

ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

Directed by Peter Hunt
Produced by Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman
Distributed by United Artists
Released in 1969

All through the 1960s, the James Bond series enjoyed a surfeit of dedicated fans throughout the world. The character created by British newspaperman, military officer, and financier Ian Fleming had redefined the spy and adventure genres, thrilling readers in the twelve novels and two short story collections completed by Fleming before his death in 1964. That same year, *Goldfinger* was released, a movie so audacious, its hero so unabashedly carnal and cool, that a new cinematic icon was established.

Albert R. Broccoli had reluctantly joined Harry Saltzman as a co-producer of the Bond series in 1961. Feeling the Bond novels had enormous potential, he was willing to be saddled with a co-production setup. They named their enterprise EON and launched the cinematic James Bond with *Dr. No*. United Artists didn't think much of the Caribbean caper and relegated it to drive-in movie theaters. But the film surprised everyone, quickly turning a profit on its \$1 million investment, and the team moved on to their next 007 mission. Since President John Kennedy had recently named the novel From Russia, With Love one of his ten favorite books, the Broccoli and Saltzman team decided to cash in on this unparalleled publicity.

Then once *Goldfinger* was a smash, the brand was clearly defined, and the next film was guaranteed to be a hit. Knowing this, the producers tried to adapt On Her Majesty's Secret Service (1963). But legal troubles and uncooperative weather made this impossible, so the EON pair happily resigned themselves to *Thunderball* (produced by Kevin McClory) and *You Only Live Twice*, a Japanese space fantasy.

Finally, in 1968, everything was set. Peter Hunt, whose revolutionary editing had given the series its distinctive look, would take charge as director. And the novel was considered one of Ian Fleming's best, a study of Bond's character that further transformed 007, the heretofore blunt instrument of government, into a man who questioned his life and wondered how long he could go on living it.

The only problem was Sean Connery. By the mid-'60s he *was* James Bond, and the proud and talented Scot resented the typecasting and incessant press attention that came with fame. So he took a risk and quit the series. Thus Broccoli and Saltzman embarked on the biggest talent search since Selznick sought a Scarlet O'Hara. Peter Hunt was convinced that if he could get someone who looked like Bond, who shared with the character an innate sexual assurance, he could craft the film around him.

A former car salesman and Fry's Chocolate advertising staple, Australian George Lazenby won the role against all odds, impressing the filmmakers on many counts, especially with his fighting ability. He had never acted before. But he was one of the most successful male models in Europe and exuded a bold self-confidence.

Diana Rigg became Tracy and Telly Savalas, who had made notable appearances in *The Dirty Dozen* and *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, accepted the part of Ernst Stavro Blofeld, arch-criminal, mastermind of S.P.E.C.T.R.E. Veterans of previous Bond films such as composer John Barry and screenwriter Richard Maibaum also lent their talents. John Glen, who would go on to direct all five Bond films of the 1980s, worked as editor and second unit director (his primary responsibility being the climactic bobsled chase).

The challenge for director Hunt was interweaving the separate stories of Bond's hunt for Blofeld with his growing love for a mysterious and broken woman, Tracy di Vincenzo. Her father, Draco, serves as a bridge between the two plot threads; he encourages a reluctant Bond to pursue his wayward daughter by feeding 007 privileged information about his underworld rival Blofeld.

Peter Hunt also sought a unique and dramatic balance between the settings, investing in the locations an important storytelling role of their own. Just as filming was being completed, he granted an interview to *American Cinematographer*:

I wanted to go in the film from a very sunny warm climate to Switzerland—cold climate and snow, and I wanted to be able to move the film very swiftly from one atmosphere to the other, which gives it a wonderful juxtaposition and change. We needed a flat beach bordered by a road, this was one of the scenes and it is in the book. Now it is not very easy to find this anywhere. You can find it in the Mediterranean but I said I didn't want Mediterranean waves. I had a very dramatic scene and I wanted big waves. I was told I couldn't put it in the Atlantic and, of course, what I really wanted was the best of both worlds between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Well, I found that in Portugal. I somehow had an instinct and a knowledge that, one, we would be able to find it just between the area where the Atlantic joins the Mediterranean; indeed we found the only place I should think of in Europe where this great long beach runs parallel with the road. Most other places in Europe are vacation spots with promenades and that's always a difficulty because they're not isolated. They have tourists around. Indeed, we sent a Production Manager all over Europe to try to find a location and in the end when we sent him to Portugal he came back with photographs which showed I was right, and that's why we went there.

