

#007

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(And Then A Few More Bonds After That)

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**RANKING ROGERS:**

*How The Roger Moore Films Stack Up*

● by OWEN WILLIAMS

Roger Moore was James Bond for most of the '70s and half the '80s. Was he Ian Fleming's creation? Not really. But Moore's smooth 007 was no saint either. From best to worst, here's how his seven films stack up:

### THE SPY WHO LOVED ME (1977)

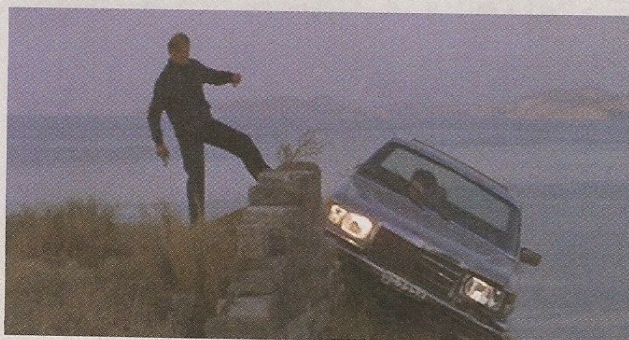
Like *GOLDFINGER* for Connery, *THE SPY WHO LOVED ME* is the film that defines an entire Bond era: one of the entries you'd show a newcomer to explain exactly what a Bond film is. We have globe-trotting through Egypt, Sardinia, Malta, Switzerland. There's satisfying action, humor, and glamour; a hit theme (by Carly Simon).

Stromberg (Curd Jürgens) is a megalomaniacal villain with a weird deformity (it's easy to miss, but his fingers are webbed). He has a ridiculous plan to nuke the world and start a master race under the sea and a crazy henchman in Richard Kiel's iconic, steel-toothed Jaws. The Lotus Esprit that turns into a submarine is arguably Q Branch's finest hour. And the film has nothing to do with the Fleming novel that shares its title. If it's formulaic, it nails that formula, and hammers a pristine template in the process. We even get a rare depiction of Bond in uniform as a Royal Navy Commander. Moore never did it better.



### FOR YOUR EYES ONLY (1981)

Slipping into a new decade, Moore's fifth Bond is his most overlooked and underrated—although admittedly, *FOR YOUR EYES ONLY* is a film that often can't seem to get out of its own way. Blofeld dumped down a chimney in the pre-credits sequence, the closing gag with Margaret Thatcher impersonator Faith Brown, and the queasily barely-legal Bibi Dahl are all elements the film could profitably have lost. But look past all that and you'll find an actual spy thriller. This was the first Bond since the early '70s to pay more than lip service to its source text, and the first since *ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE* to be a genuine Fleming adaptation; cleverly amalgamating two short stories: *FYEO* itself, plus *RISICO*. The early-ish destruction of *THE SPY WHO LOVED ME*'s underwater Lotus is a not too subtle indicator that this film is intended to be taken more seriously than the fanciful flights of *MOONRAKER*; Moore's protracted, vertiginous ascent to a mountaintop monastery base is surprisingly white-knuckle; and the death of Emile Locque—kicked off a cliff when Bond could have saved him—is one of the most cold-blooded moments in Moore's whole tenure.



### LIVE AND LET DIE (1973)

Bond Begins... again. And after six years playing *THE SAINT*, the surprise here is that Moore's Bond isn't simply Simon Templar by another name. He's harder edged, a bit drier, a bit less mischievous. There are some small-scale gadgets, but no Q this time, no John Barry, and a dramatic Paul McCartney rock theme over the skull-heavy titles. So the film both feels and sounds different compared to what came before. And in a comparatively rare example of the Bond films chasing the contemporary zeitgeist and getting somewhere (to a qualified extent), *LIVE AND LET DIE* just about swerves the infamous racism of Fleming's novel by playing the Blaxploitation card. Supporting cast like Julius Harris, Gloria Hendry, Tommy Lane, and Arnold Williams were all familiar from that world, as were the Harlem and New Orleans settings; the narcotics-focused plot; and some hilarious dialogue. Shifting tones between espionage drama, knockabout chase movie, and voodoo horror, the film feels thrown together, and some pieces don't seem to fit, but a lot of it works. And uniquely in Bond, Yaphet Kotto's henchman Baron Samedi appears to be genuinely supernatural, which is pleasingly odd.



