Cobain 2015).

This issue of complicity in torture is one that *Skyfall* grapples with, albeit obliquely. While there is no mention of these contemporary rendition programs, Silva's grievance against the service is eventually revealed to be due to M's complicity in his torture some fifteen years in the past, as she allowed his detainment and torture by the Chinese. As Silva states, after he was handed over by M in 1997: "They kept me for five months in a room with no air. They tortured me. . . . They made me suffer. And suffer. And suffer"—an ordeal that led to Silva's attempted suicide and horrible disfigurement from the cyanide capsule he ingested in vain.

This is an ambiguous thread in the film, part of a pattern of activity attributable to a determined M who will stop at nothing to fulfill her brief to keep the UK safe, like her orders that almost killed Bond in the opening sequence of the film, or her decision to put him back in the field despite his failure of the rehabilitation tests. What is more, M readily justifies the actions that led to Silva's torture. He had been "a brilliant agent" in MI6's Hong Kong station who then "started operating beyond his brief" by hacking the Chinese, leading M to give him up, getting "six agents in return" as well as a peaceful handover of Hong Kong to the

Chinese during the 1997 transition. Thus the question seems to be open as to whether such activity was a necessary exchange for the greater good, the acquiescence in the likely torture of Silva understandable due to what was at stake in the geopolitical contest.

In a sense, it is significant that the prominent Bond franchise acknowledged such involvement in torture as a contentious topic of debate at all, given that actual British officials have done their best to avoid any scrutiny of these allegations. But on the other hand, it is hard to escape the feeling that, while the issue of torture is indeed incorporated here, it is done so in a way that attempts to minimize any culpability for the West—a fictional neutralizing of the issue that leaves Bond and the wider mythology of the British secret agent untainted. In a deft sidestep, the torture here is not CIA or British organized, but instead conducted entirely by the Chinese against a culpable rogue agent who had gone "beyond his brief," an option that reassuringly displaces the actual perpetration of this crime onto a safely off-screen foreign entity (and indeed, the main rival to contemporary Western military and economic power). As Dodds has argued, we are only ever presented with Silva in a way that invites us to see his injuries as "freakish" (and thus unsympathetic) in contrast to the heroic field scars suffered by Bond in the film's action (2014, 126). And equally, the very fact that M offers a seemingly plausible justification (which goes unchallenged by Bond and Tanner) represents a troubling development in the cultural discourse on torture. No longer an act beyond all moral consideration, here it becomes one of the pragmatic, tough, but legitimate choices a leader might debate—the sort of banalizing discourse that Žižek suggests is some of the most insidious and dangerous of our time:

> At this moment at least, explicitly endorsing it would be rejected as too shocking, but the mere introduction of torture as a legitimate topic allows us to court the idea while retaining a clear conscience. ("Of course I am against torture, but who is hurt if we just discuss it?") Admitting torture as a topic of debate changes the entire field, while outright advocacy remains merely idiosyncratic. The idea that, once we let the genie out of the bottle, torture can be kept within "reasonable" bounds, is the worst liberal illusion . . . (Žižek 2002)

Therefore, while not going as far as television series such as *24* in its justification of brutal acts in the name of keeping democracy safe, *Skyfall* shows torture as an act that rational people such as M can justify, implying that it might be "reasonable" and pragmatic to hand someone over to be tortured in certain utilitarian circumstances. At the end of the film, M is fatally wounded by Silva's attack during his quest for revenge, which might be judged to be partial penance for her sin—but equally, her death means

that there is no official acknowledgment, instead simply clearing the decks for a new M to take over and leaving Bond "ready to get back to work" (as the final exchange of the film states). This might be a view that successive British governments have also preferred to adopt, as they refuse to hold any fully independent investigations into the allegations despite the mounting evidence and calls from respected human rights organizations. But it is ultimately one that evades any deeper confrontation of the West's involvement in these matters, leaving state-sponsored crimes unanswered, and culpable politicians and officials free to continue their careers behind the classified screen of national security.