Another fantastic location was secured atop one of the highest of Swiss Alps—Schilthorn. For several years a mountaintop restaurant had been under construction, but never finished. In the midst of endless scouting, a German location manager working for the director found the site. Broccoli and Saltzman deemed it perfect, negotiated a lease, and completed the facility, modifying it for the film's needs by adding a helicopter pad and installing a 2000-amp generating plant. It was accessible only by cable car, and in every other way embodied Fleming's conception of a remote scientific outpost replete with laboratories, patients, and the stark reality of death.

Five big action sequences would energize the film—a ski chase down the mountain, a stock car race, an avalanche, the final attack on Piz Gloria, and a duel in the bobsled run. The production tested the endurance of all participants, but sometimes it was dealing with the unexpected challenges that proved most difficult. For the avalanche, a year before filming, the Swiss Army placed charges high atop a mountain after being contracted by the filmmakers. But the snow dissipated before any avalanche could be filmed. Undaunted, director Hunt relied on more-than-satisfactory stock footage, optical effects, and miniatures. The scene's payoff, a

moody confrontation between James Bond and tough spymaster 'M', was followed by a bold, clandestine attack on Blofeld's Piz Gloria, precipitating the film's harrowing climax.

Throughout filming, George Lazenby proved difficult to handle. He antagonized his employers with dubious publicity like telling the press he was interested in the role only because of the money and women it would bring him, he skied for recreation (where a serious injury could scuttle the film), and showed up to the premiere sporting a beard. But, even though Broccoli and Saltzman always put an optimistic spin on these circumstances, somewhere along the line the conflict between the producers and their star could be dismissed no longer. Lazenby left the series. Some reports say Lazenby's contract was terminated after the film met with lackluster success, but by Lazenby's account, he quit. Thinking the Bond series had run its course, and receiving bad advice from the Beatles' former manager Roan O'Reilly, he decided he'd paid his dues and prepared to cash in. After touring America, promoting the film on his own dime, he took a year off to travel the world. He hoped his high-profile film debut would lead to further opportunities, but by the mid-'70s he was forgotten.

The film begins with a brief survey of things back at the office—Q is trying to sell M on a new technology, but M is more concerned about finding Bond, whose location is unknown, just as the prime minister is "making ugly noises about Operation Bedlam," the massive effort to track down that fiendish extortionist Ernst Stavro Blofeld. (Thinking back on this scene, it's not surprising that Bond is relieved by M; it's been two years with no results, and Bond is not even reliable, wandering around Europe when he's supposed to be on the case.)

We find Bond (veiled in shadow because of the actor change) cruising beside a lonely beach when he is passed by a beautiful girl in a Cougar. Bond gives chase and then saves the girl from a self-inflicted last swim. Out of nowhere, two thugs confront Bond. One pulls Tracy away at knifepoint. The other is about to murder Bond in cold blood when Bond starts to fight back. The fight, eventually joined by the other man, is frenetic and brutal. Bond's straight-armed uppercuts in the surf are one-of-a-kind.

The two attackers survive, though Bond could have managed to finish them off. But the mystery girl gets away. Was she the target? Or was Bond? Are these men from Draco? If so, how do they know Bond's name? Is it because they overheard his iconic introduction? How do they even sneak up on Bond without him noticing? There's nowhere to hide!

The fewer questions asked about this vividly photographed, atmospheric, and bracing introduction to George Lazenby, the better.