### MOONRAKER (1979)

The inevitable end point of trying to make each film bigger than the last: Bond in space. Even decades later it still feels massive. Objectively it's not a great film—and the structure is a note-for-note *STAR WARS*-prompted remix of *THE SPY WHO LOVED ME*—but before we get to the silver suits and laser guns, there's plenty to like. Michael Lonsdale is a droll villain ("Bond, you appear with the tedious inevitability of an unloved season"). The opening one-ups *TSWLM*'s ski-cliff-parachute stunt with an astonishing skydiving sequence. We travel to spectacular destinations in Venice, Rio, Brazil, and Guatemala. And Lois Chiles holds her own among the mayhem, despite being saddled with the name "Holly Goodhead": the filthiest Bond-girl moniker since Plenty O'Toole. Even the return of Jaws manages not to grate. But franchise-wise, there was no way forward but back down to Earth.

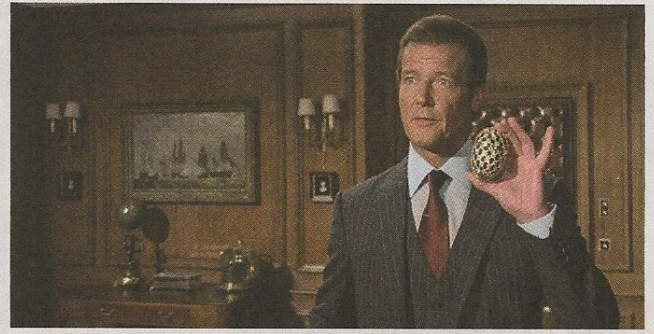


#### **A VIEW TO A KILL (1985)**

Moore's Bond swan song is almost impressive in its nastiness, and places slightly higher than you might expect, because it's interestingly weird as opposed to eye-rollingly lazy. It's got that going for it at least, even if Moore joked that by this point he was so old he couldn't stand up without a stuntman. *A VIEW TO A KILL*'s greatest asset is Christopher Walken as villain Max Zorin. These were the days when Walken was still frightening: Zorin laughing as he guns down his unarmed workforce remains a truly disturbing, haunting image. Grace Jones' May Day is fascinating too, but otherwise this is a tired Silicon Valley retread of *GOLDFINGER*. The set-pieces are weak, going through the motions, repeating previous hits, occasionally strong in concept but cheap in execution. Only May Day's parachute leap from the Eiffel Tower really sticks the landing.

#### **OCTOPUSSY (1983)**

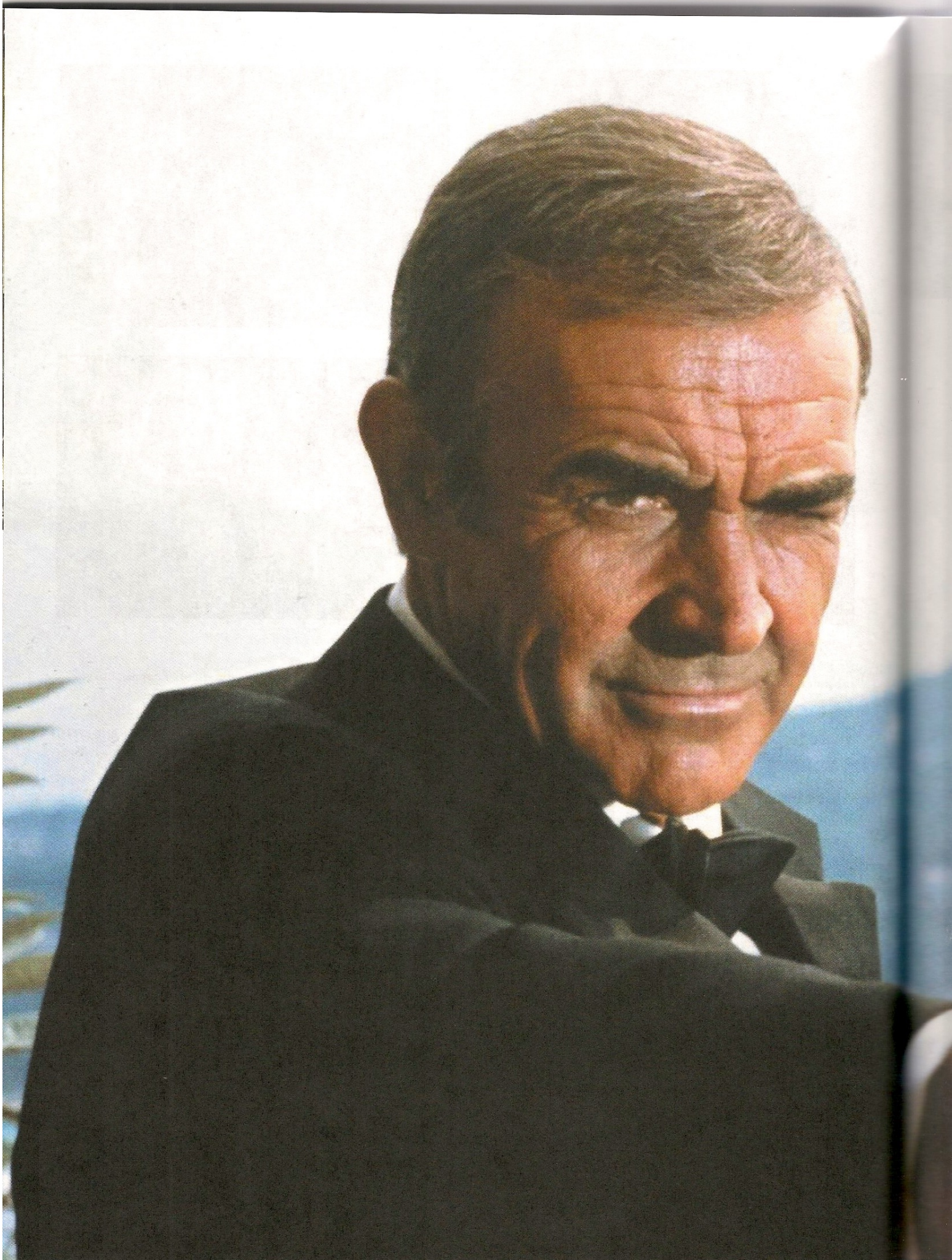
The penultimate Moore is Bond both at its coziest and its most all-over-the-place. Half the plot is standard Cold War anti-Soviet paranoia about rogue general Steven Berkoff's plans to march west. That's then mixed with interminable fussing with Fabergé eggs. Louis Jourdan is another villain and Maud Adams is a grey area (multiple bad guy-wise, this is the *BATMAN RETURNS* of Bond films, and makes as much sense). Tennis star Vijay Amritraj plays an MI6 field operative called "Vijay" who makes tennis jokes. Most of the film takes place in India. The cinematography is vibrant, but it's serving a British Empire fantasy where no cliché goes unexploited: snake charmers, rope climbers, big-game hunting, colorful beggars. It's a Best Exotic Bond where even poverty is picturesque: easygoing enough, but a bit plodding and occasionally embarrassing.



