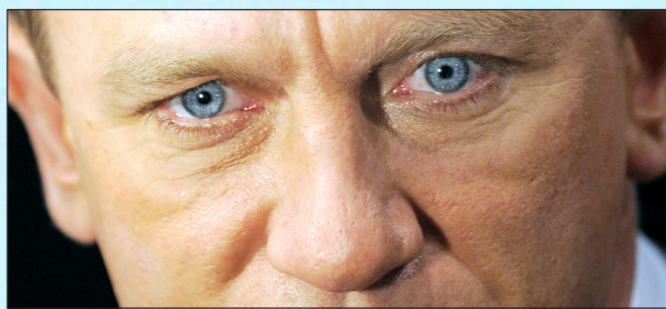


F I L M R E V I E W



There is little dialogue, flirtation or characterization in this Bond

Bond barely says a word

BY PETER BRADSHAW
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

He's back. Daniel Craig allays any fear that he was just a one-Martini Bond, with this, his second 007 adventure, the perplexingly named *Quantum of Solace*.

I've got to admit that this didn't excite me as much as *Casino Royale* and the villain is especially unpowered. But Craig personally has the chops, as they say in Hollywood. He's made the part his own, every inch the coolly ruthless agent-cum-killer, nursing a broken heart and coldly suppressed rage. If the Savile Row suit with the Beretta shoulder holster fits, wear it. And he's wearing it.

This is a crash-bang Bond, high on action, low on quips, long on location glamour, short on product placement.

Under the direction of Marc Forster, the movie ladles out the adrenalin in a string of deafening episodes: car chases, plane wrecks, motor boat collisions. If it's got an engine, and runs on fuel, and can crash into another similarly powered vehicle, with Bond at the wheel, and preferably with a delicious female companion in the passenger seat — well, it goes in the movie.

There are plenty of references to other Bond moments. A horribly dangerous skydive recalls *The Spy Who Loved Me*. A pile-up in Haiti that spills a macabre lorryload of coffins recalls the voodoo creepiness of *Live and Let Die*. And, most outrageously of all, the grotesque daubing of a female corpse brings back *Goldfinger* — though Sean Connery got an awful lot more mileage out of that sort of thing.

As in *Casino Royale*, the famous John Barry theme tune is saved up until the end; a baffling, decision, I always think, not to use this thrilling music at the beginning of the film.

Bond has hardly got his 007 spurs, when he's infuriating M, Judi Dench, with his insolence and insubordination. Out in the field, he's whacking enemy agents in short, sharp, bone-cracking bursts of violence when he should be bringing them in for questioning.

In theory, he is out to nail a sinister international business type: Dominic Greene, played by French star Mathieu Amalric, who under a spurious ecological cover plans to buy up swaths of South American desert and a portfolio of Latin American governments to control the water supply of an entire continent. As Greene, Amalric has the maddest eyes, creepiest leer, and dodgiest teeth imaginable.

Clearly, Bond has to take this fellow down. But he also wants to track down the man who took his beloved Vesper away from him in the previous movie: he is pathologically seeking payback, and to the fury of his superiors, this is getting personal. But it hasn't stopped him cultivating female company in the traditional, fantastically supercilious manner. His companions are as demurely submissive as ever. Olga Kurylenko plays Camille, a mysterious, smoldering figure, out to wreak vengeance on the corrupt Bolivian dictators who killed her family.

Britain's Gemma Arterton plays Agent Fields; she greets 007 wearing a trenchcoat with apparently little underneath, like some sort of MI6 strippogram. And she is the recipient of his ardor in the luxury hotel suite — that quintessential Bond habitat. This movie is, in fact, a reminder of how vital hotels are in Bond films, providing the essential narrative grammar: the checking in, the fight with the stranger in the room, the messages left at reception, the luxury cars lovingly photographed outside.

I was disappointed there was so little dialogue, flirtation or characterization in this Bond: Forster and his writers Paul Haggis, Neal Purvis and Robert Wade clearly thought this sort of sissy nonsense has to be cut out in favor of explosions. Well, perhaps that is what Bond fans want (not this Bond fan, though). But I was also baffled that relatively little was made of the deliciously villainous Amalric: especially the final encounter.

But set against this is the cool, cruel presence of Craig — his lips perpetually semipursued, as if savoring some new nastiness his opponents intend to dish out to him, and the nastiness he intends to dish out in return. This film, unlike the last, doesn't show him in his powder-blue swimming trunks (the least heterosexual image in 007 history), but it's a very physical performance. *Quantum of Solace* isn't as good as *Casino Royale*: the smart elegance of Craig's Bond debut has been toned down in favor of conventional action. But the man himself powers this movie; he carries the film: it's an indefinably difficult task for an actor. Craig measures up.

Film Notes

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

DIRECTED BY: MARC FORSTER

STARRING:

DANIEL CRAIG (JAMES BOND) OLGA KURYLENKO (CAMILLE), MATHIEU AMALRIC (DOMINIC GREENE), JUDI DENCH (M), GIANCARLO GIANNINI (MATHIS), GEMMA ARTERTON (STRAWBERRY FIELDS)

RUNNING TIME: 106 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

The name's Bond. James Bond.

