

SHAKEN & STIRRED

THE INGREDIENTS
OF A GREAT JAMES
BOND GAME

WRITTEN BY
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Shooting, driving, tuxedos... just what goes into a decent 007 experience?

James Bond drank his first Martini in Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* novel in 1953, while the first movie emerged nine years later. *Dr. No*, starring Sean Connery as the British secret agent with a licence to kill – usually in glamorous locations unreachable by a depressed post-war British population – turned the already famous literary creation into a cultural phenomenon that endures to this day.

Video games were in on that action from their earliest years. Broadly speaking, there are three 'eras' of Bond games: Domark had the 8-bit and 16-bit decade (towards the end of Roger Moore's incumbency on screen and all of Timothy Dalton's); EA had the Pierce Brosnan years, and Activision had Daniel Craig. But there are a few odd exceptions, like text adventures, an Atari 2600 title, and the mould-breaking *GoldenEye*. That epochal shooter notwithstanding, arguably the most successful games are the ones that have creatively shaken up the Bondian ingredients. But what *are* the elements essential to a Bond game? Now pay attention, 007...

VOICES & LIKENESSES

Generally, Bond games try to be cinematic, with such fixtures as the movies' famous gun-barrel intro, Monty Norman's Bond theme, the exotic locations, and, when budget and tech allow, actors who starred in the original films. The visual shorthand of a man in a tux holding a pistol was, in the early years, an easy way to sketch Bond as a low-tech sprite. 1985's *A View to a Kill* even had rudimentary synthesised



▲ Setpiece action in Activision's original story, *Blood Stone*.

speech, bellowing, "My name's Bond, James Bond," and – presumably M – this one: "Dammit, you've failed, Bond."

Once the technology matured, Bond games started to present likenesses but with soundalike voices. Caron Pascoe stood in for Judi Dench's M in four games, for example, while Brosnan's Bond was at various points voiced by Kevin Bayliss, Adam Blackwood, and Maxwell Caulfield. The only exception to the ersatz rule was John Cleese, who showed up as gadget-man R in *The World Is Not Enough* and *007 Racing*.

The game-changer was *Everything or Nothing*, an original story from EA presenting itself as an authentic new movie experience and casting the voices and likenesses of Dench, Cleese, Willem Dafoe, Heidi Klum, Shannon Elizabeth, and crucially, Pierce Brosnan himself. The game was developed with Caulfield voicing Bond (as he had on the previous *Nightfire*), until a late decision was made, at eye-watering expense, to bring in Brosnan for two four-hour voice sessions and a head scan.

"It was the right thing to do commercially," writer, performance director, and then-EA ➔

"A decision was made to bring in Brosnan for two four-hour voice sessions"

1982

SHAKEN BUT NOT STIRRED

Independent, unauthorised
/ ZX Spectrum

1983

JAMES BOND 007

Parker Brothers / Atari
2600, Atari 5200, Atari
8-bit, ColecoVision,
Commodore 64, SG-1000

1985

A VIEW TO A KILL (ACTION GAME)

Domark / Amstrad CPC,
Commodore 64, MSX,
Oric, ZX Spectrum

1985

JAMES BOND 007: A VIEW TO A KILL (TEXT ADVENTURE)

Mindscape, Angelsoft
/ Apple II, Macintosh,
MS-DOS

1986

JAMES BOND 007: GOLDFINGER

Mindscape, Angelsoft
/ Apple II, Macintosh,
MS-DOS

Interface

The ingredients of a great James Bond game



▲ Chances to drive the famous Aston Martin are rare in the games, but *007 Racing* made it happen.

“He could have crushed it, but for whatever reason, it’s only fine, not great”

executive Danny Bilson tells us, “but I’m not sure Pierce really had much patience for it. It was more than him just coming in and reading lines; he’s a great actor and extremely professional. But he could have crushed it, and for whatever reason, it’s only fine, not great.”