#### **THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN (1974)**

Only the second film of the new generation but it already feels by-the-numbers. Visually it manages to be flat, despite some spectacularly lavish Thai locations (although the MI6 office on the listing wreck of the RMS Queen Elizabeth is a fun set). *LIVE AND LET DIE*'s redneck Sheriff Pepper is egregiously on holiday where Bond happens to be, and Secret Agent Bond is recognized wherever he goes. Britt Ekland's Mary Goodnight is described by M as an "efficient liaison officer" but she's plainly the most inept field agent MI6 has ever employed. And Christopher Lee should have been a classic villain, but he's bizarrely unmenacing. The idea that he's Bond's evil mirror image never really amounts to anything; his car-plane and funhouse of death are silly; and the bigger-picture threat doesn't seem to fit. Why is the world's greatest hitman trying to ransom green energy technology he professes to not even understand? The best car stunt ever performed is gouged by the sound of a slide whistle. It's like a metaphor for the whole movie.

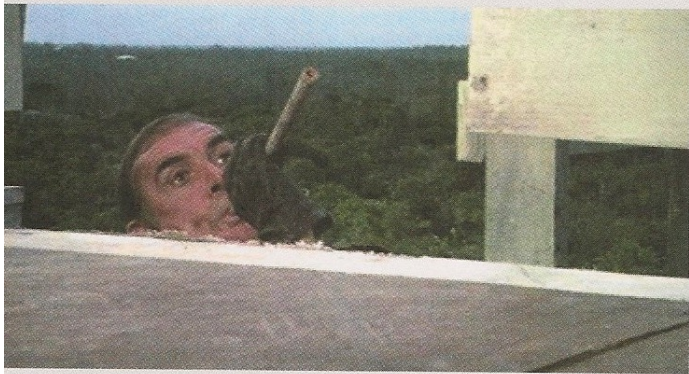




# NEVER SAY NEVER TO NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN

● by OWEN WILLIAMS





Just a year after *GOLDFINGER*, 1965's *THUNDERBALL* was even bigger: the first Bond film to expand to full Panavision widescreen and break the two-hour barrier. But while the film was huge enough to require four filming units, it did not move on once it reached the Bahamas. As if capitalizing on the cultural memory of Ursula Andress stepping from the ocean in 1962, *THUNDERBALL*, more than any other, is a Bond of beaches, blue skies, and ocean; a holiday in the sun.

The plot sees Bond—Sean Connery for the fourth time and still pure charisma—foiling a *SPECTRE* operation to extort £100 million from NATO via two stolen atomic bombs. The face of Blofeld remains hidden, so the principal antagonist is his “Number One,” Emilio Largo, who enjoys casino gambling, keeps sharks in a pool to deal with enemies and problematic employees, and seems to enjoy Bond—for a while. He has a usefully fatal femme in Fiona Volpe, and a beautiful mistress in Dominique “Domino” Derval, the sister of hapless Largo pawn François. When Domino learns her brother’s fate, she swears her own revenge. Much of the action plays out in protracted but undeniably spectacular underwater sequences.

