

James B

Christmas drill: turkey, boiled-to-death Brussels sprouts, figgy pud, feeling a bit ill, and the Bond movie on the box. But Jimmer B can be used for more than sending the olds to sleep, as Jim Swallow explains.

MAN WITH A GUN
"Stay right there, Bond. And don't make any sudden movements. If you do I shall maim you very painfully."
Colonel Sun

HARDWARE
"The shielded compartment in the overnight briefcase contained the Compact 9mm Browning fully loaded, and with two spare magazines. There was a small medical kit, which would not help them one iota against the venom of the water moccasin; a set of lock-picking tools, some assorted lengths of wire which could be used for several purposes, a vicious tool which could be used as a nine-inch lethal knife, or be transformed into a hacksaw, file or jemmy."
Scorpius

There can hardly be a single British gamer out there who hasn't seen the entire James Bond film library, thanks to endless re-runs every Bank Holiday.

As you read this, the newest 007 movie – *Tomorrow Never Dies* – is being shot around the world, and with the surge in interest around in espionage stories thanks to films like *The Saint* and *Mission Impossible*, thoughts might turn to a roleplaying frame of mind.

So why are there so few RPGs with a spy theme? Something of a poor relation in the roleplaying games field, there are only a handful of spy RPGs out there.

Only one is currently in print – Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Espionage*, which incidentally has a supplemental scenario book, *GURPS Espionage Adventures*.

Bond himself had his own RPG with Victory Games' well-supported *James Bond 007* system, TSR produced two versions of *Top Secret S.I.* with several scenarios and sourcebooks, and Palladium had *Ninjas & Superspies*. Chameleon Eclectic's *Millenium's End*, while not strictly a 'spy' RPG, also falls in the group.

Of course, you can run espionage

adventures in almost any milieu ("Good Morning Mr Phelps. The Orc you see before you is your target. This parchment will self-destruct in ten seconds...") but for the purposes of this article we'll concentrate only on present-day or near-future settings.

"THE NAME'S BOND; JAMES BOND."

Using a plot from one of the Bond films that made it onto the silver screen is a bit of a non-starter, though. The chances that your players will know the plot and the twists from the start are very high. But there are a string of James Bond stories that are rather less well-known than the blockbuster movies.

Kingsley Amis (writing under the pseudonym Robert Markham) John Gardner and Raymond Benson all penned a plethora of Bond novels after Ian Fleming's death in 1964. These stories are much less well known than Fleming's

works, but are still rich in usable material.

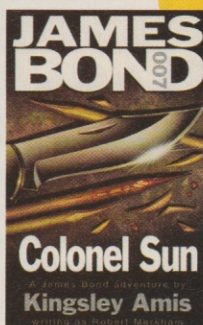
Gardner took the Sixties-era secret agent and brought him into the Eighties and later the Nineties, intact and still as suave as ever.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

One major element present in the Bond stories is their use of contemporary 'props' – that is, story elements, locations and characters taken from the world at large. Recent Gardner books include *SeaFire*, whose villain is a media tycoon, perhaps modelled on Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell, and *Cold*, where the foe is an American right-wing extremist militia group.

Both novels feature bad guys inspired by the news headlines of the day, in the same way that villains from the 1960's stories were either Chinese or Russian Communists, or else your typical megalomaniac. Back then the Red Peril was paramount and the Cold War was at full strength –

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THE MAN FROM BARBAROSSA

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John Gardner
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SEAFIRE

John Gardner
ISBN 0-340-62869-3
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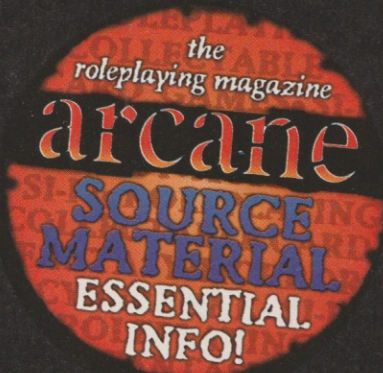
COLD

John Gardner
ISBN 0-340-65766-9
Fanatical militia group plans to take over America's government.

LICENCE TO KILL

John Gardner
Novelisation of the Micheal G.

ond



it's only as you come closer to the present day that the foes change to become more contemporary enemies, like renegade corporations (Zorin Enterprises in *A View To A Kill*), the Russian Mafia (The Janus Syndicate in *Goldeneye*) or drug lords (Franz Sanchez in *Licence To Kill*).

Of course, if you still have a fondness for the Cold War you can always ape Tom Clancy's *The Hunt For Red October* and set your scenario a few years in the past. Gardner's Bond also finds himself up against terrorist groups and Neo-nazis, both unique adversaries that are products of the Seventies and Eighties.

A forward-thinking villain would be more like a terrorist, hidden (often in plain sight), swift, highly mobile and an altogether different kind of foe. In *Cold*, the Children Of the Last Days are spread across the USA in tiny cells, and it's only at a summit meeting for it's leaders that 007 is capable of getting a shot at them.

In *Scorpius*, ruthless arms merchant Vladimir Scorpius masquerades as the leader of a wholesome religious sect, and *SeaFire*'s Sir Maxwell Tam protects himself with a massive international corporate empire. Different times mean different enemies, and with a world picture changing daily, threats come from all corners of the globe.

Another important thematic 'prop' is the backdrop – the location for your story. While some places will work no matter when your scenario is set (The Pyramids are still as impressive now as they were in 1977's *The Spy Who Loved Me*), modern locales lend a kind of immediacy to scenarios – part of *Death Is*

Forever takes place on the French TGV supertrain. The climax of *Never Send Flowers* occurs in the Disneyland Paris theme park, and the newest Bond novel, *Zero Minus Ten*, happens in Hong Kong on the eve of the colony's return to Chinese rule.