EA pulled off the casting coup of getting Sean Connery for its *From Russia With Love* tie-in two years later. It yielded similarly flat results, although Connery looks cheery enough in the making-of footage. Audibly more engaged was Daniel Craig, who played Bond three times for Activision (including, oddly, in a remake of *GoldenEye*), although not for *007 Legends*, in which Tim Watson stepped into the booth to voice Bond and Auric Goldfinger.

The games even brought in filmmakers behind the scenes, like *GoldenEye* screenwriter Bruce Feirstein and production designer Ken Adam. And *Nightfire*, *Everything or Nothing*, and *Blood Stone* went all-out for lavish original theme songs, respectively performed by Esthero, Mýa, and Joss Stone. Film composer David Arnold provided a new version of the *Goldfinger* theme



▲ Stepping back into third-person for a full view of Brosnan in *Everything or Nothing*.

for *007 Legends*’ title sequence. It adds to a movie-like experience, but whether it really *matters* in terms of actual gameplay is a moot point. Regardless of whose face was on the box, Bilson says, “on the typewriter side, I was always writing Connery anyway!”

SHOOTING

The growth of video gaming in the mid-eighties sadly coincided with, arguably, a low period for Bond movies: the last days of Roger Moore, followed by the not-particularly-popular Timothy Dalton films. After *Licence to Kill*, there was an unprecedented six-year hiatus between films, and by 1995, Bond was pretty moribund as an IP. And then *GoldenEye* happened. On film it was a gamble: a visibly cheap make-or-break film that, happily, was a hit. But it was possibly the tie-in game that really relaunched the franchise for an entire generation.

Rare’s *GoldenEye 007* practically launched the FPS on consoles, and for many, locked in the idea that a first-person shooter was the only way to approach a Bond game. Part of *GoldenEye*’s charm was its humour, stemming from the small team of British programmers who’d grown up with Bond movies on television and were practically lashing the game together with tape. Unable to use real firearm brand names, the infamously useless Klobb gun was named after developer Ken Lobb because it was “loud and inaccurate”.

“There was no paradigm for what games would be in 3D,” developer David Doak told Kotaku in 2018. “Everything was coded from scratch, particularly making a 3D game on a

1987

THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS

Domark / Amstrad CPC, Amstrad PCW, Atari 8-bit, BBC Micro, C64, MSX, ZX Spectrum

1988

LIVE AND LET DIE

Domark, Elite / Amiga, Atari ST, Amstrad CPC, C64, ZX Spectrum

1989

LICENCE TO KILL

Domark, Quixel / Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, BBC Micro, C64, MS-DOS, MSX, ZX Spectrum

1990

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME

Domark, The Kremlin / Amiga, Atari ST, Amstrad CPC, C64, MS-DOS, ZX Spectrum

1990

OPERATION STEALTH (AKA JAMES BOND 007: THE STEALTH AFFAIR)

Delphine / Amiga, Atari ST, MS-DOS

completely new piece of hardware [like] the N64. Literally, the engine was built by sitting down with graphics textbooks and figuring out every step of the way."

Nintendo was also an influence, with *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and *Super Mario 64* inspiring the idea of multiple objectives within levels. "The game became much more open as a result of us studiously learning what Nintendo was," game director Martin Hollis remembered in 2015. Nintendo's unease at the game's violence was offset by the programming team adding a jokey roll-call of all the characters at the end, like cast credits in a film. "It underlined that this was artifice," Hollis explained. "The sequence told people that this was not real killing."

EA picked up the Bond licence for the next film, 1997's *Tomorrow Never Dies*, but the average third-person adventure disappointed just about anyone hoping for a *GoldenEye* follow-up. By the time of *The World Is Not Enough* in 1999, it was clear that the tie-in game *had* to be an FPS. That trend continued into the next generation, with EA's PS2 and Xbox originals *Agent Under Fire*, *Nightfire*, and *Rogue Agent*, and Activision's *Quantum of Solace*, *GoldenEye 007 Reloaded*, and *007 Legends*. Only *Everything or Nothing*, *From Russia With Love*, and *Bloodstone* bucked the trend, stepping back to third-person to capitalise on the voice-and-likeness presences of, respectively, Brosnan, Connery and Craig. There wasn't much point shelling out for a star and then not having them appear on-screen, after all.