Adjusted for inflation it remains Bond’s greatest hit in North America, but *THUNDERBALL* is also significant for its behind-the-scenes drama. It had originally been intended as the first Bond film in 1959, but when that project fell through, Fleming turned the original screenplay into his 1961 novel (making it technically the first Bond novelization). When it resurfaced as the fourth of the EON films, his screenwriting collaborator

Kevin McClory scrambled to keep credit for his early involvement.

That saga has been well documented elsewhere, but the upshot was that, for many years, McClory retained rights to Blofeld and this particular story, meaning he could technically carry on making his own Bond films as long as they were always *THUNDERBALL*. Which, in a nutshell, is how 1983’s *NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN* happened, boasting the casting coup of Connery’s return to Bond after twelve years away from the role. As Bond in the ’80s, he’s a man out of time and place, but the narrative does at least allude to that. Old Bond has been out of active service for some time and has apparently been lecturing. M (Edward Fox, not taking things too seriously) has canceled the 00 program.

The film begins, as did *THUNDERBALL*, with Bond being sent to a health clinic. While there, as before, he stumbles upon part of Largo’s scheme, but only learns of its connection to the bigger picture

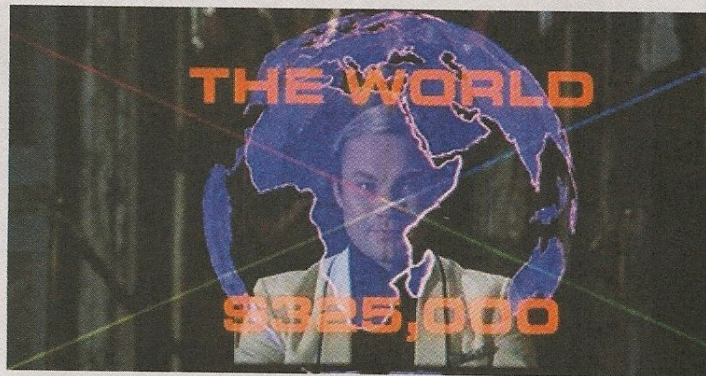
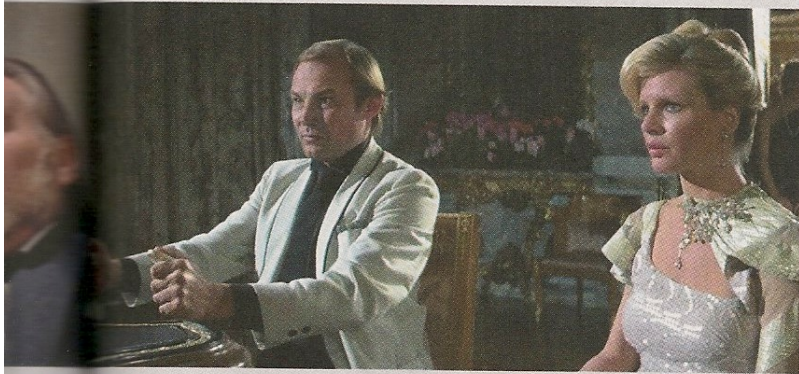
when he’s summoned back to a London briefing. A fundamental problem in *THUNDERBALL* is that Bond’s presence at Shrublands is pure coincidence. *NSNA* had the opportunity to fix that; perhaps M could have been acting on intelligence, sending Bond to Shrublands on a pretext. But nope. The problem remains unsolved.

Elsewhere though, there are improvements. Rather than being murdered and replaced with a plastic surgery double, Domino’s brother here remains the genuine article under *SPECTRE* coercion. In this version he’s at Shrublands getting a new eyeball that allows him to fool retina ID software. Don’t think too hard about what the hell kind of clinic Shrublands is actually supposed to be.

While we still move from Essex to the Bahamas, we then travel onward first to Nice and then to North Africa. Largo’s yacht here is the anglicized *Flying Saucer*, rather than the *Disco Volante*, but he actually sails it places. The film goes







further than THUNDERBALL at least in the sense of travel.

Fiona Volpe becomes the more cartoonish Fatima Blush (a mischievous Barbara Carrera), who uses snakes and sharks and has a bomb for every occasion. Kim Basinger plays Domino, a dancer this time but serving the same plot function and earning the same surprise resolution. There's an inventive fight all through Shrublands between Connery and Pat Roach, and a decent motorbike chase through Nice. There are also, for the time, impressive shots following planes and missiles in flight, clearly utilizing the same technology director Irvin Kershner had employed for the flight sequences in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (and which had in the meantime been borrowed by Clint Eastwood for FIREFOX).

