

'Skyfall' Introduces Stronger, Modern Bond

The latest entry in the James Bond saga—now 50 years, 23 movies and six Bond actors in—may be the most well-executed and heaviest-hitting Bond movie to date.

The pressure and expectation on this particular film in the series was seemingly high after the production delays due to the sale of MGM in 2010 and also the lackluster reception of its predecessor, *Quantum of Solace*. This is to say nothing of the high-caliber cast, including Javier Bardem, Ralph Fiennes and Daniel Craig (in his third portrayal as 007), assembled by director Sam Mendes. The world is truly not enough to compare to what awaits rabid Bond fans and casual viewers in *Skyfall*.

While Bond movies can at times be their own genre with specific contexts (cars, girls and guns) and equally cheesy tongue-in-cheek one-liners, all of that changed with the reboot of the series in *Casino Royale*. Many long-time fans might miss those parts of the films from Bond history, but stitched into the fabric of *Skyfall* are pieces that are much stronger and more modern.

There are as many thematic motifs strung throughout *Skyfall* as there are gun battles. The latest 007 installment is as much as a high-minded spy thriller as it is Bond film, something that Mendes seamlessly and beautifully crafts together to create a fulfilling movie and equally compelling Bond narrative.

Modernization and change are the big themes throughout *Skyfall*. Are far-flung skin-and-bone agents of MI6 really necessary in a world becoming ever more connected through technology? Are traditional espionage tactics practical in a world where the bad guy has no country and no name?

We find in *Skyfall* that MI6 is on the defensive as the agency suffers mysterious and devastating cyber-terrorism attacks, which test Bond and also the bureaucracy behind the scenes. In addition, Bond's loyalty to M (Judi Dench) is tested as her past comes back to haunt her, and Mendes creates a villain (Bardem) who truly is as ingenious as he is terrifying. Thus, the feel of *Skyfall* both thematically and visually is quite dark throughout the movie.

Gone are the bright tones of an exotic beach and bikini-clad women. What are found in its place are foggy, rainy scenes where Bond's survival is far from a guarantee (as the pre-title sequence reveals) and the cold, calculating, Bond is your protagonist. This sense of realism continues the trend started in *Casino Royale* and still serves the Bond series well as it seeks to align with Ian Fleming's original Bond character and remove the martinis and light-hearted conventions of the past.

Skyfall, given its heavier focus, is not without its influx of laughs and clever dialogue. Though the discourse at times seems sparse, it is sharp and witty, and it effectively progresses the story without seeming overly burdening. Occasionally it appears that most of Bond's lines are one-liners, which can get tiresome given the seriousness and overall tone of the movie. Added bonuses for more nostalgia-oriented fans are the multiple homages to the past incarnations of Bond (attempting to further cement their separateness, at times in a heavy-handed way).

Skyfall, like most of the Bond movies before it, wears a PG-13 rating. While there are scenes of violence and gun-related shootings and death, the visuals are cut to remove the violence from becoming egregious. The famous "femme fatales" are almost a non-factor in the film, though there are two sexual scenes in which Bond and his female companions are clearly naked and about to get intimate. In addition, sexual innuendo is a major part of dialogue exchanges throughout the

movie. Bond also goes off the grid for a period, and he is seen drinking at a bar. For these elements, you may want to think twice about bringing your young teens.

No matter what your past Bond experience is, *Skyfall* remains a movie as much as it is a Bond film, and truly delivers on its promise. *Skyfall* adds to the success of the Bond franchise but does it in a way all its own; tuxedo not required.