DRIVING

Car chases and vehicular mayhem are a big part of the Bond movies, yet in the games, driving often takes a back seat to shooting. Some games did have players occasionally hurtling around in expensive cars, however: in fact, the first officially licensed Bond game,

Parker Brothers' 1983 side-scrolling shooter *James Bond 007*, could just about be described as a driving game, since you control a "specially modified vehicle" that could, if you squint, be the Lotus Esprit from *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

Through the rest of the eighties, the *A View to a Kill* and *Licence To Kill* games both provided driving sections interspersed with on-foot sections; the latter more successfully with fun helicopter and plane sequences and some oil tanker smashing in the final level. Domark, rather sneakily, retrofitted a Bond licence onto an unrelated boat-racing shooter called *Aquablast*, and renamed it *Live and Let Die* with that film's centrepiece bayou chase in mind. *The Spy Who Loved Me*, meanwhile, was a top-down driving/shooting frenzy very much "inspired" by the coin-op hit, *Spy Hunter*. Again, that one put you in a Lotus. There wasn't much Aston Martin action in those days.

Driving became more scarce post-*GoldenEye*. *Agent Under Fire*, *Nightfire*, *Everything or Nothing*, *From Russia With Love*, *Bloodstone*, and *007 Legends* all gave you vehicles to careen around in as a palate cleanser (including a tank in ▶



▲ The unmistakable face of Pierce Brosnan in *GoldenEye 007*. But not his voice...



▼ Connery flies a jetpack round the Houses of Parliament in *From Russia With Love*. Not quite sure we remember that in the film...

1993

JAMES BOND 007: THE DUEL

Domark, *The Kremlin* / Sega Mega Drive / Genesis, Master System, Game Gear

1997

GOLDENEYE 007

Nintendo, Rare / N64

1998

JAMES BOND 007

Nintendo, Saffire / Game Boy

1999

TOMORROW NEVER DIES

EA, *Black Ops* / PSone

2000

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

EA, *Black Ops* (PSone), Eurocom (N64) / PSone, N64

Interface

The ingredients of a great James Bond game



▲ Bond faces evil milkman Necros in *The Living Daylights*.

▼ *The Stealth Affair* was only a Bond game in the US. 'Don't move, Mr Glames' doesn't have quite the same ring.



the case of *AUF*), and those latter three gave you the Aston Martin DB5 – although it's a pig to handle. The driving sections in the FPS games were handled separately from the rest of the programming by EA Canada, using the bones of the *Need for Speed* engine – although none of the Bond driving sections reach the standard of *Need for Speed* or *Burnout*.

Only *007 Racing*, released for the PSone in 2000, attempted the seemingly obvious idea of basing an entire game around Bond's iconic cars. Put together for EA by the small team at Eutechnyx, the game used the studio's own game engine, heavily modified from its previous outing, *Le Mans 24 Hours*. "Given the huge differences in the game style, it was a massive overhaul," recalls lead programmer Peter Davies, "but some core components like the physics engine, renderer, and build tools were retained." It was, he remembers, an immense coup for Eutechnyx to be handling the licence for EA, and a great excuse to rewatch the films – although rather than simply providing separate

levels based on individual cars and movies, *007 Racing* opted to connect each sequence with an original story.

"My favourite level involved driving the Aston Martin DB5 around a warehouse by 'remote control' through fixed security camera views," Davies recalls of *Tomorrow Never Dies*' similar BMW sequence. "That was something I'd never seen before in a driving game."

ESPIONAGE

For a franchise about a spy, there's little in the way of espionage in the Bond games to date. Shooting has largely taken precedence over adventure elements, but there have been a few exceptions to that rule. The first-ever Bond game – an unlicensed parody – was a text adventure. *Shaken But Not Stirred*, self-released in 1982 by bedroom programmer Richard Shepherd, was a yarn about stopping the evil Dr. Death from nuking London, using text inputs and, in its final stage, replacing the adventure format with a maze section.

