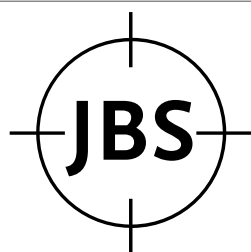


In Defence of *A View to a Kill*

A 40th Anniversary Retrospective

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There is no denying that *A View to a Kill* (1985), the fourteenth EON Bond film, is usually regarded as one of the worst in the series. It is the lowest rated film of the official series on Rotten Tomatoes (coming in at a dismal 36%) and has been referred to as the worst moment of the light-hearted Roger Moore era, for whom this was his seventh and final entry. Critic Geraldo Valero, in a 30th anniversary retrospective, claimed that the film “remains uncontested as the worst entry in the series” (2015, n.p.). Roger Moore himself was not a fan of the film, disliking the violence and commenting numerous times over the years that he was too old for the film, being especially revulsed by the fact that he was older than his love interest Tanya Roberts’ mother. Yet, as a Bond fan and scholar, I have always been partial to this film; there is something about it that makes it fun and more rewatchable than other Bond films, especially as a child and teenage fan. As I grew older, I wondered if I would start to agree with the criticism and disdain others had for it. While this has happened with some films, such as *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), I am now into my thirties and my love for *A View to a Kill* has never waned: it remains unironically in my top 10 Bond films. Having recently revisited it, there is so much about the film to love that I do not imagine it will ever leave my top 10. With 2025 marking its 40th anniversary, I provide here a retrospective on both the bad and the good of the film, to argue that while it has its is-



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sues, it has been unfairly maligned by the fandom over the years. *A View to a Kill* is, in my opinion, a stronger point of the series and worthy of a critical re-evaluation.

To address the 57-year-old elephant in the room, yes, Roger Moore had absolutely out-aged playing James Bond by this point. In all honesty, this was already true by *Octopussy* (1983). However, while *A View to a Kill* does not directly address this, there is still a certain rigour to the film's quest that favours an aging spy. Bond does not have it easy in this film. He struggles against May Day (Grace Jones; possibly his "match", as the poster for the film posits) in numerous fights, is barely able to jump onto a rising drawbridge, nearly slips to his death when climbing down a ladder while holding Stacey Sutton, flails on an extended fire truck ladder, and nearly falls off the Golden Gate Bridge. As opposed to the battles in numerous Sean Connery films and even some of Moore's earlier outings, this is not an easy win for Bond. He works hard to beat Max Zorin (Christopher Walken) and needs help from numerous people to do so. This is a flawed Bond, the type of Bond that fans would come to love with Daniel Craig's performance.

That being said, there are absolutely moments in the film where it is obvious that we are not even watching Moore but his stunt double Martin Grace, and for those scenes, I have no defence. Similarly, the age gap between Moore and Roberts is noticable and at times uncomfortable (though there had been other such age gaps elsewhere in the series). Perhaps Moore's own discomfort added to the complete lack of chemistry between he and Roberts; Moore has more chemistry with Patrick Macnee (Tibbett) than Roberts. The comedy is also questionable in parts, with the notorious "California Girls" skiing sequence in the pre-titles being a common sticking point for fans – though I would take this cheeky nod to Moore's tenure over the slide whistle in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), the gondola chase in *Moonraker* (1979), and the Tarzan yell in *Octopussy* any day.

Perhaps the film would have benefitted from directly acknowledging that this was no longer the same debonair, mid-forties Bond who took on Dr. Kananga and Francisco Scaramanga in the early 1970s, yet *A View to a Kill* still treats Moore's Bond as aged. This was Moore's seventh entry and was anticipated to be his final film; Moore announced his retirement shortly after the film was released. Would the film have been better if it had been Timothy Dalton's first outing? Probably, and I don't believe my saying so reflects bias just because Dalton is "my Bond". But it still feels like a fun goodbye to an actor who had become so beloved as 007 that his previous film, *Octopussy*, had beaten out Connery's return to the role in *Never Say Never Again* (1983) at the box office. Moore maintains

the same charm he had in his previous films and seems to be enjoying himself throughout, a contagious feeling for the audience. There is not a moment where it feels as though he is “phoning it in”, to use a colloquialism; Moore was still Bond and at least looked like he wanted to be there – something that cannot be said about Connery in *Diamonds Are Forever*, a much less fun goodbye.