Largo is now SPECTRE's Number Twelve, not Number One, and is an impish Klaus Maria Brandauer. And though, disappointingly, we don't see much of him, Max von Sydow plays an excellent Blofeld:

a sort of twinkle-eyed Mephistopheles. This time he's demanding 25% of each NATO country's oil budget. M reactivates the 00s in response.

So those are the hits, but there are further misses too. THUNDERBALL's casino scene becomes a one-on-one video game battle between Bond and Largo: perhaps modish at the time, hideously dated now. We lose the Mardi Gras sequence and instead get some ballroom dancing. In Palmyra, Bond jumps a horse off the top of a castle into the sea (don't worry, the horse is fine), and there's some casual racism in the depiction of Arab slavers bidding for Domino. The nuclear threat this time is, for vaguely sketched reasons, codenamed "The Tears of Allah."

Bond is kitted out in Q's absence by Alec McCowen's "Algernon," who hates the new bureaucracy and hopes for some gratuitous sex and violence. We do get that, but it's pretty PG, despite the negligee Basinger is barely wearing in the North Africa scenes. A sex scene on a boat with

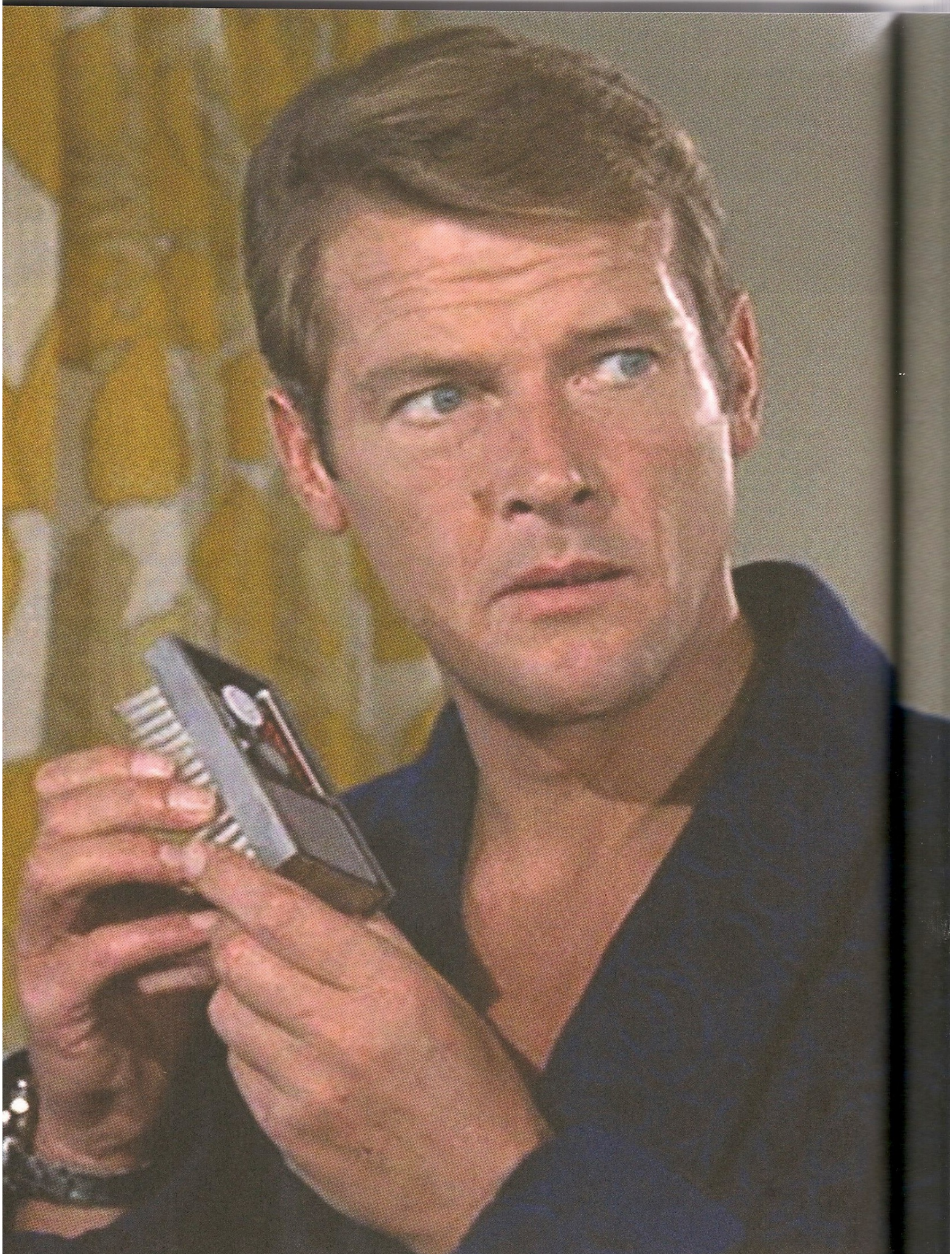
Bond and Fatima is clearly comedically intended but has an unironic '80s smooth sax soundtrack. Rowan Atkinson as a comedy British Embassy attaché called Nigel Small-Fawcett is another wrong comedic note. Kirshner says on the Blu-ray commentary he wishes he'd put more comedy in the film, which ends with a Connery wink to camera.