"BACK IN TIME. SOMEWHERE WE'LL HAVE THE ADVANTAGE": NOSTALGIA, IRONY, PASTICHE

This essay has so far charted *Skyfall*'s intervention into contemporary debates concerning the secret state, and characterized it as a conservative attempt to recuperate the loyal spy hero in the face of ongoing political controversies and changing conflicts. It is important to note, though, that the strident politics of *Skyfall* seem to be the result of a series of profound doubts, all revolving around the continuing relevance of Bond as a hero, in an age when the human agent is no longer the primary source of intelligence, when asymmetrical forms of warfare have removed the previously delicately balanced spy-versus-spy battles of the Cold War, and when the saturated cultural landscape means that Bond must compete against an ever-increasing range of heroes and espionage narratives vying for relevance and attention.[15]

The tension of this situation is perhaps most evident in the way that the film attempts to integrate the specialist language and techniques of cyber warfare into its plot. Through the film there are various examples of technical discourse voiced, including attempts at "tracing the encryption signal," commands to "strip the headers" and "trace the source" of electronic communication, and descriptions of messages being sent through an "asymmetrical security algorithm." The pinnacle of this occurs when Q analyzes Silva's captured computer, helped by a striking graphical interface in the center of MI6's headquarters. Silva, Q informs Bond, has deployed "failsafe protocols to wipe the memory," with his hard drive featuring an encrypted "Omega site," which uses "obfuscated code to conceal its true purpose." Despite the advanced cryptography of the "polymorphic" engine, Bond luckily spots a possible encryption key—the tube station "Granborough"—that flashes on the screen, which when entered unlocks Silva's system. But the tables are turned when Silva's trap is sprung and his computer penetrates MI6's network to open all the security doors—"He hacked us," Q admits.

While offering a superficially plausible array of technical terms and details, on closer examination what becomes most notable is the awkwardness of *Skyfall*'s attempts to render a Bond narrative out of this material, and this suggests an important change from the depiction of the casual "technological mastery" of Bond in the Brosnan films (Willis 2009, 169). For example, most of us are now required to use stronger passwords than "Granborough" on our standard personal email accounts, let alone to encrypt an "Omega site" of sensitive material. The guessing of the significance of a name has more in common with Edwardian spy stories such as Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, first published in 1915—where Hannay, too, must use a location as a key to crack a plot—than it does with cracking strong encryption. Q's use of a branded laptop for real-time decryption is a neat piece of product placement, but ignores the fact that most codebreaking would use specialized supercomputers and be conducted, monotonously, over a period of weeks (if indeed it is vulnerable to decryption at all). Even more noticeable is that, by the time Q sets a trail for Silva to follow, the film appears to have entirely given up any attempt to explain this on a technical level, the audience told digital "breadcrumbs" are being left without any further effort at a plausible description.

To be very clear, this is not to dismiss *Skyfall* because of this element: to look for gritty realism or technical accuracy in a Bond film is perhaps to somewhat misunderstand the nature of the franchise. What is significant, however, is the way that this awkward portrayal of computer hacking and cryptology links to a broader challenge in cultural depictions of the current NSA dominated era of intelligence. Human intelligence, as the longevity of the spy novel and thriller genre would attest, readily lends itself to fictionalized narratives, with undercover operatives, betrayals, defectors, and spy tradecraft all elements that can be centered around individual characters and common plot devices. Accurate depiction of contemporary communications or signals intelligence, on the other hand, requires a far different narrative form. As Mark Phythian has suggested, "The complete picture [of modern intelligence gathering] would be . . . complex and multi-dimensional, featuring a wide range of actors engaging in a global electronic 'great game'—competing to collect information to the extent that their self-definitions of national security, alliance commitments, and technological capabilities make necessary or feasible" (2014, 807). This is a span that the Bond franchise, so dependent on the single, iconic figure of the human spy, is structurally unable to encompass, and instead it continues to offer what has been termed the "reassuring fantasy of 'single agency'" and its relevance for contemporary conflict (Leach 2014, 49).

