

Good evening, Mr. Bond

The 007 role-playing system reviewed

For some jobs, there is only one man. If the fate of the world is in question; if the circumstances require fast thinking and incredible performance against impossible odds; if the man must shoot to kill one moment and womanize in the next — then there is only one man.

Good evening, Mr. Bond.

And good evening to the JAMES BOND 007 role-playing system presented by Victory Games. It was certainly a good evening for me. I enjoyed this game and was thrilled with it — not because it was a careful simulation of real life (it isn't and doesn't pretend to be), but because it captured, for me, the essence of James Bond.

The world of James Bond is, as the Basic Game book explains, "certainly close to our own, but a bit more fantastical. The men are always handsome, the women always beautiful, and the villains always evil." Exotic cities in faraway countries are always full of danger and clues. Around every corner waits a car full of assassins or a beautiful spy. The action is fast and the stakes are high. These elements are all part of the flavor of Bond's world. Without them, Bond would be just another government agent.

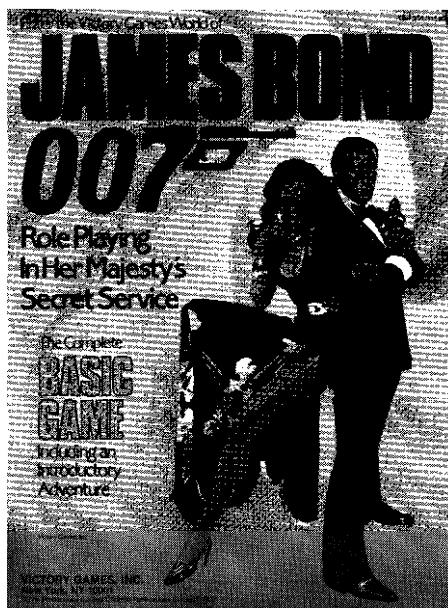
While trying to recreate James Bond's world, Victory Games had a lot to overcome. The flavor of 007 has become a familiar taste to most of us. We expect and demand the same flavor in anything connected to Bond; anything less won't do.

Also to be tackled was the problem of different Bonds — not the different film actors who have portrayed 007, but the different treatment of the Bond character in different media. The James Bond of Ian Fleming's novels is certainly different from the Bond character in the movie "Moonraker," for instance. The novels portray a great, if sometimes flawed, agent while the movies have in more recent years given us something of an adventuring superhero, presented in something close to comic-book fashion.

Can a role-playing game on James Bond meet and overcome the obvious obstacles? Well . . .

Basic Bond

. . . Gerry Klug's design seems to have risen to the task. When I examine the manuals and play the game, I get the *feeling* of James Bond. It's the feeling I was looking for and expecting, and I wasn't disappointed. The size of the soft-cover, perfect-bound (no staples) books may seem intimidating when you look at them on the shelf. The Basic Game book is 160 pages (and the Q Manual isn't far behind at 138). Between the covers of the Basic Game book,



however, you will find a very readable text in an innovative layout which puts player information and gamesmaster rules clarifications side by side. The art of role-playing is presented and explained up front (for those new to such games), as is the explanation of the game's central system. Nearly every concept and mechanic you need to know to play the game is in the first 17 pages of the rule book. The rest of the book presents applications of the system.

None of that is to say that the presentation is perfect. I noticed some editorial errors in the text, perhaps caused by the rush in which the game was brought onto the market. Considering the total-package, however, such errors were easy to forgive, and I'm sure they will be cleared up in future editions.

The game system is at once simple and diverse. All actions that James Bond characters would like to perform, from brawling to boating, shooting to seduction, are resolved through the same two tables. Players describe their actions to the gamesmaster, who then assigns an Ease Factor to the action and decides which skill would apply. An action with an Ease Factor of 10 wouldn't put a crease in Bond's brow; but doing something with an Ease Factor of ½ would make him sweat bullets. The first chart consulted is really just an aid; it multiplies the Ease Factor the gamesmaster has assigned by the Primary Chance the character has of performing the act. The resulting number is the Success Chance. Then the player uses the second table, called the Quality Results Table. The proper Success Chance is found among one of the number ranges listed in the left-hand column. The player rolls percentile dice and checks across

the proper row to find out which of five possible results occur: "Excellent," "Very Good," "Good," "Acceptable," or failure, which means that whatever you tried simply didn't work. If the result is one of the first four, the rules give a reference directing the gamesmaster to one of a large number of charts and tables to determine just what the difference is between, say, an "Excellent" shot at Oddjob and one that was merely "Acceptable."

This system impressed me greatly for how quickly it can be learned, and for how much ground it seems to cover. In the Goldfinger module, a golf game is simulated using the same central game charts, with as much ease as combat and with very few additional rules. I have yet to find any situation that the basic system could not handle cleanly and quickly.

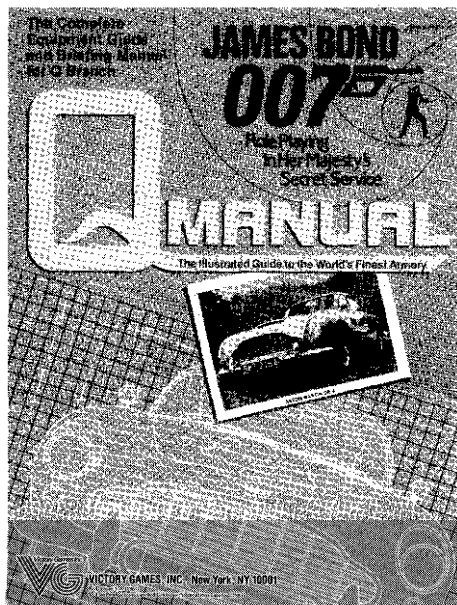
While the system is good, do not expect great accuracy of simulation out of it. To a very great extent, the fantasy world of James Bond has the sizzle of reality without its meat. The game system is the same way. If you are looking for a role-playing game that has the accuracy and feel of the "real world" of espionage, I wouldn't suggest this one. It is a credit to the game that it does not pretend to be a simulation of anything more than James Bond fantasy.