There are still underwater sequences: less impressive than THUNDERBALL's, but also less interminable. And after a lot of surprisingly good work, the film misfires badly at the end, with a gun battle in caves that are very obviously a studio set, unforgivingly overlit and with some very polystyrene-looking rocks.

In some ways NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN is a frustrating film: a standalone, independent Bond film could have remixed the Bond ingredients, but instead it's content to follow a formula that by this point was looking weak. It's light-hearted, verging on spoof—not top-tier, but probably better than at least three of Moore's films.



And it's a fascinating snapshot of an era, a time capsule reminding us that, in the '80s until Timothy Dalton, Bond was simply old. In the Moore vs. Connery "Battle of the Bonds"—narrowly won by OCTOPUSSY, at least financially—the former was 56 to the latter 53. It's hard to remember now just how bold a new Bond the comparatively svelte 41-year-old Timothy Dalton seemed, four years later. And it's intriguing to imagine what McClory's subsequently proposed, Dalton-starring WARHEAD 2000 would have been like. It could have been great... but it would still just have been THUNDERBALL again.



# AUDIO BOND:

## *The 007 Tapes*

● by OWEN WILLIAMS

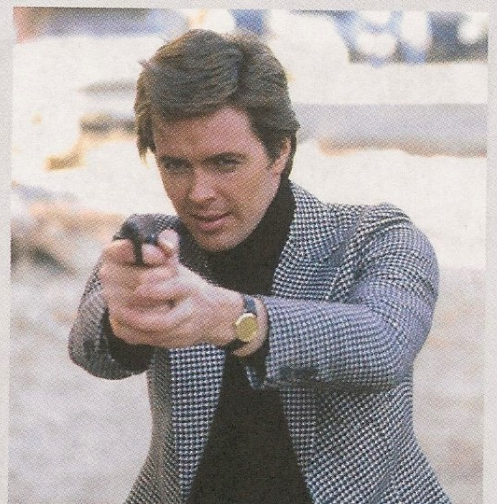
Somewhere between the Ian Fleming novels and the Bond movies... are the audiobooks. A wide variety of actors (and actresses) have played Bond for cassettes, CDs, and downloads over the years. The following dossier contains a representative sample. Is there a post-Craig screen Bond among them? Place your bets...

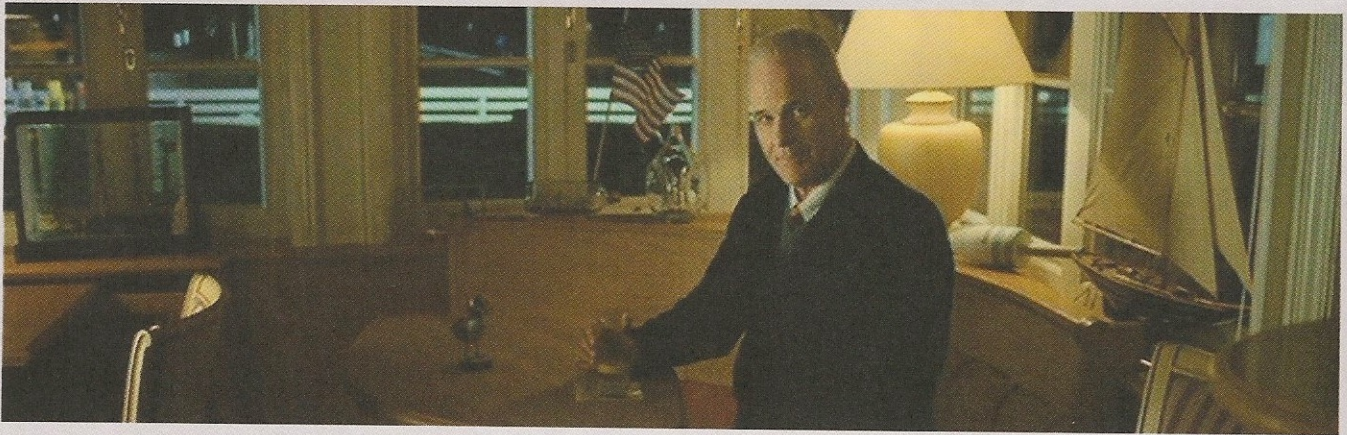
### IAN OGILVY (1980s)

A decade after Roger Moore's departure as Simon Templar, the character returned to TV in 1979's *RETURN OF THE SAINT*. Stepping into Moore's shoes for that single-season revival was Ian Ogilvy, and during Moore's run as Bond, Ogilvy also narrated abridgments of Ian Fleming's *LIVE AND LET DIE*, *DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER*, and *GOLDFINGER* for EMI cassettes. "My strongest memory of doing those is being in constant terror of needing yet another voice and another accent," he laughs.