Bond's desire to go "back in time" where he will "have the advantage," therefore, is one of the main ways the narrative tries to escape from this problem and maintain this fantasy, and explains the deep nostalgia at work in the film that many critics have commented upon, a nostalgia for this "golden age of espionage" that now threatens to vanish. Indeed, *Skyfall* is a film structured around nostalgia on the most literal level, if nostalgia is defined as a "longing for home": the title of the film is taken from the Bond family's ancestral country estate of Skyfall in Scotland, a site of unresolved childhood trauma for Bond, and a place where he must fulfill a pseudo-Oedipal quest, with the reborn Bond returning to his home in order to protect the matriarchal M from pursuing assassins, resulting in "the central, male character overcome[ing] his past and thereby becom[ing] an adult man" (Alpert 2013, 2). There are also various ironic nods to nostalgic moments from the history of the Bond franchise. Some of the more obvious include that Moneypenny is reintroduced, Bond's favorite Walther PPK pistol is reissued to him (albeit now with a "micro-dermal sensor in the grip"), and he removes his vintage Aston Martin DB5 from storage—the same that Bond drove in *Goldfinger* (1964). The geography of the film displays a similar yearning for locations from a prior time: MI6 abandons its "vulnerable" modern glass headquarters for the subterranean realm of Churchill's World War II bunker, and Mallory's office at the end of the film conjures memories of the "clubbable" world of an earlier era (as I will come back to). This is not without irony. When Bond comments that a gun and a radio aren't "exactly Christmas," Q counters with "Were you expecting an exploding pen? We don't really go in for that anymore." Similarly, M remarks that the immaculate Aston Martin is "not very comfortable," a nod towards the fact that the reality of Cold War spying perhaps does not live up to the fantasy. But, overall, this looking back to the history of the franchise creates a sense of an escape, to a time before technology and signals intelligence complicated the human spying game—in other words, to a time when spy warfare was not banal, but the terrain of an initiated elite, supposedly decided by martial prowess and skills in tradecraft rather than the click of a button.

Skyfall's nostalgia and irony, however, are also evident in its far broader engagement with moments from literary and film history, as the film builds many of its elements from a knowing pastiche of sources.[16] Hochscherf has argued that such intertextuality plays a crucial role in the first two films of the rebooted Bond, helping to "reconnect the Bond series with recent developments in audiovisual popular culture" and breaking it out of a "self-referential cage" (2013, 304). In *Skyfall* this plays an even more noticeable and sophisticated role, as it moves across periods and genres and

challenges the audience to decode the references. In escaping from London to the Scottish Highlands, Bond is following the spy-thriller trail blazed by Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, in which Richard Hannay, almost one hundred years earlier, also decided that the wilds of Scotland offered more scope to evade covert pursuers. When Bond follows the assassin Patrice in Shanghai, he does so across a nighttime skyline dominated by neon lights and vast advertisements. This is a cityscape reminiscent of the 2019 Los Angeles of the science fiction neo-noir *Blade Runner* (1982), a reference reinforced by the fact that, after their struggle, Bond dangles Patrice by his arm over the sheer drop on the side of the building—just as Deckard hangs during his struggle with the cyborg Roy Batty. In the Macau casino, Bond falls into a pit filled with komodo dragons while fighting with a group of would-be killers—the gladiatorial struggle with an exotic animal the staple of many action films, perhaps most memorably evoked in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983), when Luke Skywalker is dropped into the rancor pit at Jabba's palace. On the island lair where Silva resides, Bond's duel involves attempting to shoot a glass from the head of the unfortunate Severine—an ironic latter-day version of the "apple shot" motif, most famous in the legends of William Tell, but also used in Westerns such as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), when Tuco is freed by Blondie who shoots through the rope over his head. When captured and brought back to MI6's headquarters, Silva is held in a barren plexiglass enclosure where he calmly waits while addressing his captors—the containment system of choice for arch-villians ever since Hannibal Lecter's cell in the seminal psychological horror film *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991).[17] Tracking shots of the Aston Martin as it winds through the empty wilderness to Skyfall are reminiscent of the ominous opening sequence to *The Shining* (1980), and when Silva arrives with music blasting from his military helicopter, it seems a direct invocation of Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore in the Vietnam war film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), who also flew into battle with a musical accompaniment (in Kilgore's case, Wagner's "The Ride of the Valkyries" rather than "Boom Boom" by The Animals).

