

"ONE CRITIC COMPLAINED IT WAS NO LONGER A FILM SIX-YEAR-OLDS COULD GO TO..."

Two decades before *Casino Royale*, a bold new Bond stripped things down, got physical and intensified the violence. Timothy Dalton's 007 tenure may have been short-lived, but he certainly made an impact

TIMOTHY DALTON IS ON AN ALL-TIME HIGH. IT'S NOT JUST THE GLORIOUS MARCH SUNSHINE IN LOS ANGELES, WHERE THE STAR RESIDES.

Nor the fact he's preparing to jet off on holiday with his son. The real reason for his buoyant mood is the victory his beloved Manchester City have just scraped over Chelsea at the Etihad Stadium. Watching via satellite, Dalton has been gripping the sides of his chair.

"Enjoy it? Well, I enjoyed the *result!*" he laughs. "When you get seriously committed to anything, there's always a level of tension. And so it's very exciting when you come back and win 2-1."

Dalton is a cautious man. Just as it's doubtful he'd ever sing Blue Moon before the final whistle, so he carefully analyses each job offer that comes his way. Take James Bond. Back in 1968, the Welsh thesp was basking in acclaim from *The Lion In*

Winter, when he was summoned by Cubby Broccoli and had the coveted superspy dangled under his nose. "Let's be clear: I was not offered it," Dalton says. "But I was asked if I wanted to do it at the end of the meeting. And I said no, because it would be ridiculous to take over from Sean Connery. How could I? How could anyone?"

Indeed, the man who *did* take over, George Lazenby, completed just one mission. Meanwhile, Dalton continued to give prime performances (*Wuthering Heights*; *Cromwell*; *Mary, Queen Of Scots*), while the next Bond, Roger Moore, steered the franchise into ever-daftier waters. What did Dalton make of all the double-taking pigeons and safari suits? "I was and remain in real admiration of Roger's... what shall we say?" He chuckles. "His suave, peerless ability to send himself up. His films were pastiches of themselves, which worked brilliantly for people who like that."

When the Bond team knocked on Dalton's door again in 1986, however, all agreed that a new direction was needed. For the actor, it was a chance to hark back to what he'd loved about Bond as a teenager. "I snuck into a cinema to watch *Dr. No*," Dalton, now in his sixties, recalls. "I was close to the right age anyway, but I don't think my parents were very keen! Back then, Bond movies were considered scandalous. I remember vividly that scene where the bad guy empties his clip into a form he believes is Bond.

But Bond, who's behind the door, says, 'You've had your six...' and unloads his own. Heroes didn't do that! That was outrageous. You arrested people, treated them with decency and took them to trial."

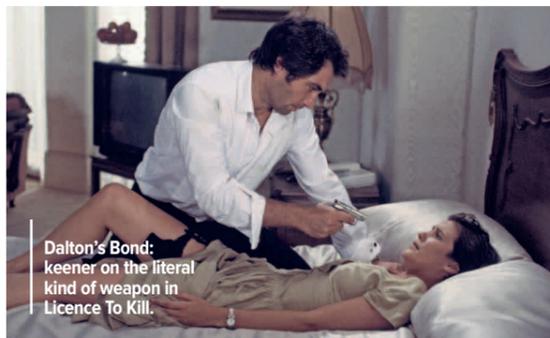
Connery's first three entries remain his favourite Bonds, although he loves *Casino Royale*. "I thought the opening 20 minutes were fantastic, because they reprised that great fight with Robert Shaw in *From Russia With Love*. A brutal, nasty, head-banging, horrible scrap. Exactly the kind of thing I dreamed of doing with the character."

DALTON HASN'T SEEN HIS OWN BOND MOVIES, THE *LIVING DAYLIGHTS* AND *LICENCE TO KILL*, SINCE THE '80S — "I COMMIT MYSELF

absolutely to a piece of work when I do it, but that's it" — and twice he accidentally refers to the latter as "Licence Revoked", its original title before marketing got involved.

"They said people around the world — ie America — wouldn't understand what 'revoked' meant," he explains heatedly. "Well, let me tell you, it was a much better title. *Licence To Kill* is terrible!" Is it not at least, we suggest, better than *Octopussy*? "Octopussy at least you could say was funny. Or memorable!"

Despite that gripe, he remains proud of both, and rightly so. Dispensing with the twinkle-eyed campy of the Moore years, Dalton's tenure restored a sense of tough reality. And if *The Living Daylights* features the odd Roger holdover (hello, boombox bazooka), *Licence To Kill* >>



Dalton's Bond: keener on the literal kind of weapon in *Licence To Kill*.





Dalton finds an innovative way to cross the Czech border in *The Living Daylights*.

“Benicio Del Toro cut off my finger! Although it wasn’t really his fault.”

marks a complete break, dispatching the British spy on a revenge mission that gets him disavowed by Queen and country.