Ogilvy went on to play Bondian characters in TV commercials and a 1994 episode of *KUNG FU: THE LEGEND CONTINUES*, and was

considered a possible official Bond when Moore began signaling he might be ready to move on in the early '80s. Obviously that didn't come to pass, but Ogilvy says he was slightly uncomfortable with the idea anyway. "I'd already followed Roger once. I didn't want my whole career to be in his shadow."





**DAVID RINTOUL (1980s-1990s)**

Another actor on the future Bond shortlist around the time of OCTOPUSSY was David Rintoul. "There were about 12 of us," he recalls. "I think Roger was probably just negotiating for more money. He didn't end up leaving at that point, and I knew I wasn't in with much of a chance. But I did sit and talk to the Broccolis about it."

The reason that meeting came about was his audio work, first reading abridgments of Fleming for BBC radio, and shortly afterwards for Chivers Audiobooks, for whom he performed Fleming's complete run.

"Audio books have been a big part of my career, and that's how it started, with James Bond," he recalls now. "I loved doing them. They read very well. In those days I would get the pages blown up to A4 and mark each voice with a different colored pen. Now it's all on the iPad." His Bond has a Scottish inflection, partly reflecting Bond's heritage in the books (a Scottish father, private school in Edinburgh), but mostly, Rintoul admits, in deference to Sean Connery. For female characters, he "lightened the voice and did it more on breath, although you have to be careful because it can sound absurd. I was on a chat show with Honor Blackman once. I said, 'You realize we're the only two people who've played Pussy Galore!'"

Some years after the completion of the Bond project, he found himself sharing the screen with Pierce Brosnan in THE GHOST WRITER. "I don't think we talked about Bond," he says, "but I did like him. Even though I killed him."



**DAVID OYELOWO (2016) AND HUGH QUARSHIE (2012)**

Corners of the internet occasionally get exercised at the idea of a black actor playing a future screen Bond, but audio is ahead of the curve: David Oyelowo performed Anthony Horowitz's officially sanctioned continuation novel TRIGGER MORTIS for Orion in 2016, and Hugh Quarshie read DR. NO for AudioGo's 007 RELOADED project in 2012.

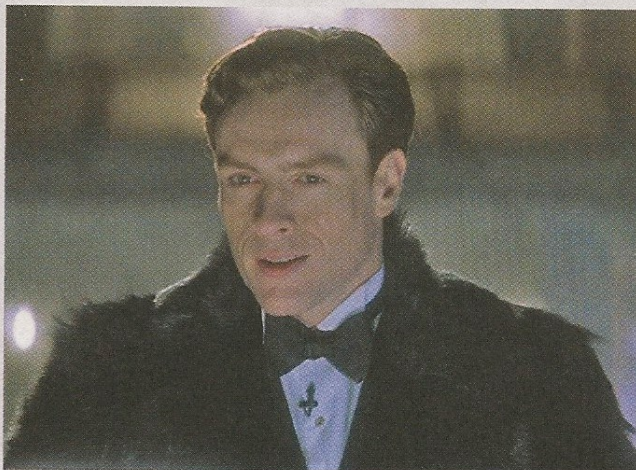
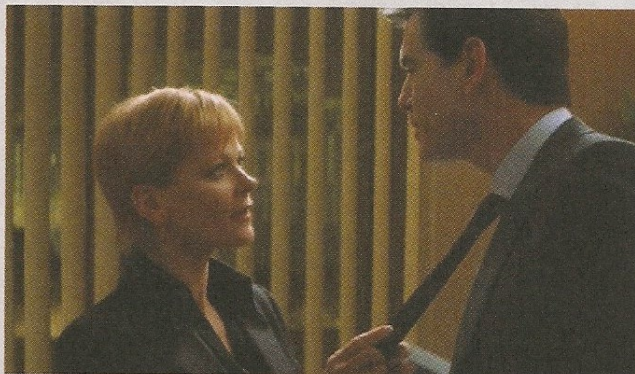
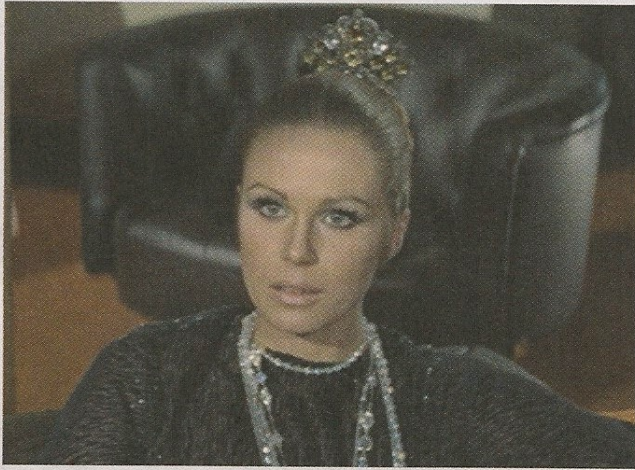
"I am officially the only person on planet Earth who can legitimately say: 'I am the new James Bond,'" Oyelowo beamed at the time. "Even saying that name is the cinematic equivalent of doing the 'to be or not to be' speech. I was asked specifically by the Fleming estate, which is really special." Along with Idris Elba, his name is one that often comes up when the post-Craig Bond landscape is discussed. "Whether or not I want to do it is beside the point," he told ABC's THE VIEW this year. "Ten or fifteen years ago this would not be a conversation. I just think it's an amazing shift in the culture."