After the titles, Bond visits a nearby hotel where he is well known (in his "Commander Bond" guise), and given the "best" suite, replete with a queen-sized bed on the balcony! That night, playing *chirim de fur*, Bond comes to the aid of this mysterious woman again when she takes a bet that everyone else knows is foolhardy, then loses—with no money to cover the bet. He now knows her to be the Contessa di Vincenzo—Tracy. She invites Bond to her room for a dalliance, but Bond is attacked by another thug. When Bond is then confronted by Tracy in his room—she has his Walther—we're not sure what is going on. Is she out to get him? Were the guys on the beach sent there by Tracy?

But Bond is very cool about it all; and Tracy, barely concealing her décolletage with Bond's bathrobe, is hardly in killing attire; so we can relax. After some loaded small talk, Bond

disarms her, and then slaps the countess when she expresses ignorance about the thug. "I can be a lot more persuasive," Bond threatens. "I'm sure you can," she replies. "Whatever I may be I am not a liar."

Bond is impressed by her tough moral stand in the face of danger. He calms down and tries to talk to Tracy about her problems, telling her that she doesn't owe him anything. She, despite knowing this, decides to sleep with him anyway.

Thus, the filmmakers have sketched a portrait of Tracy's character in a few efficient strokes. She is a neurotic risk-taker, a humorless woman with a truncated moral code, and sexually provocative to boot (note how she shamelessly leans over the gambling table, daring everyone not to look at her cleavage).

The next morning, Bond wakes long after the countess has left. His gun is gone, but the 20,000 francs he covered for her have been repaid.

Having reached a breathing point in the narrative, things immediately ramp up again. It's not more action, but more complications—Bond is confronted in the lobby with his own gun. So she didn't take it—these guys did. Who are they? Bond, instead of fighting his way out of this, decides to take a ride.

But Bond springs on the three thugs in a flash once they reach their destination. With knife poised to throw, Bond threatens the man who sent for him, and Marc Ange Draco must be impressed. This man, summoned by force, has turned the tables and proven that he is here simply because that's what he wanted, too.

Their conversation is easygoing and turns to the problem of Tracy, who is Draco's daughter. Draco wants Bond to look after her, and by his strength and love, change her life. Bond, even with the inducement of a million pounds in gold sterling, refuses. He has a "bachelor's taste for freedom." But Draco soon discovers that Bond is willing to entertain Draco's suggestion if Blofeld's whereabouts can be shoehorned into their (increasingly vague) arrangement.

Bond finally makes it back to the office, only to be scalped by M. He's off the Blofeld case. Bond, in a rare huff, tells Money Penny to take a memo saying he quits. We are granted a brief look at Bond's office. It's fitting that it's so clean, since he's never there. Summoned back to see M, Bond is told his request is granted. But it's just two weeks vacation—Money Penny (the secretary-psychologist) wrote up a different memo. Bond is grateful, and, for once, so is M.

The next stop is a bullfight in Portugal, where Draco is having his birthday party. Tracy soon discovers that Bond's presence there has little to do with her, and a lot to do with business. In her embarrassment she threatens her father that he will never see her again unless he gives Bond the information he wants immediately. Draco relents, and, while Bond mulls over this intelligence, Tracy is obviously deeply wounded. She runs off, but Bond runs after her and, to her tear-stained face, offers his apologies. They embrace, and love awakens.

What follows is the greatest thing in any Bond film—the "We Have All the Time in the World" montage. One can argue that this kind of sappy lovey-dovey mush doesn't belong in a Bond film. But it's easy to imagine, as we see Bond and Tracy commiserating in some of their less demonstrative vignettes, that Bond is listening to Tracy and helping her through her many problems just by being kind and showing support. The stroll through the formal garden,

relaxing by the fountain in evening dress, shopping in a posh city center, cavorting on the beach, and the easy-canter horse riding amongst the trees collectively convey the romantic ideal—falling in love in the most resplendent of environments. They revel in their splendid isolation.

And this montage is necessary to convey the affinity developing between the characters. One of them we already (think) we know—and what we're seeing here is rare, indeed. If *he* is getting lost in this romantic world, this must be a really awesome girl. Bond is anything but a romantic. He is good with the ladies, for sure. But he does not give in to sentiment, and he never offers a girl anything except his protection.

