

This year, James Bond celebrates his 50th anniversary at the movies. Agent 007 first hit the big screen in 1963. Since that time, 23 Bond films have been made, with six actors in the starring role. While the franchise has become as “venerable and predictable as McDonald's”, movie-goers still turnout to revel in Bond’s “fortitude, elegance, double-entendres, and gadget-driven spy-jinks.” To mark the occasion, the Nichols Library added DVDs from each of the six Bonds. Here’s a sneak preview.

For many, Sean Connery is still *the* James Bond. He debuted the role in *Dr. No* (7th of the Bond books but the first to be filmed), where 007 is sent to Jamaica to investigate the murders of two British operatives. In *From Russia with Love* (1964), he is enticed into a trap involving a beautiful girl and a top secret encoder. In *Goldfinger* (1965), he uncovers an audacious plan to rob Fort Knox. While these films were straight-ahead thrillers, they still contained many of the elements later parodied by Austen Powers (lap cat, Nehru jackets, secret underground lairs). As Bond, Connery, then an unknown, showed a winning blend of grit, hardness, physical grace, and, unexpectedly, insouciant humor, which was at odds with author Ian Fleming’s conception of the character. *Goldfinger* made Connery a star. All actors that have since played Bond must do in the shadow of his interpretation of the character.

While Connery Bond “owned” the role, Roger Moore (seven films in 12 years) had the longest run. Moore was originally considered for *Dr. No* but was under contract with *The Saint*. In his debut as Bond, *Live and Let Die* (1973), he is immersed in the world of heroin, voodoo and black magic. In *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), Moore-Bond races to beat the Russians to a missing communications device. Moore played Bond much closer to his television Simon Templar persona. He worked the charm at the expense of ruthlessness, coming across as a seasoned, debonair playboy. Moore was also the oldest actor to have played Bond. He was 45 in *Live and Let Die* and 58 when he announced his retirement in 1985

Between Connery and Moore, George Lazenby did a one-film stand as 007 in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969). Arch-nemesis Blofeld returns yet again to threaten the world, this time with biological warfare. By this time, the Bond series had already been parodied (*Our Man Flint*, 1966); *OHMSS* verges on self-parody. Lazenby, an unknown, gave it a game shot, but he had neither Connery’s edge nor Moore’s ease with which to carry it off.

After Moore’s retirement in 1985, Timothy Dalton and Pierce Brosnan attempted raise the stakes. Brosnan was the first choice for the part but he could not get out of commitments to the *Remington Steele* series, so the role went to Timothy Dalton, who had previously done a stint in the Royal Shakespeare Company. In *The Living Daylights* (1987), Dalton disrupts a covert Russian operation involving international drugs and arms deals. In *License to kill* (1989), he goes rogue in pursuit of a drug dealer. Dalton succeeded in making Bond darker and more serious (one critic called him “the suffering Bond”), but the film-going public, used to Connery and Moore’s panache, did not bond with Dalton.

Enter Pierce Brosnan, who would make four Bonds. His debut, *Goldeneye* (1995), is about a furious chase to recover a lethal space weapon. In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, he must stop a media mogul from manipulating world events. As Bond, Brosnan could “cock his eyebrow in amusement with the best of them.” He had a tougher edge, but also projected vulnerability (check his scenes with Teri

Hatcher in *TND*). And, the screenwriters finally found enemies more up-to-date rivals. Unfortunately, the frantic pace and action set-pieces often overwhelmed the performances.

Since then, Daniel Crag has completed three films as Bond. Initially criticized (“Bland, James Bland”), his debut, *Casino Royale* (2006), is now regarded as one of the best in the series. Craig “brings a nice blue-eyed ruggedness to the proceedings,” like “a can of Red Bull ready to burst.” Craig describes his portrayal of Bond as an anti-hero: “The question I keep asking myself while playing the role is, ‘Am I the good guy or just a bad guy who works for the good side?’ In *Quantum of Solace* (2008) and the acclaimed *Skyfall* (2012), he continues to explore this edge. Britain may now longer rule the waves and MI6 labors under the shadow of the CIA, but at the movies, Bond marches on.