“It pushed Bond in a way that we’re seeing coming back now,” Dalton muses. “If I recall, didn’t we burn alive the bad man? It was harder and more modern and went down a road that was worth exploring, I think. But I can’t claim to have much to do with that. I don’t think I even saw the script until ten or 11 days before we started.”

Where he was key was in innovating the series’ stunt work. A *View To A Kill* had seen Moore with a stuntman who resembled Les Dawson. The new Bond insisted on doing many of his own action gags — a decision which occasionally backfired.

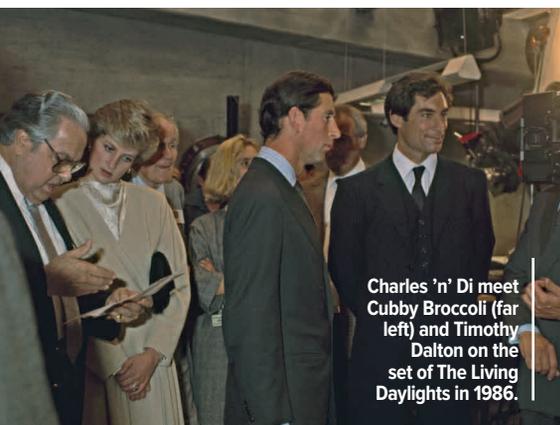
“Benicio Del Toro cut off my finger!” Dalton exclaims. “It wasn’t really his fault, but we were doing the scene (in *Licence To Kill*) where I’m hanging over a meat-grinder and he’s cutting

away at the wires holding me, and something went wrong. Come to think of it, we probably shouldn’t have had a sharp knife!”

Another mishap would occur on that set. “For the finale, I had to jump from one moving tanker to another. I leap across, climb this ladder while all these bullet hits are going off — *BAM! BAM! BAM BAM BAM!* — and the klaxon that means ‘cut’ goes off. I’m thrilled. I know I’ve done a good job. But when I look around, everyone’s pissing themselves. I look down and I’m in my underpants. My trousers are hanging down off my ankles. My very beautiful suit — made of strong serge, as Fleming specifies in the books — was in shreds!”

LICENCE TO KILL SAW A BOND FILM SLAPPED WITH A 15 CERTIFICATE FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND SOME WERE HORRIFIED BY THE RETURN of a harder-edged agent. “One critic complained that it was no longer a film six-year-olds could go to,” says Dalton. “Well, Bond movies, when they opened in the ’60s, were not for six-year-olds. They were *grown-up* adventures.”

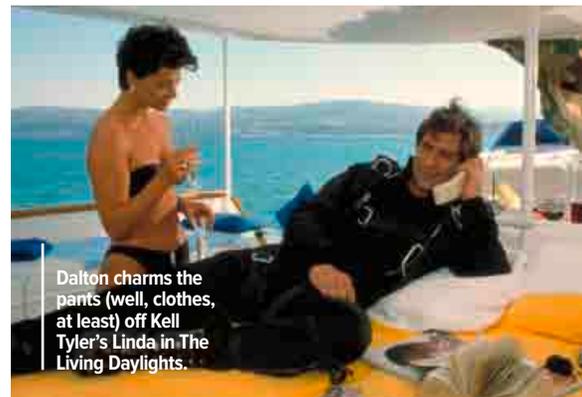
Time, though, has been kind to the Dalton years. Recent instalments have followed his gritty lead, and a fervent sector of fans insist his is the best take (although Dalton says, “Comparing Bonds is like choosing between your ear and your finger”). The big opening stunt in this summer’s *The Dark Knight Rises*, meanwhile, bears an uncanny likeness to *Licence To Kill*’s pre-credits plane-vs.-chopper bit; no coincidence given Christopher Nolan is a self-confessed Bond nut.



Charles 'n' Di meet Cubby Broccoli (far left) and Timothy Dalton on the set of *The Living Daylights* in 1986.



Licence To Kill’s villain, Sanchez (Robert Davi), expects Dalton to die.



Dalton charms the pants (well, clothes, at least) off Kell Tyler’s Linda in *The Living Daylights*.

The real shame is how close we came to seeing Dalton’s 007 again in the blood-soaked gun barrel. “There was a third script; I remember feeling quite enthusiastic,” he says. “I’d have loved to make a real scorcher of a film, one that harnessed the best of *Living Daylights* and *Licence To Kill*... Revoked... *Licence To KILL!* But then a very serious lawsuit came down between Cubby and the studio, so the whole series was cancelled.” (The dispute between Eon’s parent company, Danjaq, and MGM/UA’s new owner, Qintex, forced a six-year hiatus.)

The actor has no regrets or hard feelings. Just as he did in the ’60s, he heads to his local cinema each time a new Bond film opens, to enjoy the ongoing escapades of 007. Only, these days he needn’t lie about his age. “I’m very lucky — I’ve had a good life and a good career,” Dalton says. “And Bond has brought me a lot of joy.”

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