Moreover, the sources for *Skyfall*'s pastiche move beyond the fictional realm. As discussed earlier, *Skyfall* presents a vision of a conflict where everyday infrastructure is the terrain and weapon of the fight, but what is also notable is that the iconography used to display this strongly draws from historical terrorist attacks and actual security incidents, eschewing the fantastical space battles and shark tanks of prior Bond films for plausible (if somewhat embellished) source material, all contributing to the film's attempts to anchor the plot with contemporary and realistic resonances. The crisis over the publication of the names of MI6's agents on the Internet,

for example, mirrors an incident in 1999 when open-information websites posted a list claiming to reveal the names of hundreds of SIS officers worldwide—a move that attracted similar media attention, condemnation, and (unsuccessful) attempts at suppression, although the consequences of the 1999 list appear to have been negligible compared to those suggested in *Skyfall*.[18] The explosion in M's office in the highly visible MI6 headquarters (the film uses images of SIS's actual headquarters found at Vauxhall Cross in London) has echoes of the Real IRA attack in 2000, when a rocket was fired from a public park into MI6's building, hitting the eighth floor but causing only minor damage. When Silva escapes from MI6 custody and dons a police uniform to carry out his attack, he seems to follow the example of Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right terrorist who in 2011 also used the open camouflage of a police uniform during his massacres in Oslo and on the island of Utøya.[19] Silva's choice to bomb the Tube cannot help but echo the July 2005 bombings that occurred on Tubes and buses in London (Dodds 2014, 118)—although as Korte notes, in *Skyfall* the train is derailed by an explosion rather than specifically destroyed, the lack of visible casualties perhaps a deliberate choice given the potential sensitivity of exploiting these still recent London attacks for a British film (2014, 76n24).

There are no doubt many other incidents of both fictional and historical appropriation that might be suggested. But for the purpose of this essay, we begin to perceive a process that is more than mere nods to historical reference points or a blankly ironic pastiche. Rather, this would seem to be a confident and firm assertion of the continued relevance of Bond, a figure who in his reboot can commandeer and synthesize competing examples of screen heroism, whether from the spy, horror, science fiction, war, or Western genres. Even when unable directly to match the feats of his precursors (he is unable to save Patrice and Severine, for example), part of Bond's strength is shown to be the fact that he nonetheless finds a way to ensure that the mission still proceeds, proving he is capable of adapting to and overcoming whatever threats, past or present, fictional or factual, the world may present.

However, as much as this intertextuality may attempt to construct an ultimate Bond, the weight of the franchise's history still seems too much to resist, and many of the character traits soon break through again. As noted, at the outset *Skyfall* seems to present a more progressive and modern Bond: overseen by a formidable female M, and with Moneypenny an equal in the field, Bond is not fazed by the homosexual advances made by Silva. This superficially suggests a revised politics at work, but as the action of the film progresses the franchise soon reverts to type, fully restoring what has been termed "the masculine heritage of the Bond series" and "MI6 . . . as a male-dominated space" (Wight 2014). Moneypenny is not cut out for