One inherent drawback of the system is its lack of definition in results — but this quality is admittedly a two-edged sword. One might argue that leaving the exact results of an action open to gamesmaster and player interpretation lets the participants take a more active and imaginative role in the game. On the other hand, I often found myself working pretty hard "filling in the holes." In a car chase, the Aston Martin tried to "Force" my Lotus. The Aston Martin succeeded with a Quality Rating of 2, and I botched the Safety roll for the Lotus with a Quality Rating of 3. That meant my Lotus had a "Mishap" and suffered "Incapacitating Damage." It was up to me to translate this as, "You swerve your Aston against the side of my Lotus. You see the face of the driver just as the Lotus careens over a low wall and blows its engine." Getting the details out of the results can require work and imagination.

But. . . I have to admit that this lack of definition actually helped in some ways. Such rather touchy subjects as seduction, interrogation, and torture were handled with tact and taste. Just what a Quality Result of 1 really means on the last stage of the seduction sequence (listed as "When and Where" with an Ease Factor of 4) is left up to the player's own imagination. I get the feeling that I am watching James kiss a gorgeous starlet — followed by a quick

dissolve to the next scene, in which Bond has the information he wanted. This puts the moral control of the game in my hands. I like that.

James Bond always worked alone or with only a few helping hands to get him through the task. The game actually works well as a one-on-one game, and can function with up to four characters at one time. This is a smaller limit than most role-playing games suggest; I haven't tried the game with more than three players, but I suspect the system could handle it well.



The Q Manual

What 007 lacked in luck, he could make up for with gadgets. These were always invented by the mysterious Q Section. I loved the widgets and doodads that James Bond always had on hand at just the right moment. Victory Games published the Q Manual as a supplement to the James Bond 007 role playing game — but even without the game, the Q Manual is a treat.

In truth, the same information given in the manual offers little insight into the equipment itself. The 007 role playing system was not designed, as far as I can tell, to be highly accurate in its simulation of the real world. The game statistics are useful for general comparisons, but do not give any detailed insights. However, this game information generally only represents about a third of each of the entries.

The attraction of this book, other than as a game aid, is the almost conversational way that each piece of equipment is discussed. Each entry starts with a few well-phrased paragraphs generally describing the object and its capabilities. This text is followed by a "Q Evaluation," wherein one of the fictional staff members of the Q branch offers a commentary on the merits or faults of each piece to the espionage community. These commentaries are charming and seem to reflect individual personalities of the Q branch staff.

If you play any type of espionage role-playing game, the equipment descriptions

in this book will be a valuable resource. And with headings for weapons, vehicles, security devices, and exotic devices, this is a great daydreaming book for any Bond fan. It may not be the most detailed game aid ever, but I found it one of the most interesting to read.

The Gamesmaster Pack

Bond is very visual, so it is not surprising that Victory Games addressed this ingredient of the "Bond flavor" right away. The Gamesmaster Pack for the James Bond system fills the bill neatly.

This product, unlike a rule set or a module that's "only" a book, has some loose components — and that leads to one problem, not with the product but with its presentation. The Gamesmaster Pack comes in the same open-topped, 1/2-inch-deep box used as packaging for the other Bond supplements. (The "top" of the box is formed by the plastic wrapping around the product.) The packaging is slick and classy, and as a consumer I like the feeling of extra value I get when I purchase a supplement in a box. However, anyone who likes this game is going to quickly find himself with lots of game components and nowhere to store them. I don't have the boxed version



of the Basic Game, but I hope it has room for modules and accessories. Perhaps Victory Games went a little too far in trying to make every penny count.

I only say "perhaps," because the Gamesmaster Pack is certainly a valuable tool. Inside the cover is a heavy, full-color Gamesmaster Screen holding 8 pages (four pages on a side) of all the charts either player or referee will need during play. A pad of character record sheets is a nice inclusion, although I would have liked some of them preprinted to use for my favorite Bond characters.

The high point of the package for me was the heavy cardboard characters. These are mounted on plastic stands (included) so that

they stand upright. And, the cover sheet of the supplement folds out to become a blue display field with a white grid on which the cardboard characters may be placed.

At first look, I really didn't think the cardboard characters would be much help. Yet in the playing of the game, these counters were so easy to use and added such a great visual element to the game that their value could not be questioned.

Farewell, Mr. Bond

As a game designer, the James Bond game made me sit up. I guess I'll have to work a little harder. As a game player, I decided this game fills the bill. With a rule book that is easy to digest and use, the game system conveys all the sizzle of 007's world. Don't expect this game to be anything more than James Bond fantasy — but be assured that you're getting nothing less.

— Reviewed by Tracy Raye Hickman

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Curtain call

In a press release received by DRAGON® Magazine on Feb. 1, Victory Games announced the imminent release of two additions to the James Bond 007 line: *Dr. No*, an adventure module, and a gamesmaster supplement entitled *For Your Information*. (Two other modules, *Goldfinger* and *Octopussy*, were already on the market.) The company said that other products in the line would be released in 1984. ✕