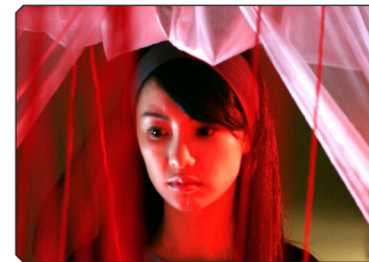
PHOTOS: EPA AND AFP

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Good Will Evil 凶魅

This strangely titled Taiwanese chiller has nothing to do with *Good Will Hunting*. A rising politician can't raise a family because his nightmare-prone wife won't agree; eventually they agree to adopt because it will benefit his career, but the strange child they pick from an orphanage has a thing for dismembering dolls and other sinister behavior. Like most horror flicks with disturbed children and flawed adults, there's a horrible secret awaiting to surface. There's also the requisite red ball bouncing down the stairs in slow motion, though not as slowly as the release for this film (it was made last year).



Be Kind Rewind

Jack Black gets too close to a power station and his magnetic body ends up wiping clean the videos in a rental store where his friend (Mos Def) works. To save the situation before the boss returns, the enterprising lads recreate the library by shooting their own goofy versions of movies that were lost. Critics couldn't help asking: Have these people never heard of DVDs, or buying ex-rentals online? Taking a break from her Darfur activism, Mia Farrow plays a customer who can't tell the faked movies from the originals. From Michel Gondry, music video heavyweight and director of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.



Turtles Are Surprisingly Fast Swimmers

Offbeat, charming Japanese production features Juri Ueno as a housewife whose absent husband and admiration for her self-assured best friend (Yu Aoi) prompt her, *True Lies*-style, to seek adventure as a spy. But this is no action film; it's more a character study and a philosophy of life dressed as quirky comedy. Turtles may be fast underwater, but the movie has taken time to build an audience — and three years to get a Taiwanese release. It screens first in Taipei before swimming to other centers on the west coast.



South Taiwan Film & Video Festival

For movie lovers who despair at the Golden Horse film festival and competition's political agenda, here's the perfect alternative. The South Taiwan Film & Video Festival is chock full of exciting Taiwanese and international product that would never get the Horse's nod, ranging from celluloid features to animation and video productions. This year's retrospectives include Wei Te-sheng (魏德聖), whose debut feature *Cape No. 7* (海角七號) has become a bona fide Taiwanese phenomenon, Lin Shu-yu (林書宇), director of *Winds of September* (九降風), and Hsu Hui-ju (許慧如). The festival is screening at the Ambassador complex in Tainan until Nov. 20, then at the Kaohsiung Film Archive from Nov. 29 to Dec. 7. Chiayi Performing Arts Center will also screen a selection of titles on Dec. 6 and Dec. 7. Some films have English subtitles and there are free screenings. More details are at www.south.org.tw/south2008.



'Tis the season to be slightly schmaltzy

Peter O'Toole steals the show in 'Thomas Kinkade's The Christmas Cottage'

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

Thomas Kinkade is one of those artists serious art lovers love to hate, but he has achieved considerable commercial success, and even Britain's *ArtReview* magazine ranks him in its Power 100 list of artists, dealers and collectors who "run the art world." He comes exactly in 100th place.

The self-described "painter of light," a phrase the artist has trademarked, is frequently lambasted in the art press for his treacly sweet pictures of middle-American small-town bliss, which have been produced in the hundreds and sold by the thousands.

Thomas Kinkade's The Christmas Cottage is a new departure for the artist, who participated in what is a straight-to-DVD offering in the US, but which is being given a big-screen release in Taiwan. The main draw is the presence of Peter O'Toole, who plays Glenn Wessels, an aging

artist who, in the film, becomes a defining influence on Kinkade's artistic development as the "painter of light." It also features Marcia Gay Harden, who won an Oscar in Ed Harris's *Pollock* (2000), an altogether more serious work about what it is to be an artist.

O'Toole, who is making something of a specialty of dying of old age on screen, reprises his role in *Venus* (2006) without any of the lasciviousness or complexity, but with admirable verve. His acting has more vitality than anything the younger members of the cast are able to muster, and he has the knack of summoning into his old, whiskey-blurred eyes a powerful mixture of messianic hope and despair that all flesh is grass.

For O'Toole, who has performed in more than his fair share of turkeys over the years, this is far from his worst role, and he gives this picture a theatrical vigor that saves it from drowning in schmaltz.

This is a film with a Christmas

Film Notes

THOMAS KINKADE'S THE CHRISTMAS COTTAGE

DIRECTED BY: MICHAEL CAMPUS

STARRING: JARED PADALECKI (THOMAS KINKADE), MARCIA GAY HARDEN (MARYANNE KINKADE), PETER O'TOOLE (GLEN WESSLER)

RUNNING TIME: 96 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

message, and is unashamedly about the life-giving qualities represented by the religious aspects of the holiday. That's fine, and very seasonal, and for those who do not share the artist's faith, it should be noted that the evangelical Christian message has



The Christmas Cottage is inspired by Thomas Kinkade's paintings of middle-American small-town bliss.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SWALLOW WINGS FILMS

been muted and transformed into something more widely acceptable. That dialogue related to "painting the light" might be perceived as an endorsement of Kinkade's brand — literally — of art and a cynical exercise in marketing, might

detract from innocent enjoyment. But if one knows nothing and cares even less about Kinkade and his attempts to market his art, the film is perfectly adequate festive season fare, with at least one fine performance to enjoy.