field work and retreats to her desk at the end of the film (thus reassuming Moneypenny's traditional location), Dench's M is killed off and replaced with the patrician Mallory, and Bond still maintains his predilection for predatory sexual acts with the "Bond girls," nowhere more evident than in his sexual liaison with Severine, a victim of sex trafficking. And the final scenes of the film seem to seal this reversion. Ralph Fiennes's three-piece suited Mallory, as several critics have suggested (for example, Dodds 2014, 129), is strongly reminiscent of the Ms from earlier in the franchise, but I would take this significance further. Mallory's office is clearly modeled on that of M in the first Bond film, *Dr. No* (Wight 2014), and in the movements, shots and editing, *Skyfall* seems to deliberately follow the sequence of when Bond encounters M for the first time on screen. Both *Dr. No* and *Skyfall* show Bond flirting with Moneypenny before entering M's office through the same distinctive leather-padded door, revealing a nearly identical dark office space of leather upholstery, wooden paneling, naval oil paintings, softly lit lampshades, and elegant books and ornaments—a setting that could just as easily be in a Pall Mall club, an Oxbridge college, or the private office of a government minister, suggesting Bond has returned back to his home at the heart of the British Establishment.[20]

The significance of this is to, in effect, complete the circle for the franchise. The rebooted Bond has arrived back at the starting point, the transparent MI6 offices of Dench's M abandoned, Bond and M returning to this discreet gentlemanly realm with Moneypenny minding the phones outside, the modern computer hackers and interfering bureaucracy safely defeated, and Bond now free to "get back to work." This, finally, illuminates the tension at the heart of *Skyfall*, and indeed the continuing franchise, as it grapples with the presence of the intelligence apparatus in the contemporary world. On the one hand, as this article has traced, *Skyfall* strives to maneuver the Bond franchise into contemporary political engagement, showing a society where digital threats are routine and thus supposedly where an unfettered secret state presents the only protection for democracy. But on the other hand, *Skyfall* needs to preserve the secret agent from exactly the encroaching banality that this online revolution bodes, maintaining the fantasy of the spy as an elite gentleman-warrior rather than a data analyst working from a desk. *Skyfall* resolves this tension only through a retreat "back in time" into the iconography of a prior era of spying and Bond films, and through attacks on those who question the credibility of the secret agent in the present day. Of course, whatever the tensions, the Bond juggernaut is far from spent: indeed, the next Bond film, *Spectre*, promises to continue with this nostalgic formula by reintroducing the SPECTRE organization and the arch-villain Blofeld,

who was central to many of the earlier novels and films. But it does suggest a retreat into the Bond mythos rather than further attempts to refashion the Bond franchise in light of contemporary debates. Ironically, then, it seems that it is very ubiquity of the present-day secret state that provides Bond with the one challenge on screen that he is unable to overcome.

NOTES

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[1] *Skyfall* was the highest-grossing film at the UK box office in 2012 and became the highest grossing of the Bond films in the USA, with a worldwide gross of US$1108 million (BFI 2014, 73). The critical success of *Skyfall* is indicated by the fact that the review aggregating website Rotten Tomatoes lists 296 reviews of *Skyfall* by film critics, 272 of them positive. This is still dwarfed by the vast discourse on the film published by fans and enthusiasts on blogs, websites and forums. Equally, there is a rapidly growing body of academic criticism, much of which is cited throughout this essay. This essay went to press prior to the release of Sam Mendes's *Spectre* in October 2015.

[2] For analysis of the Bourne franchise, see for example Dodds (2010). For a more detailed survey of other recent conspiratorial British television depictions of the secret state, see Oldham (2014).

[3] Alpert (2013) gives extensive detail about how the themes of *Skyfall* map onto the revelations of Snowden, but does not dedicate attention to the apparent link with Assange and WikiLeaks.

[4] For example, the former head of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), Colin McColl, is said to have described Bond as "the best recruiting sergeant the service ever had" (quoted in West 2004, 279). The fact that Bond has provided the language through which many intelligence matters are reported in the media was nowhere more evident than in 2006, when Russia claimed British intelligence had been using a secret transmitter hidden in a rock in Moscow. The world media reported it as if it was something devised by Q: the *Mirror*, for example, returned to the story in 2012 with the headline: "Britain behind James Bond-style 'fake rock' Russian spy plot." Former MI5 head Stella Rimington complained that, as the first publicly acknowledged head of a British intelligence service, one of the main ways the media attempted to understand her was as a female Bond, even receiving invitations to appear alongside Dench in speaking engagements (2002, 244).

