'Skyfall' is Enjoyable, Transitional James Bond Romp

Submitted by **PatrickMcD** [1] on November 8, 2012 - 9:26am

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Rating: **3.5**/5.0

CHICAGO – James Bond is the world's most enduring super spy, beginning with Ian Fleming's classic spy novels, up to a celebration of 50 years in the movies. Daniel Craig returns as Bond, James Bond in the latest film 'Skyfall,' which blends familiar 007 actions with psychological transitions.

The transitions are what make the picture different, even slightly odd, as Bond is taken through a series of tests that call into question his relevance. In a way, it is questioning our own reaction to the super spy who came out of the Mad Men era, whether the man who literally fights towards death every day – and never ties himself down to anything or anybody – can still seem real. This complexity is less rich than described, and does stretch out the film to Freudian lengths, but there is enough in "Skyfall" to satisfy the popcorn crowd, who wants their Bond shaken not stirred, and his colleagues to be familiar reminders of who he is.

James Bond (Daniel Craig) opens the proceedings in the midst of a mission in Turkey. A computer drive has been stolen, containing the names of all the British Mi6 agency spies assigned by M (Judi Dench), who are undercover all over the world. After a classic chase, which includes rooftop motorcycling and railroad hopping, Bond is the victim of friendly fire and disappears.

The Spy Who Came in From the Couch: Daniel Craig as James Bond in 'Skyfall'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures

M comes under fire after that incident, and at the same time the agency becomes victimized by a series of terrorist attacks. The danger that London experiences through these attacks puts the agency's relevance into question, especially from Mallory (Ralph Fiennes), an official from the Prime Minister's office. When Bond reappears, he is put back into the field to find the terrorist, who turns out to be Silva (Javier Bardem), a computer hacker genius with former ties to Mi6. It's old school spy techniques versus the modern world. Does James Bond still belong?

The relevance question is intriguing, especially in the context of James Bond at the movies for 50 years. The world was a very different place in 1962, and although the enemies were nasty, their motives were lucid and ideological. The modern enemies are more random, with ways and means that have less clear goals. "Skyfall" avoids all that and focuses on a more personal evil, which makes it less of a direct chapter in the James Bond lore, and more of a transitional and psychological duet between villain and spy.

The characters are going through group therapy by way of these incidences, because all will come out the other side with new realities. Bond is especially put through the ringer, with a literal resurrection to different path. Even his famous womanizing is called into question – don't worry it still occurs – but it seems more random and isolating. In 1962, the hook-ups were seen as sophisticating, in "Skyfall" they are presented as the Freudian implications of a lost soul.

Bardem as Silva is a well worn villain, and his performance is key to protecting the Bond legacy. There is nothing new about a wicked computer hacker, even one who has the world at his fingertips. It's Silva's personal connection to M – obviously they're not Facebook friends – that brings the whole spy world into question in a modern society. This theme is overriding in the film, brought into prime example with the gadgets expert named Q (Ben Whishaw), now achingly young and outfitting Bond with much less, that does more.

Delicious: Javier Bardem as Silva in 'Skyfall'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures

There are a couple problems with the film. It takes too long to build, and there is too much therapist/psycho analysis mumbo-jumbo to get through. There is almost an symbolic expectation that if Silva disappears, everyone else will fade away with him. Is this Bond or Oz? And the gunfire is as random as usual. Whether it's a handgun, an automatic weapon or a bazooka, the main characters manage to dodge the bullets, or at the worse it's only a flesh wound. Nobody dodges better.

This film also calls into question, is James Bond the ultimate man's man? Or is it the nerdy Q, isolated in a safe room with his computers, cooly pulling down several million a year as a cyber world expert. Who would you sleep with, given a world gone mad?

 "Skyfall" opens everywhere November 9th. Featuring Daniel Craig, Judi Dench, Ralph Fiennes, Javier Bardem, Ben Whishaw, Naomie Harris and Albert Finney. Written by Neal Purvis, Robert Wade and John Logan. Directed by Sam Mendes. Rated "PG-13"

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