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Life copies art as 007 fights to survive tech takeover



While the UK fixates on the threatened demise of the transatlantic alliance, film buffs on both sides of the pond are aflutter over the fate of James Bond after the archetypal British hero was **cornered** by US tech giant Amazon.

The two dramas are not unrelated. The evolving screen character of Ian Fleming's fictional British spy can serve as a useful measure of shifting geopolitics, while reinforcing the value of sharp suits and even sharper wits in standing up to shadowy billionaires.

007 has been in some tight spots before. But many fear that the decision of the Broccoli family to turn over creative control to Jeff Bezos's Amazon MGM might terminate a Bond legacy of which it was the long-term custodian.

The Bond character was conceived in the early days of the Cold War. These days the 007 plots can be read as a cypher of a high-tech world in which a cabal of powerful plutocrats has come to exercise an overbearing influence on everyday life, from shopping to entertainment to data collection and even to politics.

Amazon **acquired** MGM in 2022, but creative control remained with Barbara Broccoli and Michael Wilson, daughter and stepson of Bond film pioneer Albert Broccoli.

The American-British pair finally stepped down after Barbara's reported opposition to Amazon's plans for 007 stalled progress on future productions. The last film to reach the screens was *No Time to Die* in 2021, with Daniel Craig as Bond.

The end of an era

It is not just British fans who have been alarmed by rumours Amazon wants to adapt the character to a new big tech entertainment era, geared to streaming, spin-offs, algorithms and product-marketing.

Los Angeles film critic William Bibbiani **proclaimed** in the entertainment journal *The*

Wrap that it was the end of an era, but not necessarily the start of a better one.

Describing the fictional Bond as an international super spy who stops billionaires from taking over the world, he wrote, "And they've given that creative control to one of the billionaires who is currently taking over the world."

Amazon takeover was the equivalent of a win for SPECTRE

That was echoed by New Zealand publisher Jack Yan, who **wrote** that the Amazon takeover was the equivalent of a win for SPECTRE, Bond's shadowy plutocratic enemy.

Bezos has asked his followers on Elon Musk's X to name their favourite actor to become the next screen Bond, but with no guarantee that their choice will decide the outcome.

Some despairing Bond fans are already reflecting that anyone will do, as long as the character remains British, the sine qua non of the original Bondian vision.

Soviet plotters and Chinese conspirators

Fleming created his character at a time of accelerating British imperial decline. Some Bond academics say the subsequent on-screen fictional spy navigates an increasingly uncertain world while maintaining the myth of British superiority.

"The character's ideological role as a defender of the British Empire was becoming anachronistic by the 1960s as that empire was being broken up," **according** to film studies professor James Chapman, writing for the *International Journal of James Bond Studies*.

The author of 'Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films' has previously explored the evolution of Bond villains in a changing world, from Soviet

plotters and Chinese conspirators in the 1960s, via Latin American drug lords in the 1980s and back to the Chinese in the 1990s.

The character's status as a national treasure reached its apogee at the opening of the 2012 London Olympics

When Bond transferred to the screen in 1962, he switched from the classic upper-class Englishman to a more nuanced character who evolved as the series progressed. Bond was no longer trapped by region and class even if he continued to display an increasingly outdated refined machismo.

The first screen Bond was Sean Connery, a Scot, succeeded by Roger Moore in 1973, seen as temporarily reviving the posh English stereotype. "Such a representation may have resulted from the socio-political situation of the 70s and 80s, which possibly led to a public nostalgia of the past and a recourse to familiar societal order," according to the British Identities website.

The character's status as a national treasure reached its apogee at the opening of the 2012 London Olympics when the late Queen Elizabeth greeted Daniel Craig's Bond at Buckingham Palace before a helicopter ride in which they appeared to parachute into the stadium.

The dark forces of SPECTRE

So, whither Bond at a time when Donald Trump, with tech backers such as Bezos in tow, is updating the geopolitical script and upending the transatlantic alliance?

Will the next film feature a reinvigorated Bond working to save the West from sinister plotters whose tentacles stretch from the White House to the Kremlin to Silicon Valley? The chainsaw-wielding Elon Musk already appears to be pitching for a supporting role.



Perhaps the Bond character has had its day. Cultural as well as geopolitical boundaries are being redrawn - Jeff Bezos with Lauren Sanchez

A more likely fate is that Bond switches from bold to bland. Perhaps the Bond character - or 'franchise' as it must now be termed - has had its day. Cultural as well as geopolitical boundaries are being redrawn.

In an era of megatech, surveillance and AI, the lone saviour in the Savile Row suit may be as outdated as Sherlock Holmes when it comes to being the heroic, if tongue-in-cheek, image the British have of themselves.

But, if Bezos is really looking for a new Bond star, how about Keir Starmer? On a visit to the UK's Pinewood film studios at the end of last year, the prime minister **joked**, "If I keep coming back here, I could be the next James Bond."

As he heads to Washington this week, can he save the world, or will he succumb to the dark forces of SPECTRE?