Running an espionage adventure about, say, an attack on the Channel Tunnel during the British general election would make the players feel 'closer' to the action than one about a missing spy-plane in Antarctica. Modern-day espionage roleplaying games have the best kind of source material – the news: just watch TV or read the papers. No matter where or who the mission concerns, it's important to maintain the mood.

BREAKING THE MOLD

The traditional spy story comes in the 'mission' format, with the agents briefed on a task which starts the chain of events that lead to main plot, and the 007 movies have largely followed that same style.

But that doesn't mean that you have to as well. The referee can tag events to individual characters to break up repetitive plots.

Have players take a holiday only to spot a known KGB agent in the company of an MI6 officer at their hotel. This is a great way to put them off-balance and arouse their curiosity.

You can also expand the traditional spy story 'toolkit' by introducing agents and espionage 'players' from other quarters. The novel *Icebreaker* features agents from the UK's SIS & MI6, Israel's Mossad, America's CIA and

Russia's KGB as well as the little-known Finnish SUPO. And what of groups like the BIR or NSA? Shin Beth? BIV? Syrian AFI?

Another angle is that of corporate spying and industrial espionage, something that's a permanent fixture of most cyberpunk RPGs. In Japan, it's rumoured that the larger corporate conglomerates have a better intelligence network than the government. So why shouldn't big business be ready to cheat, lie and kill to protect it's secrets and gather those of others?

As well as the idea of espionage agencies, there are those groups and organisations that operate on the fringes. Religious cults, terrorist groups, environmental extremists, all are examples of groups that have little or no loyalty to any one nation.

LICENCE TO STEAL

The John Gardner/Robert Markham/Raymond Benson James Bond stories are not as well known as the films and original Ian Fleming novels, so there's a fair opportunity to pillage them for scenario ideas.

We've already covered some of the essential elements of these books above, but beyond this there are still fifteen novels worth of storylines ready to be pilfered – just make sure that your players haven't read them beforehand.

Some of the plots can be placed into an ongoing campaign by swapping out key elements or NPCs. In *Special Services*, for example, Blofeld makes a reappearance, returned from the dead, almost. Replace Blofeld with your villain of choice and it can be James Bond 007's TAROT or Top Secret S.I.'s WEB behind the dirty deeds.

Other ideas like the 'hunter becomes hunted' plotlines of *Nobody Lives Forever* and *No Deals, Mr Bond* are classic scenario leads, turning the tables on agent PCs who might have become complacent in past missions.

Icebreaker, *SeaFire* and *Win Lose Or Die* are all good mixes of action set pieces while *Role Of Honour*, *Scorpius* and *Zero Minus Ten* have plenty of pacy intrigue and 'legwork' for players of a detective bent.

While the James Bond novels might lack the gritty realism of John le Carré or the technothriller aspects of Tom Clancy, they are nevertheless pitched to provide action and adventure for the reader and RPG referees. It may be just what your game needs. 🐾

MASTER PLAN
 "To his rising horror and concern, Bond heard of the plans in large cities throughout the United States. The orders were already clean-cut and clear – the seizing of TV and radio stations; the securing of all National Guard armories, the neutralizing of law enforcement agencies and military bases. It was all standard coup d'etat procedure, played by the book, and he knew that, if there were enough people with allegiance to General Clay, the entire operation stood a definite chance of success."
Cold

Any referee serious about running a spy RPG should check out *The Bluffer's Guide To Espionage*, from Ravette Books, ISBN 1-85304-156-4, while those living close to London should visit the excellent exhibit on Britain's spying history at the Imperial War Museum.

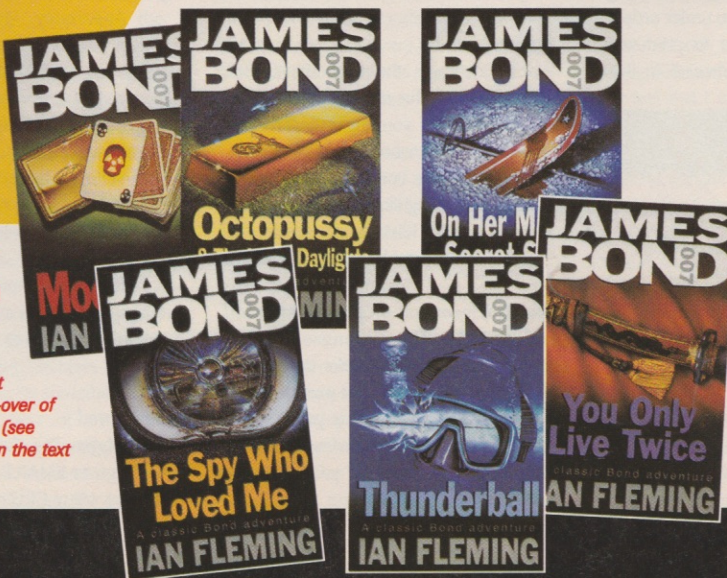
Wilson & Richard Maibaum movie script.

GOLDENEYE
 John Gardner
 ISBN 0-340-63537-1

Novelisation of the Michael France & Jeffrey Caine movie script.

ZERO MINUS TEN
 Raymond Benson
 ISBN 0-340-68448-8

Bond uncovers a plot amid the 1997 hand-over of Hong Kong to China (see 'People and places' in the text above).



BOND CLASSICS

(all by Ian Fleming, published by Hodder & Stoughton)

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