A brace of officially licensed games from Angelsoft were more respectful to the franchise. The company released *A View to a Kill* in 1985, followed by *Goldfinger* in 1986, both written by respected author Raymond Benson, who'd penned a Bond companion book and would go on to write several original Bond novels in the 1990s. Both games follow their sources reasonably closely, and cram a lot into their short campaigns. *A View to a Kill* takes in Siberia, London, Paris, and San Francisco, and while the puzzles are largely about wires and microchips, you at least get to fight Grace Jones – using the command "Flip May Day".

"There was a producer, me, and two programmers – and that was it!" Benson tells us. "Since there were no graphics – all text – we didn't need artists or sound technicians, or the huge teams that later games required."

2000

007 RACING

EA, Eutechnyx / PSone

2001

007: AGENT UNDER FIRE

EA / PS2, GameCube, Xbox

2002

007: NIGHTFIRE

EA, Eurocom / GameCube, PS2, Xbox, PC, GBA, MacOS

2003

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

EA / GBA, GameCube, PS2, Xbox

2004

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT

EA / GameCube, PS2, Xbox, DS

The middle section of Domark's action-game version of *A View to a Kill* was also puzzle-based. A spindly Bond must clip-clop around San Francisco's burning City Hall, finding items he can use to escape; the trick being that rooms with items you need disappear as the fire spreads, meaning there's a crucial element of timing too. The best – and to date, the last – 007 adventure was Delphine's *Operation Stealth*: a fun 16-bit adventure in the vein of LucasArts' irreverent point-and-clicking. It was only officially licensed in the US though, where it was released as *James Bond 007: The Stealth Affair*. The rest of the world got "John Glames" as their secret agent and "Dr Why" as his antagonist.

ON-FOOT ACTION

In the eighties and early nineties, studios like Ocean were infamous for grabbing film licences and turning them into platform games. This happened to Bond surprisingly rarely: the third section of Domark's *A View to a Kill*, and the entirety of *The Living Daylights*, though, were all about running and jumping. The former saw Bond in a mine, attempting to defuse villain Max Zorin's bomb. The game was impossible to complete without a poke to patch it.

The Living Daylights, meanwhile, benefited from the decision to design a fun game and then retrofit the Bond elements onto it. "I came up with the idea of a man walking along, shooting in front of a scrolling background," designer Richard Naylor told C&VG at the time. "It was then a matter of tying the background and characters from the film to the game." The result was a scrolling shooter with the design wrinkle that, in order to shoot, you had to stop running and pull up a target (this lent itself to the game's later remix as a lightgun game).

Domark's final Bond game, *The Duel*, returned to side-on running and jumping. Released for Sega consoles, it used Dalton on the cover



▲ *Rogue Agent* was about the villains. The *GoldenEye* name was a brand cash-in that didn't fool anyone.

and the intro screens, but was otherwise a standalone story throwing in villains like Jaws, Baron Samedi, and Oddjob. *The Duel* shows how a mundane *Rolling Thunder* clone can be elevated to *feel* Bondian by simply adding exotic-looking locales and sprites in bow-ties and bowler hats.

MULTIPLAYER

As well as dragging the FPS genre onto consoles, *GoldenEye*'s second gaming revolution was its legendary multiplayer mode. Immediately suggested by the N64's four controller ports, the split-screen battling was essentially an afterthought: a wish-list item for the Rare team that came to life simply because there was time to play around with it. Nintendo wasn't even aware the mode existed until it was presented to them, fairly late in the day.

That four friends could sit around one television and shoot each other turned out to be *GoldenEye*'s pièce de résistance. The quality of the single-player campaign was obvious, but multiplayer death matches hugely increased the game's lifespan, making it a staple of parties and all-night sessions for years.