In Berne, James Bond infiltrates the offices of Blofeld's solicitor. The spacious interiors, rich wood, and mottled glass speak to great success and wealth. And the papers in his safe make plain that Gumbold's success was not the product of honest dealings but a result of corrupting the law to protect the guilty. While waiting for the safe combination to be revealed, Bond enjoys a bizarre addition to Gumbold's office reading materials—Playboy Magazine. Just as he will demonstrate at Piz Gloria, Bond (for now, at least) cannot resist enjoying beautiful women.

After Bond convinces M that he should be back on the case and convinces Sir Hillary Bray that he should impersonate the esteemed genealogist, Bond returns to Switzerland, ready to ferret out Blofeld.

Bond busies himself with bedding the patients, which is highly risky, but could be justified as a means of extracting information. Then he tries to convince Blofeld to give him the afternoon off (after taking the morning off) to ride down in the cable car. (Bond wants to rendezvous with the British agent who has been monitoring him.) But there's no apparent reason for this agent to go to the trouble of climbing the mountain to talk to Bond—it only risks exposing Bond. Is he up there to step in and protect Bond should a problem arise? And Bond has no information at this point that he needs to relay down the mountain. In his haste to find a way off that infernal peak, Bond makes the second of his genealogical errors, by asking Blofeld to accompany him to Augsburg over Christmas. But the archives will be closed, Blofeld points out.

Blofeld and Bond do some inexplicable things. First, Blofeld lets Bond catch a glimpse of his secret map indicating the location of his "angels of death." Second, he tells Bond everything about his scheme apart from how the bacteria will be distributed. Now, in light of the fact that Blofeld wants to keep Bond there to convince the authorities he means business, this kind of makes sense. But why does Blofeld deposit Bond in the cable car wheelroom? It's not like it can't be 'sprung.' It's difficult, sure—but this is James Bond we're talking about.

Much later in the film, Bond has bested Blofeld on the bobsled run. Bond jokes around with the St. Bernard rather than marching back to that tree branch to throttle Blofeld to death. Are we meant to think that Bond got sloshed on the brandy and forgot all about Blofeld? What else could have happened?

The great contest between Bond and Blofeld becomes personal when Blofeld gets an eyeful of Tracy. He wants her badly—she is beautiful, well-bred, and she's Bond's girl. There's no better way to humiliate one's enemy than to take his woman. On top of that, she's Draco's daughter, Draco being Blofeld's one rival for European criminal hegemony. The irony of course

is that Tracy uses her sex appeal to distract Blofeld from the matter of the mysterious helicopters, allowing her two men to take Blofeld's stronghold by surprise.

Piz Gloria is a remarkable location, maybe the most unique in all Bond films. Here is Blofeld, perched at one of the great heights of the world, ensconced in a fortress from which he can plot the Western world's downfall and best all comers. The scenes in the alpine redoubt are remarkable for their mixture of cultured manners amidst depraved brutality, contrasting the warmth inside with the freezing temperatures outside.

The twelve girls meet the inherent demands of the story, as well as the external pressures of the producers. Consider: Many Bond films feature a bevy of beautiful women sitting around a pool or whatever. But here the women are there, and beautiful, for a reason. Blofeld is distributing his virus omega through a network of lovelies he's summoned to the Alps. He sent Fraulein Bunt out to interview potential candidates, and she considered their proximity to significant agricultural holdings, their docility, and (most important) their attractiveness. If these women are going to be successful, a large reason will be their charm and gaiety, which will surely disarm most nosy men. And if that doesn't work, the women will just bed them into oblivion.

So we get the women, but we get a reason, too. This is a smart movie.

If Bond doesn't raid Piz Gloria with Draco, Blofeld could get his amnesty, his title, and still hold the world ransom. Until the UN scientists find an antidote, Blofeld holds all the cards. And if he stays perched up there, what will stop him from launching a new biological terror?

