

Bond reaches new heights in 'Skyfall'

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By **PATRICK HALL**

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It's been 50 years since British secret agent James Bond hit the screen and for the first time in the longest film series of all time, an audience knows who that man is, where he came from, and in "Skyfall," the franchise maybe has reached its apex.

The third outing for **Daniel Craig** as Bond is without a doubt his best and as a lover of every Bond film, short of a couple stinkers, "Skyfall," is one of the best, right up there with "Dr. No," "Goldfinger," and other classics.

In "Skyfall," Mi6 loses a computer hard drive that contains the identity of every agent embedded in terrorist organizations across the world. During the pursuit of the thief, Bond is shot and seemingly falls to his death.

When the devious and maniacal villain Silva (**Javier Bardem**) uses the list and begins to personally attack Mi6 leader "M" (

Judi

Dench

), Bond returns and proves that he is the best at what he does, even when he has lost a step.

"Skyfall" is slow and methodical at times, with exposition and a lot of dialogue, but the plot necessitates those down moments. I don't think it detracts from the film's tension or appeal as an action or "James Bond" movie.

New players to the Craig films, such as the new "Q", played by **Ben Whishaw**, a fellow agent Eve (**Naomie Ha**
rris), and British bureaucrat and military veteran Gareth Mallory (**Ralph**
Fiennes) are welcome. It's great to see Bond work with a team, while still doing the things we love to see on his own.

While the good guys have some new team members, the film would have been nothing without the amazing performance by Bardem as the villainous Silva. He's a modern villain, and the film is very much about the modern world and the difficulties that nations face with terrorists who are not nationalists.

Silva is an incredible homage to classic Bond villains with unusual deformities or characteristics, an exotic evil lair and wild schemes to rule the world or destroy it. But, while his plots could wreak havoc on the world, he is personally gunning for M.

There is more character development in "Skyfall" than I've ever seen in any Bond film and it was so refreshing. We love Bond for who he is, suave agent who is a fantasy persona for men worldwide. But who is he on the inside, and where did he come from, we could only guess.

"Skyfall" peels away the layers on Bond's past and his psyche, as well as that of M and the relationship the two have. It's a way to nod to Bond's past and look ahead to his future. There are a myriad of homages to old Bond films and they are all awesome for the nostalgic Bond fan.

From the original Aston Martin to quips about crazy gadgets and the classic them from "Dr. No," which always gives me chills, "Skyfall" was a perfect installment for celebrating the franchise's 50th anniversary.

But at the same time, the film forces Bond and Mi6 to move forward, adapting to a changing world. Bond hasn't fought Soviets since before "Goldeneye" in 1995, but some of the bad guys in that film were still Russian.

Director **Sam Mendes** delivered an outstanding film, with dramatic car chases, foot chases, great set pieces and the climactic battle is amazing. Writers **Neal Purvis,**

Robert Wade

and

John Logan

deserve so much credit for fleshing out Bond and M more than has ever been done.

Craig's films have done something that few others in the franchise managed to do. They create a character arc for Bond, which is why I have loved them so much. I'm as much a Bond fan as the older crowd that first saw "Dr. No," but I think not to recognize the quality of Craig's films is a huge mistake.

They have delivered James Bond as advertised, but they've added more to his foundation, and expanded on his future.

"Skyfall" is truly one of the best four or five Bond films ever, but I can't with absolute confidence say it is "the best," but it sure is close. I'll be disappointed when Craig leaves the character, but I can't wait to see where they go from here.

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