While none have matched that first flush of genius, almost every subsequent Bond ➔



▲ Roger Moore-era villain Jaws returns in *The Duel*.

"The rest of the world got 'John Glames' as their secret agent and 'Dr Why' as his antagonist"

2005

007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

EA / GameCube, PS2, Xbox, PSP

2008

007: QUANTUM OF SOLACE

Activision, Treyarch / PC, DS, PS2, PS3, Wii, Xbox 360

2010

GOLDENEYE 007: RELOADED

Activision, Eurocom / DS, PS3, Wii, Xbox 360

2010

007: BLOOD STONE

Activision, Bizarre Creations / PC, DS, PS3, Xbox 360

2012

007 LEGENDS

Activision, Eurocom / PC, PS3, Wii U, Xbox 360

“The most important thing for another Bond game is a great studio making it”

game contains a multiplayer mode, whether first-person, third-person, or in the case of *007 Racing*, on wheels. That *GoldenEye* experience simply became an indelible part of Bond gaming. “You can’t help but include the four-player split-screen,” laughs Dino Verano, associate producer of the final Bond game to date, *007 Legends*. “There’s nothing quite like being able to throw a handful of chips in someone’s face while they’re trying to shoot at you. I’ll never forget playing the original *GoldenEye* with my friends. Console shooters were still unheard of at the time, and there weren’t many games that took advantage of the N64’s four controller ports. There were definitely multiple arguments on whether being Oddjob [who was short and often below the eyeline of other players] was cheating or not. We finally settled on the rule that only my friend’s eight-year-old brother could be him!”

THE FUTURE

As the 25th film, *No Time To Die*, finally arrives in cinemas, it’s jarring to note that it’s been nine years since the last Bond game was released. *007 Legends*, marking Bond’s 40th anniversary with levels representing every Bond era (with Craig’s likeness dropped into all of them), felt somewhat valedictory, and its dismal critical reception and sales seemed to indicate that Bond games were no longer a going concern.

The N64 *GoldenEye* was a blessing and a curse for the series, a zeitgeisty cultural high



▲ Boat-racing game *Aquablast* had the Bond licence slapped onto it and became *Live and Let Die*.

point that subsequent games could never replicate. Bond-as-shooter became indelible, shutting off other avenues that might have been equally – or even more – creatively satisfying. The games have always looked to the films, for example, and never to Ian Fleming’s original novels – even when Benson was writing text adventures. In 2014, Telltale Games’ then-head honcho Kevin Bruner revealed that Bond was a “dream IP” for the studio. “I’m a giant James Bond fan,” he told *Official Xbox Magazine*, “and I’m always frustrated by games that make him a mass murderer. He’s a super-spy, and that’s a different skillset... there’s not much killing in the books – more intrigue.”

Rumours persisted of a game in Telltale’s adventure format until at least 2017, but nothing came of them. Bilson, meanwhile, says he pitched an MMO to EA 20 years ago “where the different ‘lands’ were the different films”.

“I’m not sure the IP even helps anybody,” Bilson says. “It’s not going to make it a big hit. Kids don’t [recognise] Sean Connery. That’s grandpa’s thing! I’d love a *GTA*-style Bond game, where the mission is one thing and it’s branching off and you have all the classic villains. But I think the most important thing for another Bond game is a great studio making it.”

There was never a Bond game for the PS4 or the Xbox One. An entire console generation has gone Bondless. But after that long silence, the studio currently swinging for MI6’s fence is IO Interactive, of *Hitman* fame. Announced at the end of 2020 under the placeholder title *Project 007*, it promises the opportunity to “earn your 00 status in the very first Bond origin story”.

“It’s true that once in a while, the stars do align in our industry,” IO boss Hakan Abrak said. “Creating an original Bond game is a monumental undertaking, and our passionate team is excited to craft the most ambitious game in the history of our studio.”

James Bond will return... 🕒

▼ The *Hitman* studio’s teaser logo for the as-yet-untitled *Project 007*. No projected release date yet.