Quarshie, meanwhile, found it "quite challenging and actually quite satisfying that I should be playing James Bond as well as all the other upper class Englishmen who run the secret service..."

**JOANNA LUMLEY (1990s), SAMANTHA BOND (1990s-2010), ROSAMUND PIKE (2012)**

In an act of morbidly fascinating authorial hubris, ultimate man's man Fleming wrote THE SPY WHO LOVED ME in first-person character as a nubile young Canadian journalist. Bond only shows





up by happenstance two-thirds of the way into the novel, and when it's all over "Viv" gratefully falls into bed with him despite having for the last several hours been under the constant threat of sexual violence from gangsters at an empty motel in the Adirondack Mountains. Fleming dryly called it an experiment that went "very much awry."

It also necessitates a female narrator for audio versions. If the internet hates the idea of a black Bond, it gets positively apoplectic at the notion of a female 007. But again, audio is there already. To date at least three women have played aural Bonds. Joanna Lumley contributed several tapes to a Talking Volumes Fleming collection. Samantha Bond stepped in for a Penguin set otherwise read by Rufus Sewell (Pierce Brosnan's Moneypenny onscreen, she had previously also read the novelizations of those films for cassettes). And Rosamund Pike—*DIE ANOTHER DAY*'s Miranda Frost—pledged her Bond (and Viv) to AudioGo's *RELOADED*. "When you're sitting in the booth you suddenly find that your whole body posture has changed," Pike reflected. "By the time I got to the police detective at the end, I became rather heavy set and sluggish."

#### **007 RELOADED (2012)**

The aforementioned *RELOADED* project from AudioGo collected all of Fleming's books into CD and download sets, each with a different narrator (several of whom had Bond movie connections). Alongside Quarshie, Pike, and Toby Stephens (see below), the performers were Dan Stevens, Rory Kinnear, Bill Nighy, Damian Lewis, Hugh Bonneville, Jason Isaacs, David Tennant, Martin Jarvis, Kenneth Branagh, Samuel West, and Tom Hiddleston. "Behind all [Bond's] pragmatism and lean muscle is a very poetic imagination," Hiddleston mused, "and a mind that is cultivated and sophisticated... and yet he's there with a gun in his hand."

"I think the oddest thing I found was the romance and these long passages of introspection," said Stevens. "I thought Bond was all about killing and gadgets and cars!"

#### **TOBY STEPHENS (ONGOING FROM 2008)**

Stephens, like Pike, is another *DIE ANOTHER DAY* refugee (he played villain Gustav Graves). But in recent years he's been making the voice of Bond very much his own. He read *FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE* for AudioGo and Jeffrey Deaver's *CARTE BLANCHE* for Hodder & Stoughton. And since 2008 he's been starring as Bond in (almost) annual feature-length dramatized adaptations of Fleming's novels for BBC Radio. There have been eight of these to date, most recently *LIVE AND LET DIE* in the spring of 2019.

"I chewed my way through all of the Bond books in my mid to late teens," he told AudioGo. "I love going back ... to what it was originally conceived as, and getting that texture. Finding a voice for [Fleming's original] Bond ... for me is about trying to come up with a neutral, uninflected voice. He really is somebody who is about functionality and getting the job done ... apart from the odd moment where there's a little bit of vulnerability. That's interesting to play."

*(With apologies to Richard E. Grant, Anthony Valentine, Simon Vance, Robert Whitfield, and many others we didn't have space for.)*