[5] For an analysis of the gender politics of the rebooted Bond, see Funnell (2011).

[6] As Dodds notes, the themes of resilience and survival are central to the film, with *Skyfall* showing a unique focus on London itself and its vulnerability to attack, with the United States "nowhere to be seen" (2014, 129).

[7] For more detailed analysis of the post-Cold War transitions of the Bond film franchise, see Black (2005), Chapman (2007), and Leach (2009).

[8] While Silva's boasts here are overblown, events after *Skyfall*'s release proved they were not totally implausible, with the November 2014 hack of Sony Pictures and release of a huge trove of confidential documents (included material concerning the Bond films) showing the sabotage potential of such attacks.

[9] Outside of the Bond franchise, the antagonism between secret agents and politicians is a long-running theme of the genre. For discussion of this see, for example, Taylor (2008).

[10] Bennett and Woollacott provide further analysis of the significance of Bond's place in what they term "the chain of interpellations" of the British state hierarchy (1987, 106).

[11] Tony Blair's preface to the notorious 2002 dossier "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government," for example, openly stated that "The document . . . is based, in large part, on the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)," boasting that "It is unprecedented for the Government to publish this kind of document" but now done to prove that Iraq's WMDs were "a current and serious threat" (3). Of course, these WMDs were not found after the invasion.

[12] Several other critics have also focused on this speech as a central moment in the film: see, for example, Korte (2014, 72–3), Hasian (2014, 583), and Alpert (2013, 3).

[13] This has been the subject of various media and NGO reports, and has been documented in detail by researchers working on the Rendition Project. See www.therenditionproject.org.uk/.

[14] This was the allegation made by the British diplomat and ambassador Craig Murray. He published an account of this as *Murder in Samarkand* (2006).

[15] Several other critics have noted the importance of this sense of vulnerability in *Skyfall*, but have analyzed it in interestingly different ways. Dodds argues that the figure of the alcoholic, wounded, and aging Bond, as well as the near-retirement aged M who appears to have lost her operational edge and moral authority, are key to the themes of resilience that the film dwells upon (2014, 118). Equally, Hasian has analyzed how this film displays "new nostalgic senses of imperial identity" and a yearning for "imperial control and (post)colonial desires in a chaotic world" of cyberterrorism (2014, 570, 575). Alpert suggests that "*Skyfall*, a movie supposedly about MI6 British agents, is more about 'family' and the betrayal of one's family members than about 'god and country'" (2013, 2), and McMillan (2015) finds in the film contemporary tensions and debates over the question of British and Scottish national identity. Finally, Korte reads *Skyfall* as a film showing the rebirth of Bond and a celebration of the "traditional, individual heroism" he embodies (2014, 74).

[16] Such possible sources and allusions have attracted a vast amount of online discussion and debate. Here I offer only what seem to me to be the more obvious and pertinent comparisons, and make no claim to be the first to notice many of these.

[17] Alpert reads this parallel with Lecter as establishing Silva as a monstrous "parodic hero" who is "more sympathetic and central to the movie" than the supposed protagonist (2013, 2).

[18] For initial media reporting on this list, see Norton-Taylor and Pallister (1999). While media outlets in Britain were forbidden from republishing the list or mentioning specific names, it remained (and remains) easily accessible on the Internet.

[19] As the main script for *Skyfall* was written before the July 2011 massacre, it is unlikely that this resonance was deliberate, but it nonetheless became a crucial part of the context in which *Skyfall* was filmed, edited, and released.

[20] For detailed analysis of the significance of locations such as M's office, see Stock (2009).

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