This sense of enjoyment lends itself to the film, which very much feels like the large-scale adventures of the mid-1960s Connery outings, which was somewhat lost in the early 1970s but regained with *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), commonly thought of as Moore’s apex as Bond. From Siberia to Paris to Chantilly to San Francisco, the film both capitalises on the beauty of its locations and injects high-octane action into the series. The energy is palpable in the opening ski sequence, the Eiffel Tower chase, the horse race, the attack at Stacey’s manor, the final scene at the Golden Gate Bridge, and, in one of my favourite moments in the entire series, the City Hall fire. Having gravitated towards Moore’s Bond as a child, watching him descend the burning building with Stacey over his shoulder – with John Barry’s soaring *leitmotif* of Duran Duran’s “A View to a Kill” playing over it – this is Bond at his most heroic and spectacular. The vulnerability of his brief, faltering slip on the ladder makes it even better: this is a human Bond, not the automaton of earlier films.

Returning to the music, even this film’s biggest detractors admit the majesty that is both Duran Duran’s title track – for many fans, their favourite Bond song – and Barry’s score. In fact, this may be one of the best scores of the entire series. Despite the believability issues in Bond and Stacey’s relationship, their love theme, another *leitmotif* of the title song, is tender and romantic, which relates to another unusual invocation in this film: sensitivity. There is a certain grace that Moore brings to his final portrayal of Bond, and a sensitivity that would become more commonplace with Dalton, Brosnan, and Craig. While Moore’s Bond’s sensitivity has been hinted at before – especially in moments of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, when Anya mentions that Bond has been previously married; and throughout *For Your Eyes Only*, Moore’s most character-driven film – watching Bond become angry over Tibbett’s death, tucking Stacey into bed after she drinks too much, and his rescue of her from City Hall is a refreshing take on 007. The scenes at Stacey’s California manor, in particular, offer an almost domestic Bond, with him baking a quiche and performing household duties such as fixing her broken fuse box. And between the Paris scenes, Zorin’s Chantilly mansion, and Stacey’s manor, this Bond is more of an English gentleman spy than in

any other film, resulting in a particular charm that makes this film stand out amongst the series.

As principal antagonists, Christopher Walken and Grace Jones are a revelation for this series. Walken plays Max Zorin with a grounded psychopathy reminiscent of *From Russia with Love*'s (1963) Red Grant, which would not be duplicated until Raoul Silva in *Skyfall* (2012). While many, including Moore, criticised the film's violence, particularly the scene in which Zorin massacres his own men in the mine, it fits with the character and makes the film that much more unsettling. Walken seems to be relishing the role, making him one of the most memorable Bond villains to date. Similarly, Grace Jones as May Day makes for one of the most memorable henchpeople, proving to be a worthy adversary for Bond. Furthermore, her flipping of Bond onto his back during their love scene, a submissive position he is unaccustomed to, points both to the power in her character and to the film's implicit narrative about the ageing spy. Her redemption arc following her betrayal by Zorin, though somewhat sudden, leads to an epic death scene when she chooses to sacrifice herself to save Bond and Silicon Valley. Bond's attempts to save her underlines the aforementioned point about Bond's humanity in the film; rather than let her die, and in true heroic fashion, Bond accepts May Day's penance without hesitation.

As such, there is a certain charm to this film that merits a revisit for even the most particular of Bond fans. It may never be a top Bond film to those reading this; fandoms are particularly fickle, and everyone is clearly entitled to their opinion. However, in a film series highly reliant on formula, there are many great moments that differentiate *A View to a Kill* from its predecessors. It is a fun adventure and swansong for a man who took the role from its beloved originator and made it his own over twelve years and seven films. For whatever problems the film has, I can never understand the film being at the bottom of anyone's list. As an homage to a fun era of Bond, there is a nuanced charm to the film that can still be felt forty years later.

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