Blofeld's plans for this fortress are nicely encapsulated in a witty exchange between a sardonic Bond and a slavishly loyal Fraulein Bunt:

"Fraulein, I should warn you—guns make me very nervous." [Ha!]

"They are to keep away the spies from the chemical companies. Many times already they have tried to steal our discoveries."

"Yes, we live in a world of avarice and deceit."

"Here, at least, is no avarice." [Blofeld isn't after money, but respectability.]

"Really...."

"The Bleauchamp Institute is not for profit, Sir Hillary. [It's for world domination.] The Count does his work for the sake of mankind." [Blofeld is so arrogant, he probably thinks Earth would spin off into space without his leadership.]

"Mmm, I'm very happy to hear it."

"He wants to leave his mark on the entire world."

"Characteristic ambition." [Of a megalomaniac.]

"...Characteristic?"

"Of a true humanitarian."

"Ah."

This movie is terrifically exciting, intelligent, and beautifully shot (with inventive touches like the pool reflecting the 'Casino' sign and the knife wedged in Draco's calendar only coming into focus once Draco peers through his spectacles). The dialogue is elegant. The film boasts impressionistic editing and sound design, one of John Barry's premier James Bond scores

(only *Diamonds Are Forever* and *Goldfinger* can challenge it), and a sincere performance by George Lazenby (especially in his fight scenes and the marriage proposal scene).

Though Lazenby possesses a robust, masculine voice, he may be at his best when he is silent. His face at critical moments is so expressive that the audience knows exactly what he is thinking and feeling. (At least, the viewer projects his thoughts and feelings onto the character.) The best example of this is when Bond is forced to strangle one of Blofeld's thugs with a ski, as his compatriots search for Bond just a few yards away. Lazenby's face conveys anger, fear, and desperate calculation.

It is a great shame that he did not continue in the role. Even his detractors will admit that he certainly *looks* the part, and with each film Lazenby would have improved his technique. Given that he was 28 when he began shooting *OHMSS*, Lazenby could have played Bond *for twenty-five years*.

The first-time actor was out of his depth, unable to deal with the pressures and possibilities of the situation he was in. Curiously enough, one day Harry Saltzman observed the crew treating Lazenby indifferently—Lazenby was waiting in line to take the cable car like everyone else. The co-producer instructed the men that, regardless of what they thought, Lazenby was the star of the picture, and he should be treated like one. In stark contrast, when his production partner Cubby Broccoli arrived at Schilthorn he found the cast and crew tense and uncomfortable. So he threw a party to put everyone at ease; Lazenby arrived conspicuously late, and when queried, complained about not getting special treatment. He reportedly said, "I'm the star." Broccoli's heated reply was that Lazenby wasn't a star just because he thought that highly of himself, nor because Broccoli thought of him that way. He would be a star when the public decided he was a star.

In a way that seems slightly ludicrous, now that so many Bonds have passed under the bridge, the public was adamant that Sean Connery was Bond, and that was that. Lazenby seems to have never embraced the role as his own, treating it as a lark. According to Diana Rigg, who thought he was well-suited for the part and had great potential, Lazenby "was the architect of his own demise as a film star."

Since Lazenby only completed one film, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* enjoys a unique place in the Bond canon. Its reputation seems to grow each year, and EON continues to draw on the film's legacy as it constantly redefines what a James Bond film is really about. *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), *Licence To Kill* (1989), and *The World Is Not Enough* (1999) echo the film's themes and moods, validating its story of personal tragedy as the defining characteristic of the man behind the bravado, quips, and remorseless killing. James Bond's adventures were never the same after this. Even when Bond became pretentious and preposterous, the audience knew better; filmgoers knew what he was capable of. Those collective and cumulative perceptions, distilled and collated over the course of many years, affected how Bond was engaged by the audience. Any new incarnation of Bond had to first overcome the legacy (or baggage) of the preceding adventures.

And fans who cheered *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* as a forlorn classic patiently awaited the day that the 'true' Bond—*their* Bond—would return in triumph.